

WRIGHT ON MCKINSEY ONE MORE TIME

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ABSTRACT: In this essay, Crispin Wright's various attempts at solving the so-called McKinsey paradox are reconstructed and criticized. In the first section, I argue against Anthony Brueckner that Wright's solution does require that there is a failure of warrant transmission in McKinsey's argument. To this end, a variant of the McKinsey paradox for earned a priori warrant is reconstructed, and it is claimed that Wright's putative solution of this paradox is best understood as drawing on the contention that there is a transmission failure in the argument in question. In section II, I focus on Wright's views in the second part of his pivotal article on the McKinsey paradox (published in 2003). It is argued that the solution to the paradox proposed there by Wright is convincing *if* his theory of entitlements is accepted. In the third section, however, I raise an objection against Wright's account of entitlements. Finally, in section IV, Wright's views in his most recent essay on the McKinsey paradox are examined. It is shown that his new solution to this problem does not work any better than his earlier attempts at solving it.

KEYWORDS: McKinsey paradox, Wright's solution, externalism, self-knowledge, epistemology

I.

In an article on Crispin Wright's solution to the McKinsey problem, Anthony Brueckner has claimed that Wright's solution to this problem does not rely on the contention that there is a failure of warrant transmission in the McKinsey argument.¹ This claim is surprising given that Wright makes it quite clear that his

¹ See Anthony Brueckner, "Wright on the McKinsey Problem," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 76 (2008): 389–390. For the McKinsey problem, see Michael McKinsey, "Anti-individualism and Privileged Access," *Analysis* 51 (1991): 9–16; Jessica Brown, "The Incompatibility of Anti-Individualism and Privileged Access," *Analysis* 55 (1995): 149–156; and Paul A. Boghossian, "What the Externalist Can Know A Priori," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 97 (1997): 161–175. For Wright's solution to this problem, see Crispin Wright, "Cogency and Question-Begging: Some Reflections on McKinsey's Paradox and Putnam's Proof," in *Skepticism*, eds. Ernest Sosa and Enrique Villanueva (Boston and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 140–163; Crispin Wright, "Replies," in *Skepticism*, eds. Ernest Sosa and Enrique Villanueva (Boston and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 201–219; Crispin Wright, "Some Reflections on the Acquisition of Warrant by Inference," in *New Essays on Semantic Externalism and Self-*

dissolution of McKinsey's paradox is, at least in part, based on the thesis that there is a transmission failure in the pertinent argument.² In this section, it will be shown that Brueckner's interpretation of Wright's solution is misguided because he has too narrow an understanding of what the McKinsey paradox amounts to.

Let me begin by explaining the distinction between warrant transmission and warrant closure as Wright has drawn it in a series of essays published at the beginning of this century.³ The principle of *closure* of (a priori) warrant says that someone who has an (a priori) warrant for the premises of an argument and knows that these premises entail its conclusion has an (a priori) warrant for its conclusion. According to Wright, this principle must be distinguished from the principle of warrant *transmission*, which says that someone who acquires a warrant for the premises of an argument and, recognizing its validity, infers its conclusion from the premises, thereby acquires a warrant for the argument's conclusion.

In Wright's view, warrant transmission, but not warrant closure, fails in circular arguments as well as in Fred Dretske's well-known zebra argument.⁴ The philosophical significance of Wright's distinction becomes clearer if one takes into account that the principle of warrant transmission also fails, in his opinion, in the following argument, which may be called the "McKinsey argument:"⁵ I think that water is wet. If I think that water is wet, I have encountered water. Therefore, I have encountered water. (Wright holds that there is a failure of warrant transmission in

Knowledge, ed. Susana Nuccetelli (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 2003), 57–77; Crispin Wright, "McKinsey One More Time," in *Self-Knowledge*, ed. Anthony Hatzimoysis (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 80–104. For a related, though ultimately different, dissolution of McKinsey's paradox, see Martin Davies, "Externalism, Architecturalism, and Epistemic Warrant," in *Knowing Our Own Minds*, eds. Crispin Wright, Barry C. Smith and Cynthia Macdonald (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 321–361; Martin Davies, "Externalism and Armchair Knowledge," in *New Essays on the A Priori*, eds. Paul A. Boghossian and Christopher Peacocke (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 384–414; Martin Davies, "The Problem of Armchair Knowledge," in *New Essays on Semantic Externalism and Self-Knowledge*, ed. Susana Nuccetelli (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 2003), 23–55.

² See Wright, "Cogency," 153–157; and Wright, "Some Reflections," 63–64.

³ See Crispin Wright, "(Anti-)Sceptics Simple and Subtle: G. E. Moore and John McDowell," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65 (2002): esp. 331–332, and Wright's papers mentioned in fn. 1.

⁴ See Fred Dretske, "Epistemic Operators," *The Journal of Philosophy* 67 (1970): 1015–1016; and Wright, "(Anti-)Sceptics Simple and Subtle," 332 and 342.

⁵ See Wright, "Cogency," 153–157.

Moore's famous proof of an external world, too.⁶ But in this essay I will not be concerned with this thesis.)

The McKinsey paradox can now be formulated as follows: I have an a priori warrant for the claim that I believe that water is wet. I also have an a priori warrant for the externalist contention that, if I believe that water is wet, I have encountered water.⁷ Finally, closure holds for a priori warrant. Therefore, I have an a priori warrant for the claim that I have encountered water. But I cannot have an a priori warrant for such a specific claim about the external world.

Brueckner contends that Wright tries to dissolve this paradox by alleging that its last premise is wrong: I have an a priori "entitlement" to the claim that I have encountered water.⁸ The term "entitlement" is Wright's technical term for a non-evidential and unearned a priori warrant.⁹ According to Wright, an entitlement to a certain proposition "is conferred not by positive evidence for the proposition in question but by the operational necessity, so to speak, of proceeding on the basis of such an untested assumption if one is to proceed at all."¹⁰

But why does Wright think that I enjoy an entitlement to the claim that I have interacted with water? For Wright, I have an a priori entitlement to the "integrity of the concepts in terms of which I essay to formulate items of my self-knowledge (...)."¹¹ If externalism is true, a necessary condition for this integrity is the satisfaction of certain external conditions, in the present example: my having causally interacted with water. Thus, it can be inferred, according to Wright, that I have an a priori presumption or entitlement to the claim that I have encountered water.

⁶ See Wright, "(Anti-)Sceptics Simple and Subtle," 330–348.

⁷ The classical sources for externalism regarding the mental are Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning'," in *Mind, Language and Reality. Philosophical Papers, Volume 2* (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 215–271; Tyler Burge, "Individualism and the Mental," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 4 (1979): 73–121; Tyler Burge, "Other Bodies," in *Thought and Object. Essays on Intentionality*, ed. Andrew Woodfield (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1982), 97–120; and Tyler Burge, "Intellectual Norms and Foundations of Mind," *The Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986): 697–720.

⁸ See Brueckner, "Wright on the McKinsey Problem," 389–390.

⁹ See Wright, "Some Reflections," 68–69; and Crispin Wright, "Warrant for Nothing (and Foundations for Free)?" *The Aristotelian Society. Supplementary Volume* 78 (2004): 174–175. For more on entitlements, see also Crispin Wright, "On Epistemic Entitlement (II). Welfare State Epistemology," in *Scepticism and Perceptual Justification*, eds. Dylan Dodd and Elia Zardini (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 213–247.

¹⁰ Wright, "Some Reflections," 68.

¹¹ Wright, "Some Reflections," 68.

One may object that I can only have empirical evidence for such a specific claim about the external world and that I cannot therefore have an a priori entitlement to it. For Wright, this argument is a *non sequitur*. He holds that “an a priori entitlement to a belief is quite consistent with the only envisageable kind of positive evidence for it being empirical. I can be a priori entitled to suppose that my senses are functioning adequately right now, though a check would need to be empirical.”¹² Once it is realized that having an a priori entitlement to a claim about the external world does not require having a priori evidence for it, the thesis that I have such an entitlement does not seem absurd any longer.¹³

By employing the notion of an earned (and evidential) a priori warrant, Wright constructs the following variant of the McKinsey paradox:¹⁴ I have an earned a priori warrant for the claim that I believe that water is wet. I also have an earned a priori warrant for the externalist contention that, if I believe that water is wet, I have encountered water. Finally, closure holds for earned a priori warrant. Therefore, I have an earned a priori warrant for the claim that I have encountered water. But I cannot have an earned a priori warrant for such a specific claim about the external world.

McKinsey’s original paradox can be dissolved by maintaining that I enjoy an a priori *entitlement* to the claim that I have interacted with water. As already mentioned, this way of solving the original problem no longer seems absurd once it is realized that having an a priori entitlement to a proposition does not require having a priori evidence for it. What remains absurd, according to Wright, is, however, the idea that I could have an *earned* a priori warrant for a claim about the external world.¹⁵ The variant of McKinsey’s paradox just reconstructed cannot therefore be dissolved in the same way as the original paradox, viz, by claiming that its last premise is wrong.

Wright does not explain in detail how, in his opinion, the above variant of McKinsey’s problem is to be solved. All he says is that its solution must have something to do with the fact that closure does not hold for earned a priori warrant.¹⁶

¹² Wright, “Some Reflections,” 68–69.

¹³ Jesper Kallestrup disagrees (see Jesper Kallestrup, “Recent Work on McKinsey’s Paradox,” *Analysis* 71 (2011): 168). In his view, the contention that one can possess an a priori warrant for a claim about the external world is absurd, no matter whether this warrant is evidential or non-evidential.

¹⁴ “(...) but McKinsey is quite right that closure for reflectively earned armchair warrant would suffice to set the problem up.” (Wright, “Some Reflections,” 68)

¹⁵ See Wright, “Some Reflections,” 68.

¹⁶ “(...) closure for reflectively earned armchair warrant (...). However, we don't have *that* principle – quite.” (Wright, “Some Reflections,” 68)

Wright endorses the closure principle both for warrant and for a priori warrant.¹⁷ Indeed, he argues explicitly that closure for a priori warrant is true no matter whether transmission holds or fails.¹⁸ So why not submit that closure holds for earned a priori warrant too?

The answer seems to be that, according to Wright, the chief argument for closure of earned a priori warrant is untenable because warrant transmission fails in certain cases. The argument in question proceeds as follows: First, if I have an earned a priori warrant for the premise “p” and also for the premise “If p, then q,” and if warrant is transmitted from these premises to the conclusion “q,” then I have an earned a priori warrant for this conclusion. Second, warrant is transmitted from the two premises to the conclusion. Therefore, closure is true for earned a priori warrant.

Provided the presupposed transmission principle founders, the main argument for closure of earned a priori warrant cannot be sustained. The above variant of McKinsey’s paradox can therefore be dissolved by claiming that this closure principle is mistaken. Brueckner thus errs when he alleges that the issue of warrant transmission is irrelevant for Wright’s solution to the McKinsey problem. To be sure, Wright’s solution to McKinsey’s original problem is independent of the issue of warrant transmission. But Wright considers a variant of the McKinsey problem for earned a priori warrant, and his solution to this variant is best understood as relying on the claim that there is a failure of warrant transmission in the McKinsey argument.

Before I proceed to the next section, let me sum up the textual evidence for my interpretation of Wright’s position. First, he claims that his solution of McKinsey’s problem draws partly on the thesis that there is a transmission failure in the McKinsey argument.¹⁹ Second, since he endorses closure of a priori warrant,²⁰ the contention that there is a transmission failure plays in his opinion no role for solving McKinsey’s original paradox. Third, he holds that the variant of McKinsey’s paradox for earned a priori warrant must be dissolved by claiming that closure for earned a priori warrant is wrong.²¹ From these three hypotheses it can be inferred that, according to Wright, the assumption of a transmission failure in the McKinsey argument must somehow lead to the rejection of closure for earned a priori warrant and thus to the solution of the variant of the McKinsey paradox for this kind of warrant. My proposal is that Wright thinks that, once it is realized that there is a

¹⁷ See Wright, “Some Reflections,” 67–69.

¹⁸ See Wright, “Some Reflections,” 68, first paragraph.

¹⁹ See Wright, “Some Reflections,” 63–64.

²⁰ See Wright, “Some Reflections,” 67–69.

²¹ See Wright, “Some Reflections,” 68.

transmission failure in the McKinsey argument, the chief argument for closure of earned a priori warrant is inconclusive and this principle can therefore be repudiated. In brief, the issue of warrant transmission is, *contra* Brueckner, not irrelevant to Wright's solution of the McKinsey paradox.

II.

In the preceding section, I have focused on Wright's position in the first part of his essay "Some Reflections on the Acquisition of Warrant by Inference." In this and the next section, I shall concentrate on Wright's differing views in the second part of that article, more precisely, in section V. For the sake of convenience, I will henceforth talk of "Wright I" and "Wright II," respectively.

According to what has been called the "illusion version of anti-individualism,"²² I suffer an illusion of content if I am in a no-reference situation such as Paul Boghossian's "Dry Earth."²³ On this planet, "all apparent interaction with watery substance is multisensory communal hallucination (...)." ²⁴ The term "water" therefore has no reference there. Proponents of the illusion version of anti-individualism claim that an inhabitant of Dry Earth who says to herself "Water is wet" does not thereby express a thought even though her experience is subjectively indistinguishable from the experience of her actual-world counterpart.²⁵ In other words, our protagonist suffers an illusion of content.

Armed with these terminological explanations, Wright's account of entitlements in the second part of his article can be reconstructed as follows:²⁶ The proposition that all is in order with my concepts implies that I do not suffer an illusion of content. Provided the illusion version of externalism is true, this in turn implies that I am not an inhabitant of Dry Earth. My a priori entitlement to the claim that all is in order with my concepts therefore becomes an a priori entitlement to the contention that I am not on Dry Earth, i.e., that I have encountered either water or some other watery substance (such as, for example, twater).

This line of argument differs from Wright's argument in the first part of his essay in one important respect. Wright I claims that, given externalism, freedom from content illusion implies that I have interacted with water. He concludes that I have an a priori entitlement to the claim that I have had water encounters in the

²² See Jessica Brown, *Anti-Individualism and Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 2004), chap. 4, esp. 113–114.

²³ See Boghossian, "What the Externalist," 170.

²⁴ Wright, "Some Reflections," 64.

²⁵ See Wright, "Some Reflections," 64–65.

²⁶ See Wright, "Some Reflections," 68 and 71–72.

past. In contrast, Wright II holds that lack of water encounters does not imply that I suffer content illusion.²⁷ For I might be an inhabitant of Twin Earth, who has encountered twater, not water, and who does not suffer an illusion of content (because he has twater instead of water thoughts). But if freedom from content illusion does not imply that I have encountered water, one has no reason to think that one enjoys an a priori entitlement to the thesis that one has interacted with water. What one is a priori entitled to believe, according to Wright II, is rather that one does not inhabit Dry Earth. For freedom from content illusion implies – if the illusion version of anti-individualism is true – that one is not an inhabitant of that planet.

Wright's just-described innovation in the second part of his article has repercussions on the dissolution of McKinsey's paradox proposed by Wright in the first part of his essay. McKinsey's original paradox cannot be solved in the way suggested by Wright I, that is, by alleging that its last premise is wrong because I have an a priori entitlement to the proposition that I have encountered water. For, according to Wright II, I do not have such an entitlement. Moreover, the variant of McKinsey's problem for earned a priori warrant cannot be solved in the way proposed by Wright I either. The crux of his solution to the variant of McKinsey's paradox was that there is a transmission failure in the McKinsey argument. But, for Wright II, one has no reason to believe that there is such a failure in this argument.

Wright advances two reasons for the claim that warrant is not transmitted from an argument's premises to its conclusion. The first reason is that all four conditions of his "disjunctive template" are fulfilled.²⁸ The second reason can be formulated as follows:²⁹ I have an entitlement to, that is, an unearned a priori warrant for, an argument's conclusion. An unearned warrant cannot be transmitted from an argument's premises to its conclusion. Therefore, transmission fails in the argument in question.

According to Wright II, neither the first nor the second of these reasons can be used to establish that there is a transmission failure in the McKinsey argument. As to the first reason, the fourth condition of the disjunctive template is not fulfilled with regard to the McKinsey argument.³⁰ For the counterfactual "If I lacked water encounters, I would suffer an illusion of content" is not true: In some of the closest

²⁷ See Wright, "Some Reflections," 68 and 71–72.

²⁸ See Wright, "Some Reflections," 62–63 and 65–66.

²⁹ Here I follow Brueckner's interpretation of Wright's position (see Brueckner, "Wright on the McKinsey Problem," 388).

³⁰ See Wright, "Some Reflections," 69–70.

counterfactual situations in which I lack water encounters I am on Twin Earth, rather than on Dry Earth, and therefore do not suffer content illusion.

As to the second reason, in Wright II's view I do not have an a priori entitlement to the conclusion of the McKinsey argument, that is, to the proposition that I have encountered water. The first premise of the second reason is therefore wrong. In brief, neither the first nor the second reason shows that warrant is not transmitted from the premises of the McKinsey argument to its conclusion.³¹ Wright I's strategy of dissolving the variant of McKinsey's paradox for earned a priori warrant is thus unsuccessful.

So much for the destructive consequences of Wright's philosophical innovations in the second vis-à-vis the first part of his essay. What about the constructive consequences? Does Wright II have the resources for a solution to the McKinsey problem which is more convincing than the solution proposed by Wright I? To answer this question, I will now try to reconstruct a dissolution of McKinsey's paradox which is suggested by some of Wright II's remarks and which seems persuasive, at least if one accepts Wright's general epistemological framework, that is, his theory of entitlements.³²

According to Wright II, I have an a priori entitlement to the claim that I am not an inhabitant of Dry Earth, i.e., to the proposition that it is not the case that I have never encountered water or any other watery substance. It follows that I have an a priori entitlement to the claim that I have interacted with water or some other watery substance. Wright II also contends that I have an a priori warrant for alleging that the watery stuff of our actual acquaintance is water. Finally, closure holds for a priori warrant. From these claims Wright II infers that I have an a priori warrant for believing that I have encountered water. Hence, McKinsey's original paradox can be dissolved by maintaining that its last premise is wrong.

This solution to the McKinsey problem differs from Wright I's solution in that he argues that I enjoy an *a priori entitlement* to the contention that I have encountered water, whereas Wright II's just-reconstructed argument only shows that I have an *a priori warrant* for this contention. The question whether this a priori warrant is earned or unearned, and therefore an entitlement, can be settled if one takes into account that this warrant is transmitted from the premises to the conclusion of the following argument:

- (1) I have encountered water or some other watery substance.
- (2) The watery stuff of our actual acquaintance is water.

³¹ See Wright, "Some Reflections," 72.

³² See Wright, "Some Reflections," 71–72.

(3) Therefore, I have encountered water.

If we have an a priori warrant for the conclusion (3) (as has been shown above) and if this warrant is transmitted from the premises to the conclusion of the argument just put forward, then I have a transmitted – and therefore earned – a priori warrant for the conclusion (3), that is, the proposition that I have encountered water. But this means that the variant of McKinsey’s paradox for earned a priori warrant can be dissolved by claiming that its last premise is mistaken.

There is, however, a rather obvious objection to this solution of the variant of the McKinsey problem (one I have already mentioned in the first section). The thesis that one has an a priori *entitlement* to a claim about the external world no longer seems absurd once it is realized that having an a priori entitlement to such a claim does not presuppose possessing a priori evidence for it. But this strategy of dispelling the impression of absurdity does not work with regard to the contention that one has an *earned* a priori warrant for a claim about the external world. For having an earned a priori warrant for a proposition presupposes having a priori evidence for it. It seems, then, that Wright I is right when he holds that having an earned a priori warrant for a claim about the external world is “paradoxical.”³³

Wright II might reply – and perhaps actually replies – that the thesis that one has an earned a priori warrant for the conclusion (3) only seems paradoxical if this conclusion is “taken in isolation.”³⁴ If one bears in mind that I can deduce the conclusion (3) from premises about the external world to which I have an a priori entitlement – that is true for the premise (1) – or an a priori warrant – that is true for the premise (2) – it is no longer mysterious how I can have a priori evidence and therefore an earned a priori warrant for a claim about the external world such as the conclusion (3).

III.

It has been argued that Wright II has the resources for a convincing solution to the McKinsey problem if one is prepared to grant him his general epistemological framework. In this section, I will, however, level an objection against this framework, more precisely, against his theory of entitlements. I will not call into question Wright’s claim that we are a priori entitled to assume that our perceptual system is reliable and that all is in order with our concepts. Rather, I want to raise a more specific doubt about the way he derives entitlements concerning the external

³³ Wright, “Some Reflections,” 68.

³⁴ Wright, “Some Reflections,” 72.

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world from relatively unproblematic entitlements pertaining to the integrity of our conceptual system.

As already noted, Wright II argues that my a priori presumption or entitlement to the claim that all is in order with my concepts, together with the “known conceptual necessity” of the illusion version of externalism, “becomes an a priori presumption”³⁵ or entitlement to the claim that I do not inhabit Dry Earth and therefore have encountered either water or some other watery substance.³⁶

This argument sketch may be reconstructed as follows: I have an a priori entitlement to the claim that all is in order with my concepts and that I do not suffer content illusion. I am also a priori entitled to contend that, if I do not suffer content illusion, I am not on Dry Earth. Finally, a priori entitlement is closed under logical implication. Therefore, I have an a priori entitlement to the claim that I am not an inhabitant of Dry Earth.

If formulated in this way, Wright’s argument is questionable for at least two reasons. First, Wright has not given us any grounds for believing that a priori entitlement is closed under logical entailment. Second, the illusion version of externalism may be known a priori, but it is certainly not a claim to which one has an a priori entitlement.

Wright may respond that the claim that one has an a priori entitlement to the illusion version of anti-individualism need not be among the premises of his argument, and that it must rather be understood along the following lines: I enjoy an a priori entitlement to the claim that all is in order with my concepts and that I do not suffer content illusion. Given the conceptual necessity of the illusion version of anti-individualism, this claim conceptually entails that I am not on Dry Earth. Finally, a priori entitlement is closed under conceptual implication. Thus, I am a priori entitled to contend that I am not an inhabitant of Dry Earth.

The weak point in Wright’s argument, if reconstructed in the way proposed, is its second premise. For the claim that I am an inhabitant of Dry Earth does not seem to imply conceptually that I suffer an illusion of content. If one is an inhabitant of Dry Earth, one might still think with the notion *water*, viz, in case one possesses theoretical knowledge of the constitution of water. In other words, it is possible that one thinks with the water concept even though one is an inhabitant of Dry Earth and has never encountered water or any other watery substance, namely if one knows, in this possible world, that water consists of hydrogen and oxygen.³⁷

³⁵ Wright, “Some Reflections,” 68.

³⁶ See Wright, “Some Reflections,” 68 and 71–72.

³⁷ See Burge, “Other Bodies,” 116.

The second premise of Wright's argument must therefore be revised so as to assert that the claim that I inhabit Dry Earth and have no knowledge of the chemical composition of water conceptually implies that I suffer content illusion with regard to the notion *water*. By contraposition, it follows that freedom from content illusion conceptually entails that it is not the case *that I am an inhabitant of Dry Earth and have no knowledge of the composition of water*. If one substitutes this contention for the original second premise, the conclusion of Wright's argument has to be modified as well, viz, like this: I am a priori entitled to believe that it is not the case *that I am on Dry Earth and have no knowledge of the composition of water*.

If McKinsey's protagonist had an a priori entitlement to the claim that he has no knowledge of the composition of water, he could infer from the conclusion of Wright's argument that he is a priori entitled to believe that he is not an inhabitant of Dry Earth. But the protagonist has at best an a priori warrant for, not an entitlement to, the claim just mentioned. Thus, Wright II is wrong when he alleges that one has an a priori entitlement to the contention that one does not inhabit Dry Earth.

At this juncture, one may wonder whether it is not sufficient for the success of Wright II's attempt to solve the McKinsey problem that one has earned a priori warrant for, not an a priori entitlement to, the claim that one is not on Dry Earth and has encountered water or some other watery substance. For if one has an a priori warrant for, though not necessarily an entitlement to, the premises (1) and (2), one also has an a priori warrant for the conclusion (3), and this suffices for solving the McKinsey problem.

This way of advancing Wright II's dissolution of the McKinsey paradox is questionable on the ground that the strategy of dispelling an impression of absurdity used above to defend Wright II's original solution to the McKinsey problem cannot be employed to dispel the impression that it is absurd to suppose that one has an earned a priori warrant for the claim that one is not an inhabitant of Dry Earth. Recall what this strategy was. According to Wright II, I have an earned a priori warrant, and therefore a priori evidence, for the claim (3), that is, the proposition that I have had contact with water. The impression that it is absurd to suppose that one has a priori evidence for the claim (3) can be dispelled if one takes into account that one can deduce it from claims about the external world, viz, the propositions (1) and (2), for which I have an a priori warrant.

But this strategy of dispelling an impression of absurdity cannot be applied to the claim that I am not on Dry Earth and have had contact with water or some other watery substance. The impression that it is absurd that one has an earned a priori warrant and therefore a priori evidence for this claim cannot be dispelled by holding

that it can be deduced from premises about the external world for which one has an a priori warrant. For it seems that the only premises for which I have an a priori warrant and from which the claim in question can be inferred are “It is not the case *that I am on Dry Earth and have no knowledge of the composition of water*” and “I have no knowledge of the composition of water,” and these premises do not exclusively concern the external world.

One may object that the requirement that the premises in question concern the external world is unnecessary. Why not dispel the impression that it is absurd that one has a priori evidence for the claim that I am not on Dry Earth by calling attention to the fact that this claim can be deduced from a priori warranted premises? This proposal will not do either. For someone who knows the variant of the McKinsey paradox for earned a priori warrant also knows that the claim that he has encountered water can be deduced from a priori warranted premises. Still, he is puzzled by the variant of the McKinsey paradox, more precisely, by the alleged fact that he has an evidential (earned) a priori warrant for his having encountered water. Therefore, calling attention to the fact that the claim in question can be deduced from a priori warranted premises alone does not dispel the impression that it is absurd that one has a priori evidence for this claim.

One might suggest, finally, that the impression that it is absurd that one has a priori evidence for the claim that one is not on Dry Earth can be dispelled by drawing attention to the fact that this claim can be deduced from a priori warranted premises *different from the premises of the McKinsey argument*. Suppose someone doubts that one can have a priori evidence for the claim in question. Suppose further that she still doubts this even after having been told that the claim in question can be deduced from the a priori warranted premises of the McKinsey argument. The doubt of this person might be dispelled by calling attention to the fact that the claim in question can *also* be deduced from a priori warranted premises which are *different* from the premises of the McKinsey argument, viz, the premises “It is not the case *that I am on Dry Earth and have no knowledge of the composition of water*” and “I have no knowledge of the composition of water.”

This strategy of dispelling the impression of absurdity associated with the thesis that there is a priori evidence for the claim that I am not on Dry Earth is not conclusive. Strictly speaking, the second premise of the McKinsey argument runs as follows: If I believe that water is wet, it is not the case *that I have no knowledge of the composition of water and have never encountered water*.³⁸ The conjunction of this premise and the implicit premise that I have no knowledge of the composition of water implies that, if I believe that water is wet, I have at some time encountered

³⁸ See Burge, “Other Bodies,” 116.

water. In brief, one of the premises of the McKinsey argument, correctly understood, is the contention that I have no knowledge of the composition of water. But this contention is also among the premises of the aforementioned alternative argument for the claim that I do not inhabit Dry Earth. There is thus no argument for this claim whose premises are a priori warranted and different from the premises of the (correctly understood) McKinsey argument. It seems, then, that the impression of absurdity associated with the idea that I have an earned a priori warrant for the claim that I am not on Dry Earth cannot be dispelled. Wright II's solution to the McKinsey problem appears to fail.

IV.

In his essay "McKinsey One More Time," Wright qualifies his earlier diagnosis of the McKinsey paradox in a number of ways. The most important of them is that Wright no longer contends that I am a priori entitled to claim that I am not an inhabitant of Dry Earth. Instead, he relies on the following case distinction:³⁹ Either I am entitled to the claim that I am not on Dry Earth, then Wright II's solution to the McKinsey problem is correct; or I am *not* entitled to that claim, then the McKinsey paradox can be dissolved by alleging that its first premise is wrong, i.e., by maintaining that I do not have an a priori warrant for the proposition that I believe that water is wet.

According to Wright, the second horn of this dilemma can be substantiated as follows:⁴⁰ If I am warranted to contend that I believe that water is wet, I have a warrant for the claim that I am not an inhabitant of Dry Earth. But my warrant for this claim is only empirical for I lack an a priori entitlement to it. Therefore, my warrant for the contention that I believe that water is wet is only empirical too. In other words, the traditional view that I have a priori knowledge of my own mental states is wrong.

One may rejoin that the proposition that I lack an a priori entitlement to the claim that I am not on Dry Earth does not imply that my warrant for this claim is at most empirical. For I might have an *earned* a priori warrant for the claim in question. This rejoinder is, however, not available to me because it has been argued in section III that the impression of absurdity associated with the idea that one has a priori evidence and therefore an earned a priori warrant for the claim in question cannot be dispelled.

³⁹ See Wright, "McKinsey One More Time," 101–102. (What follows in this and the subsequent paragraphs is a rational reconstruction of Wright's position.)

⁴⁰ See Wright, "McKinsey One More Time," 97; see also Wright, "Some Reflections," 75.

What about the first premise of Wright's defense of the second horn? Do I have a warrant for the claim that I am not on Dry Earth if I have a warrant for the contention that I believe that water is wet? The following three-step argument may have convinced Wright that the answer to this question is in the affirmative. First step: "In taking it that I have recognized (...) that I have a certain specific belief, I take it for granted that the apparent concepts configured in that belief are in good standing (...)." ⁴¹ From this Wright concludes that, if I have a warrant for the contention that I believe that water is wet, I have a warrant for the claim that all is in order with the concepts in question and that I do not suffer content illusion regarding them. ⁴² Second step: If (i) I have a warrant for the claim that I do not suffer content illusion, (ii) this claim conceptually entails that I am not on Dry Earth and (iii) warrant is closed under conceptual entailment, then I have a warrant for believing that I am not on Dry Earth. ⁴³ Moreover, the claims (ii) and (iii) are true. Therefore, if I have warrant for the claim that I do not suffer content illusion, I have a warrant for believing that I am not an inhabitant of Dry Earth. Third step: From the conditionals argued for in step 1 and 2 it follows that, if I have a warrant for the contention that I believe that water is wet, I have a warrant for the claim that I am not on Dry Earth.

A refined version of this argument does indeed show that the first premise of Wright's defense of the second horn is true. ⁴⁴ Moreover, it follows from the considerations put forward in section III that the second premise is true as well. Should one, then, endorse Wright III's diagnosis of the McKinsey paradox? In the following, I will advance two lines of argument which suggest a negative answer to this question.

First, the McKinsey paradox cannot be dissolved simply by denying that our knowledge of our own propositional attitudes is *a priori*. What is needed in addition is a strategy for dispelling the impression that it is absurd to claim that one must investigate the external world in order to know what one believes, thinks etc. But Wright has not provided such a strategy. His proposal for a solution to the McKinsey problem is therefore at best incomplete.

Second, the premises of Wright's argument in defense of the second horn are admittedly true. Still, his argument is not sound since its conclusion does not follow from its premises. One might think that Wright's argument *is* valid because one

⁴¹ Wright, "McKinsey One More Time," 96.

⁴² "The claim to warrant for the premises rests on the reasonableness of these presuppositions." (Wright, "McKinsey One More Time," 96)

⁴³ See Wright, "Some Reflections," 68, second paragraph.

⁴⁴ For the needed refinement, see section III.

confuses it with the following closely related, and valid, reasoning: To acquire a warrant for the contention that I believe that water is wet, I have to acquire a warrant for the claim that I am not an inhabitant of Dry Earth. But to acquire a warrant for this claim, I have to explore the external world. Therefore, I must examine the external world in order to acquire a warrant for the contention that I believe that water is wet. In other words, my warrant for this contention is not a priori but merely empirical.

This reasoning is valid, but it is not equivalent to Wright's original argument. For the first premise of that argument does not imply the first premise of the above reasoning. In general, a proposition of the type "If I have a warrant for A, I have a warrant for B" does not entail a proposition of the type "To acquire a warrant for A, I have to acquire a warrant for B." But if the reasoning outlined above is valid, whereas Wright's original argument is not, why not abandon his argument in favour of the above reasoning?

The answer is that Wright's defense of the first premise of his argument cannot be modified so as to support the first premise of the reasoning in question. In particular, the second step of his defense, with its reliance on warrant closure, cannot be amended in this vein. The only way to circumvent this difficulty seems to consist in dropping the second step altogether and in instead "extending" the first step. The modified version of Wright's defense would then look as simple as this: In taking it that I have a warrant for the contention that I believe that water is wet, I take it for granted that all is in order with my concepts and that I am *therefore* not an inhabitant of Dry Earth. Thus, to acquire a warrant for the contention that I believe that water is wet, I have to acquire a warrant for the claim that I am not on Dry Earth.

The premise of this defense is of course only true if the protagonist is an externalist. But this does not pose a problem for Wright since the McKinsey paradox can only be generated for proponents of externalism anyway. There is, however, a second, related, worry. According to Tyler Burge, the proposition that one is on Dry Earth does *not* imply that one's concepts are not in order and one suffers content illusion.⁴⁵ A Burgean externalist holds that an inhabitant of Dry Earth might think with the concept *water* provided he knows about the chemical composition of water.

If one claims that causal contact with water is necessary for the possession of the concept *water*, and that causal contact with *twater* is necessary for the possession of the concept *twater* (and so on for all concepts of watery substances), then one will quite likely also contend that being on Dry Earth implies that one suffers content illusion. But a Burgean externalist does *not* claim that causal contact with water is

⁴⁵ See Burge, "Other Bodies," esp. 116.

necessary for the possession of the concept *water*. He only holds that what is necessary for A's possession of the concept *water* is the truth of the proposition "A has encountered water *or has knowledge of its chemical composition*." Therefore, a Burgean externalist need not contend that being on Dry Earth implies that one suffers content illusion. But if there are (Burgean) externalists who do not submit that the proposition "All is in order with my concepts" implies the proposition "I am not an inhabitant of Dry Earth," then the premise of Wright's defense is not true for everyone it is supposed to be true for, and his defense founders.

In sum, the second horn of Wright's dilemma can be substantiated neither with recourse to his original argument – because it is not valid – nor with recourse to the modified version of that argument – because his defense of its first premise is unconvincing. It seems, then, that Wright's diagnosis of the McKinsey paradox in his most recent article on this issue is not doing any better than his earlier attempts at dissolving the paradox.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Two final remarks. It has been argued in the first section of this essay that Brueckner is wrong in holding that Wright's solution to the McKinsey problem is independent of the issue of warrant transmission. This remains true with regard to Wright I's solution to the McKinsey problem. But if we consider Wright's later views, my earlier diagnosis must be qualified. For neither Wright II's nor Wright III's dissolution of McKinsey's paradox presupposes that there is a transmission failure in the McKinsey argument.

Wright III's solution to the McKinsey problem is also independent from how one answers the question whether closure holds for a priori warrant. This is obscured by the fact that Wright rejects this principle in the last section of his 2011 article (see Wright, "McKinsey One More Time," 102–103). Note, by the way, that this indicates a change of mind on Wright's part. For in his essay "Some Reflections" he agreed with McKinsey that closure of a priori warrant is true (see Wright, "Some Reflections," 68–69; and Michael McKinsey, "Transmission of Warrant and Closure of Apriority," in *New Essays on Semantic Externalism and Self-Knowledge*, ed. Susana Nuccetelli (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 2003), 106–107).