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SCEPTICISM AND DREAMING

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ABSTRACT. In a recent, and influential, article, Crispin Wright maintains that a familiar form of scepticism—which finds its core expression in Descartes’ dreaming argument—can be defused (or, to use Wright’s own parlance, “imploded”), by showing how it employs self-defeating reasoning. I offer two fundamental reasons for rejecting Wright’s ‘implosion’ of scepticism. On the one hand, I argue that, even by Wright’s own lights, it is unclear whether there is a sceptical argument to implode in the first place. On the other, I claim that even on the supposition that Wright has indeed succeeded in setting-up such an argument, he nevertheless fails to follow-through with an adequate response. A diagnosis of the failure of Wright’s approach is then given in the context of the wider sceptical debate.

1. WRIGHT’S RECONSTRUCTION AND IMPLOSION OF THE SCEPTICAL ARGUMENT.

Crispin Wright has proposed what he calls an ‘implosion’ of the familiar Cartesian form of dreaming-scepticism.¹ As is well known, this argument essentially contends that I cannot know/justifiably believe that I am not now dreaming and thus, since dreaming excludes perception, I am not in a position to claim knowledge/justification for a wide class of perceptual beliefs. Wright does not characterise the argument in these terms however, since he believes that when interpreted with either ‘knowledge’ or justification’ as the epistemic operator the argument is ineffective.² For when expressed in terms of knowledge it is always possible, he contends, to respond to the sceptic via a ‘Russellian retreat’, whereby knowledge of the contested propositions is conceded in favour of justification.³ And when represented in terms of justification the argument will be ineffectual since, he argues, we clearly *do* have sufficient justification for believing that we are not now dreaming. Nevertheless, he does think that there is a sceptical argument worth responding to here, one that turns upon an epistemic “notion which, like knowledge, is answerable to non-internalist standards

¹ ‘Scepticism and Dreaming: Imploding the Demon’, *Mind* 397 (1991), 87-116.

² *Ibid.*, 90-3.

³ It is actually unclear what exactly is achieved by a ‘Russellian retreat’. Intuitively one might regard justification as being whatever, along with true belief, is sufficient for knowledge (with, perhaps, a codicil to Gettier). But neither Wright nor Russell have this epistemic notion in mind, since the very point of a Russellian retreat is to concede that, *even if one’s beliefs were true*, they still would not count as knowledge. (If this were not the case then there would be no need for a retreat. One could claim knowledge whilst allowing that there is a possible world in which one’s contingent beliefs are false, as long as, that is, one also had reason to believe that this world is not the actual world or a relevantly nearby world, and this much is surely contained in the intuitive notion of justification, so defined). The manoeuvre thus gives us a very weak epistemic notion that may be exploitable by the sceptic after all.

but unlike knowledge, allows no space for a Russellian retreat.”⁴ He christens this notion “warrant”:

Let us say that the holding by a subject, *x*, of a particular belief at a particular time is *warranted* just in case the following two conditions are met:

- (i). *x* has sufficient reason, all things considered which she is in a position to consider, to hold the belief; and
- (ii). one who knew of all the features of its pedigree in *x*’s thought would not be placed in a position where, independently of any reason bestowed thereby to regard the belief as false, it would be rational to view the probability of its truth as being unimproved by the fact of *x*’s holding it.⁵

The first condition is just the internalist notion of sufficient reason; it is the second that adds the *externalist* quality to this justification that Wright thinks we need in order to effectively characterise the sceptical argument. Implicit in the formulation of (ii) is the idea that the grounds for a belief can be defeated in one of two ways: either they are ‘*overridden*’ in the sense that new information may come to light which, although not impugning the original credentials of the belief, nevertheless generates a total state of information which no longer supports that belief; or they may be ‘*rebutted*’, in that the original credibility of the grounds for the belief are impeached, perhaps by an illustration of how the evidence gathered was prone to error for instance, or by showing that the subject made some cognitive mistake.⁶ The second half of this specification of warrant allows the possibility of the first sort of defeater but not the second; that is, it demands that, whether or not the belief will be overridden, it is, as a matter of fact, not rebutted. It thus picks out a form of grounded belief whose pedigree—the “holder’s grounds if any, her cognitive conditions as she forms it and the circumstances surrounding its formation”⁷—is flawless. If one knows that the belief fulfils such a pedigree, then, absent any independent grounds for regarding the belief as false, the likelihood of the belief being true must be increased by the fact that the person holds it. Warrant thus contrasts with knowledge in that it is not factive, but, like knowledge, it is responsive to the actual pedigree of the belief (unlike mere justification, where the pedigree can be just reasonably supposed).⁸

The reason why Wright thinks we need such a notion in order to represent the sceptical argument is that he believes both that this form of scepticism and the proper response to it effectively revolve around the same principle, what he terms the ‘Proper Execution Principle’ (PEP):

If the acquisition of warrant to believe a proposition depends on the proper execution of some procedure, then executing the procedure cannot give you any stronger warrant to believe the

⁴ ‘Scepticism and Dreaming: Imploding the Demon’, *op. cit.*, 94.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁶ Cf. John Pollock, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge*, (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield, 1986), 38-9.

⁷ ‘Scepticism and Dreaming: Imploding the Demon’, *op. cit.*, 95.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

proposition in question than you have independently for believing that you have executed the procedure properly.⁹

As he explains, your attaining a warrant for believing that you have correctly measured the length of, say, a chair, is proportionate to your warrant for thinking that the measuring procedure was carried out properly; that, for instance, the ruler you used to conduct the measurement was accurate.

According to Wright, the sceptic uses this principle, along with the claim that dreaming and perception are phenomenologically indistinguishable¹⁰, as a means of undermining the pedigree of our belief. For given this indistinguishability, the problem is that whatever procedure you could carry out which would give you grounds for believing that you were not now dreaming could only give you a warrant on the presupposition that you are not dreaming in the first place. For instance, suppose you pinch yourself, or ask someone else whether or not you are dreaming, this is only a valid procure which could afford you a warrant if you are not now dreaming, since you may be dreaming that you executed this procedure. (Similar considerations will apply, *mutatis mutandis*, for the modern variant of the dreaming argument: the brain-in-a-vat scenario). Consequently, there is no warrant available for believing that you are not now dreaming since you lack a warrant for thinking that whatever procedure you might carry out to ascertain that you are not now dreaming has been properly executed (i.e., the pedigree of the belief is impugned). As a result, you lack a warrant for any belief that is gained by perception. For, recall, dreaming excludes perception and so, via (PEP), a warrant for a perceptual belief would require a warrant for thinking that you are not now dreaming, a warrant which you do not have.

We can formally characterise this sceptical threat as follows, where “W [P]” stands for “x has a warrant available at time *t* for the belief P”; “D” stands for “x is now dreaming”, and “P” is taken as a schematic letter restricted to those propositions that might only be known by perception.¹¹

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|-----|----------------------------------|--|
| (1) | $\neg W [\neg D]$ | The Sceptical Claim (via (PEP)). (P1). |
| (2) | $W [P] \rightarrow [\neg D]$ | Conceptual Truth. |
| (3) | $W [W [P] \rightarrow [\neg D]]$ | Warrant for a Conceptual Truth, 2. ¹² (P2). |
| (4) | $W [P]$ | Assumed for <i>Reductio</i> . |
| (5) | $W W [P]$ | Iterativity, 4. ¹³ |

⁹ *Ibid.*, 99. Wright claims that this principle was inspired by Barry Stroud’s remarks in *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 21-3.

¹⁰ One’s dream could be “*phenomenologically smooth*”, in that “any normally experienced and reflective subject would find no cause therein to suspect that he was not perceiving and thinking normally.” See *ibid.*, 106.

¹¹ Following Tymoczko and Vogel (‘The Exorcist’s Nightmare: A Reply to Crispin Wright’, *Mind* 403 (1992), 543-52), I symbolise Wright’s “Rxt [P]” (“x has a warrant available at time *t* for the belief P”), as simply “W [P]”, since the indexicals of subject and time are never varied or quantified over and so may be taken as being fixed.

¹² Wright assumes that there is always a warrant available for conceptual truths. See ‘Scepticism and Dreaming: Imploding the Demon’, *op. cit.*, 92n, 97 & 109.

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| (6) | W [\neg D] | Transmission, 3, 5. ¹⁴ |
| (7) | \neg W [\neg D] & W [\neg D] | & Introduction, 1, 6. |
| (8) | \neg W [P] | <i>Reductio Ad Absurdum</i> , 4, 7. |

An intuitive response to this sort of sceptical argument (suggested by Wittgenstein¹⁵), is to contend that, if you were dreaming, then you would also lack the intellectual function which would enable you to formulate the argument in the first place. Wright rejects such a rebuttal since, although it is true that dreaming excludes perception of an external world, it is not necessarily true that dreaming excludes intellectual function, this being merely, at best, an empirical fact that therefore lacks the generality required.¹⁶ He does, however, take up the strategy on offer here of highlighting a presupposition of the sceptic's argument as a means of undermining their claims. To this end Wright adopts the ingenious strategy of defining the following state of *maundering*:

x is *maundering* at *t* just in case *x* is then in a phenomenologically smooth state which, like dreaming, necessarily excludes the causal conditions for perception but, in addition, likewise precludes the causal conditions of competent intellection.¹⁷

The interesting question now is whether the sceptic is able to distinguish maundering from dreaming in such a way as to have the intellectual function necessary to run her argument.

The original argument contended, on the basis of (PEP) and phenomenological indistinguishability, that warrants are not available for our belief that we are not now dreaming and thus, since dreaming precludes perception, we also lack warrants for any perception-based belief. The idea is that this very same reasoning should lead to the claim that warrants are likewise unavailable for thinking that we are not now maundering and hence, since maundering excludes both perception and intellection, we also lack warrants for all our perception *and* intellection-based beliefs.

We can express this formally as follows, where “M” stands for “*x* is now maundering”; and “P” is interpreted as before except that now it covers all propositions which can be known by perception *or* intellection.

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|-----|-------------------------------------|--|
| (1) | \neg W [\neg M] | The Sceptical Claim (via (PEP)). (P1**). |
| (2) | W [P] \rightarrow [\neg M] | Conceptual Truth. |
| (3) | W {W [P] \rightarrow [\neg M]} | Warrant for a Conceptual Truth, 2. (P2**). |

¹³ That W [P] implies W W [P]. See *ibid.*, 98.

¹⁴ That if there is a warrant available for a set of propositions $\{p_1, \dots, p_n\}$, and these propositions entail a further proposition *q*, then there is a warrant available for *q*. *Ibid.*, 97

¹⁵ See *On Certainty*, (eds.) G. E. M. Anscombe & G. H. von Wright, (tr.) Denis Paul & G. E. M. Anscombe, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), §§383 & 676.

¹⁶ ‘Scepticism and Dreaming: Imploding the Demon’, *op. cit.*, 104.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 106. As with the coherent dreams that Descartes specifies, it is not really important whether we do in fact ever maunder, only that such a possibility can be actualised.

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|-----|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| (4) | W [P] | Assumed for <i>Reductio</i> . |
| (5) | W W [P] | Iterativity, 4. |
| (6) | W [\neg M] | Transmission, 3, 5. |
| (7) | \neg W [\neg M] & W [\neg M] | & Introduction, 1, 6. |
| (8) | \neg W [P] | <i>Reductio Ad Absurdum</i> , 4, 7. |

The problem is that the sceptic requires the availability of intellection-based beliefs in order to run her argument, and yet her argument shows that warrants are unavailable for such beliefs. As a result it self-destructs. In particular, any instance of (2) is itself a conceptual truth which can only be known by intellection, and thus comes within the scope of (8). We can therefore extend the argument to a contradiction:

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| (9) | \neg W {W [P] \rightarrow [\neg M]} | By Preceding Discussion, 8. |
| (10) | CONTRADICTION | & Introduction, 3, 9. |

So the very same reasoning which led to the dreaming argument likewise leads to a second argument, with analogous premises, that implodes in on itself. Wright argues that it therefore follows that there must be something wrong with the premises. The second premise, that we are warranted in thinking that, if we possess a warrant for a perception/intellection-based belief then we are not now dreaming/maundering, is meant to be a conceptual truth, so there is little hope of locating the problem here. The blame thus falls to the first premise of the maundering argument, that we lack a warrant for thinking that we are not now maundering. Wright's manoeuvre here is to contend that this premise is false, and so, since the first premise of the dreaming argument was derived via analogous reasoning, further claim that the first premise of the dreaming argument is false also: it is not the case that warrants are unavailable for believing that we are not now dreaming.

But this is no straightforward victory since Wright makes an important concession to the sceptic at this point. According to Wright the conclusion we should take from this implosion of scepticism is that "the impossibility of *earning* a warrant that one is not now dreaming does not imply that no such warrant is ever *possessed*."¹⁸ The "warrant" that we have rescued from the sceptic is thus not quite the warrant we originally claimed to enjoy.

2. IS THERE A SCEPTICAL ARGUMENT TO IMplode?

Before considering what this esoteric conclusion is supposed to mean, I want to dwell first on

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 107-8.

whether Wright has succeeded in making a case for the sort of scepticism embodied in the first premise: that there is no warrant available for believing that I am not now dreaming. Consider again how the notion of warrant was defined to include both the internalist condition of justified belief along with an externalist standard concerning the pedigree of the belief. The trouble is that given this externalist element, coupled with the fact that Wright avers that our justifications are entirely satisfactory in this respect, it is unclear whether the considerations about (PEP) and phenomenological indistinguishability are going to be sufficient to establish a sceptical argument.

Wright argues for the first premise in the following way:

Suppose I set myself to acquire a warrant to believe that I am not now dreaming by some procedure, of whatever sort - [*e.g.*] pinching myself [...] By (PEP), the result cannot be better warranted than the belief that I have properly executed the procedure is independently warranted; and that belief cannot be independently warranted at all unless I have independent warrant for its component, that I really did execute the procedure and *did not merely dream its execution*. But then it appears that I must already have the warrant which I have set myself to acquire - only if so does the execution of the procedure have any probative force. There is no route from a state in which one has no warrant for the supposition one is not dreaming to the acquisition of a warrant for that belief; hence, it seems, the belief is unwarrantable, just as (P1) says.¹⁹

Wright here suggests that one cannot acquire a warrant for the belief that one is not now dreaming, because this would presuppose that one already has such a warrant. The trouble with this claim is that, even on Wright's own explicit definition of warrant, there seems no principled reason for thinking that I must lack this prior epistemic support for the belief in question. After all, all I need is a sufficient justification for this belief (which Wright claims is possible), so fulfilling (i), and, as a matter of fact, satisfy (ii). And since (ii) makes an externalist requirement on my possession of warrant, it follows that I can fulfil (ii) *independently* of whatever cognitive efforts (or otherwise) I undertake in order to acquire the warrant in question. As long as I am so related to the world as to be able to meet (ii), then this would suffice. Accordingly, the sort of purely internalist considerations mooted in (PEP) about the acquisition of warrant are irrelevant both to my possession of warrant and the import that warrant is deemed to have for the sceptical argument.

Indeed, if (PEP) has *any* sceptical consequences then it seems to speak against the possibility of acquiring a *justification* for the contested beliefs, so it is perhaps odd then that Wright thinks our justifications to be intact in this regard, thereby defusing one way in which the sceptical argument could be appropriately expressed. Of course, there is a higher-order scepticism lurking about here which wonders how *anyone* is warranted in thinking that they are not dreaming, but Wright's

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

characterisation neither speaks to, nor embodies, this form of scepticism.²⁰

3. WOULD THE ‘IMPLOSION’ HAVE WORKED?

Despite these concerns over the establishment of the sceptical argument, one might nevertheless feel that at the very least Wright’s argument might, with suitable modifications, supply an attractive schema within which certain sceptical attacks are defused. Unfortunately, as I shall now explain, such optimism is unfounded.

Recall the final conclusion that Wright reached: that we have an “unearned” warrant for the contested dreaming proposition (and so, one might reasonably assume, for the maundering proposition also). It is important at this juncture to be clear why Wright does not make the more natural move at this point in the proceedings and go from denying the first premise to saying that we have a warrant for the contested proposition in the normal way. The reason is that Wright is not claiming that the sceptic’s reasoning is faulty—indeed, he admits to finding it persuasive²¹—since if it were there would be no argument to ‘implode’. His point is rather to show that the sceptic has *misdescribed* the epistemic facts by failing to notice that her doubt involves a proposition which, though it appears straightforwardly empirical, is in fact of a more complex design. That is, Wright remains true to our sense that the sceptic is employing a legitimate epistemic policy in this respect and merely contends that this policy is *misapplied*; that there is a relevant epistemic distinction to be drawn between the propositions that are properly subject to the sceptic’s reasoning and those which, like the dreaming proposition, are not.²² Wright therefore has to tell a story about what is happening here, and it is to serve this end that he introduces the Wittgensteinian notion of a hinge proposition.²³

²⁰ This, and similar, concerns are discussed by Anthony Brueckner in his paper ‘Problems with the Wright Route to Scepticism’, *Mind* **402** (1992), 309-17. Thomas Tymoczko and Jonathan Vogel have criticised this characterisation of warrant in ‘The Exorcist’s Nightmare: A Reply to Crispin Wright’, *op. cit.*, 543-4. In essence, they claim that, *contra* the second part of this characterisation, someone who availed themselves of all of the features of the pedigree of *x*’s belief could, nevertheless, regard the probability of the belief’s truth as *unchanged* by the fact of *x*’s holding it. This strikes me as implausible. Even if I already believed the proposition in question, the very fact that someone who I take to be in such a good cognitive position agrees with me would surely enhance my estimation of the likelihood of the belief being true. In any case, even if this critique could be carried through it would only require a minor modification of the concept outlined above, a modification which would cause no harm to the ensuing argument.

²¹ ‘Scepticism and Dreaming: Imploding the Demon’, *op. cit.*, 103-4.

²² Indeed, Wright admits as much when he writes: “the argument from the (PEP) *would* establish its object were the further assumption correct that warrants for beliefs of the ilk we are concerned with - I am not now dreaming etc., - had to be earned.” That is, the argument from (PEP) would have worked if it had been focused on ordinary empirical propositions rather than hinge propositions. *Ibid.*, 114.

²³ See *On Certainty*, *op. cit.*, *passim* and §§341-3 in particular.

The thinking behind Wright's use of this notion seems to be that there are certain propositions which can never be warranted in the usual sense because they are *presuppositions* of a certain discourse, but that it is because of this presuppositional role that they can never be coherently supposed to lack warrant either. As he puts it, it is

the idea that among our beliefs there are some which we are warranted in accepting not as a result of some specific cognitive achievement but rather as a product of a special place they hold in our framework of thought and inquiry.²⁴

Viewed in this way it is obviously important that, at least within the discourse in question, no warrant can ever be earned for this proposition, since it must form part of the content of the proposition that it serves this framework role. So by the lights of this account the individuating factors of a hinge proposition appear to be: (i), that one cannot earn a warrant for this proposition (the “no cognitive achievement” thesis); and (ii), that one cannot coherently suppose that the proposition lacks a warrant since this would lead to the sort of intellectual self-subversion we witnessed above. On this basis the maundering claim clearly falls into the hinge camp since the presupposition that I am in a state which does not exclude intellectual function is needed in order to question intellectual function in the first place, since this very questioning requires intellectual function. Moreover, I cannot prove that I exhibit such intellectual function without presupposing that I possess it in the first place (since the very act of proving it assumes intellectual function), so the warrant that I do not maunder can never be “earned”. For the sake of brevity let us suppose that the sceptic is quite willing to concede this fact (she has no interest in maundering-scepticism, say), and focus instead on the real topic of dispute: whether “I am not now dreaming” is a hinge proposition. So far all the sceptic has conceded is that if she wishes to raise a legitimate argument for her doubt then she must not argue in any way that presupposes that she is incapable of such argument. (The sceptic may be able to resist even this move, but I shall not go into this here).²⁵ Certain propositions have then what we might call a ‘default’ warrant, because belief in them is methodologically necessary for coherently entering into a certain discourse.

There are two important elements of Wright's ‘implosion’ of scepticism that ought to be noted at this point. The first is that the use of the term ‘warrant’, even when qualified as being

²⁴ ‘Scepticism and Dreaming: Imploding the Demon’, *op. cit.*, 104ff. See also Wright's earlier remarks on the notion of a hinge proposition in ‘Facts and Certainty’, in *Proceedings of the British Academy* 71 (1985), 429-72, 449ff.

²⁵ A cynic may contend that arguing in this way undermines Wright's own avowed commitment to avoiding the “adversarial stance” as regards scepticism (*ibid.*, 88-9). For why should the sceptic be forced to concede the presence of intellection-based warrants in order to argue unless we view her as embodied in some way? Is the sceptic really unable to present us with a paradox here such that ‘reason’ is used in order to impeach reason? Alternatively, the sceptic could take a different tack and claim that what is really at fault is the reasoning employed rather than the premises; in

“unearned”, seems out of place to express the methodological status of these beliefs. For it is not that we have now acquired truth-tracking support for this belief, only that we *must*, as a matter of methodological necessity, believe it. (Indeed, to say that the warrant is “unearned” is precisely to say that it fails to fulfil the definition of warrant that Wright himself outlined above, and is thus a euphemistic way of saying that the belief simply *lacks* warrant²⁶). No matter how one eventually defined the notion, one would intuitively think that if a belief enjoys a warrant then it should be regarded as being more likely to be true than an unwarranted counterpart, but this need not be the case here. It may thus be more accurate to say that, despite his anti-sceptical guise, Wright is nevertheless making a significant concession to the sceptic by allowing a fundamental sceptical claim: that there are certain propositions which we must believe even though such belief can have nothing to do with tracking the truth. (In a related vein, what exactly has the sceptic conceded by dropping maundering-scepticism? Not that there are *warrants* available, as Wright defines the term, for believing this proposition after all, but only that we must believe that there are. The sceptic has given very little).

The second element we should note is that it is not immediately obvious that the dreaming proposition is going to be a hinge proposition in any case. After all, it was shown that the maundering argument imploded, not that the dreaming argument did. (In fact, as we saw, Wright rejects Wittgenstein’s attempt to directly implode the dreaming argument). If Wright were saying that we should conclude from the maundering argument that the reasoning that established the premises of the dreaming argument were faulty (i.e., the considerations concerning (PEP) and phenomenological indistinguishability), then things would be different. But he is not going to say that because, as noted above, there would then be no sceptical argument to implode - defeating a straw man is no victory at all. So Wright must maintain that the reasoning is acceptable but that it is the application of that reasoning that is at fault, and at fault because it was applied to propositions which were hinges rather than just ordinary empirical propositions. As far as maundering goes this point is clear enough, but as regards dreaming the problem merely seemed to be that arguing as in the dreaming case leads to arguing in the maundering case, and this leads to implosion. That is, if the sceptic wants to propose dreaming scepticism then she must further propose maundering scepticism, and since the latter is self-defeating, so dreaming scepticism must be defective as well.

particular, the four logical laws that the defective notion of warrant is held to obey. Some of these issues are explored by Tymoczko and Vogel in ‘The Exorcist’s Nightmare: A Reply to Crispin Wright’, *op. cit.*

²⁶ Recall that the warrant we have is of a *methodological* rather than *truth-tracking* nature. As a result it fails to fulfil the first part of the specification of warrant straight away. Moreover, it would follow that someone who availed themselves of the pedigree of the belief in your thought (and therefore acknowledged its methodological status) would

But if the sceptic's reasoning is meant to be acceptable provided it is applied to non-hinge propositions, why cannot the sceptic simply doubt the dreaming proposition whilst conceding the maundering proposition its hinge status? After all, we do not need to assume that we are not dreaming in order to run an argument in the same way that we must assume that we are not maundering, and so it is not even clear that the proposition that I am not now dreaming performs the sort of framework role that Wright felt was constitutive of a hinge proposition.

If Wright is to fill this lacuna he would thus need to adduce some form of consistency constraint on epistemic rationality which would force the sceptic who doubted in the dreaming case to doubting in the maundering instance also. The second element of the notion of a hinge proposition would also have to be extended such that it covered propositions which *indirectly* engendered self-subversion: that is, those propositions which, when believed by an epistemically consistent agent, would lead to belief in a further proposition which was self-subverting. Let us bracket the reservations we might have regarding whether the sceptic ought to be required to be consistent, or whether such epistemic universality constraints are even plausible.²⁷ The important issue is whether this would assist the anti-sceptic in their endeavour. For the problem would then be to motivate inconsistency on the sceptic's part without begging the question against her. Recall that Wright is not impugning the reasoning that led the sceptic to propose the premises of the dreaming argument, he is merely arguing that this very same reasoning leads to doubt of a hinge proposition (in the maundering case), and so, by implication, the dreaming proposition is a hinge proposition also. But now the difficulty is manifest. What would be inconsistent about the sceptic treating the maundering proposition as a hinge and the dreaming proposition as an ordinary empirical proposition? After all, the distinction that she needs to draw between these two propositions (in order for it to be appropriate, epistemically speaking, to treat them differently), has been supplied by the very anti-sceptical *modus operandi* which illustrated that doubt of the maundering proposition leads to implosion and is thus, by hypothesis, a different sort of epistemic entity to the dreaming proposition. Moreover, it would be rather odd that the anti-sceptic should now be so keen on consistency given that it is only in the face of adversity that this new epistemic device is

have to regard the probability of the belief's truth as *unchanged* by your holding it, thus contravening the second part also.

²⁷ These constraints are often thought to reflect the internalist principles that underpin an ethical discourse and so, since internalism is typically taken to be inherent to scepticism, underlie sceptical arguments for doubt also. It would therefore be ironic if they were needed to put pressure on the sceptic. For discussion of this point, see Jonathan Adler, 'Skepticism and Universalizability', *Journal of Philosophy* **78** (1981), 143-56; and Jonathan Dancy, *An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 12ff. In any case, aside from the fact that these constraints, if used against the sceptic, seem to assume the "adversarial stance" noted above, such principles also face numerous problems of formulation. For discussion of this point, see Anthony Brueckner, 'Epistemic Universalizability Principles',

introduced.²⁸

4. DO WRIGHT'S FURTHER REMARKS RESOLVE THE ISSUE?

Wright does not directly consider this sceptical reply to his argument but he does make a further case for the joint unsatisfiability of the premises for the dreaming argument. This may thus constitute a way in which he could achieve the desired end after all.

Wright allows that even though the premises of the maundering argument are jointly unsatisfiable, still, it might be objected that the premises of the dreaming argument have not yet been shown to be likewise unsatisfiable. That is, even if his argument against the dreaming hypothesis above were thought to go through, it would merely show that its premises could not be established in this way, not that they could not be established at all (as in the maundering case). He writes:

How [...], if it has not been shown that the premises of the Dreaming Argument are jointly unsatisfiable, do we resist the claim that there is at least no warrant to reject them - that they may be true for all we are warranted in believing - and that the same goes, accordingly, for the conclusion too?²⁹

If it could be shown that the premises of the dreaming argument were jointly unsatisfiable, then we would have an answer to the sceptic which does not trade on any anti-sceptical move which involves forcing the sceptic into endorsing an extreme form of doubt, and we would thus avoid the core difficulties raised above. Wright considers the possibility of the sceptic responding to his argument in terms of agnosticism, which he characterises as the claim that one lacks a warrant for thinking that the negation of the contested P does not hold. He argues that this second-order response to his anti-scepticism could be defused if we were allowed to hold the following material conditional where the antecedent is agnosticism about the first premise of the dreaming argument, and the consequent is agnosticism about the first premise of the maundering argument:³⁰

I. Axt [(P1)] → Axt [(P1**)].

Philosophical Studies 46 (1984), 297-305; Bob Hale, 'Epistemic Universalizability', *Analysis* 48 (1988), 78-84; and Christopher Hookway, *Scepticism*, (London: Routledge, 1990), chapter IX.

²⁸ Wright himself argues that the diagnosis of his sceptical implosion is that "[W]e illicitly convert the perceived impossibility of *earning* a warrant for beliefs of this kind with their unwarrantability *tout court*, failing to recognise that this distinction is imposed by the very apparatus of the sceptical argument itself." 'Scepticism and Dreaming: Imploding the Demon', *op. cit.*, 113-4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 109. "Axt [P]" translates as "¬ Rxt [¬ P]". See footnote 11 for an explanation of the indexicals.

He then claims that from this, and from the conclusions gained from the previous argument, he can derive:

VII. $\neg \text{Axt} [(P1), (P2)]$.

And this is simply the denial of agnosticism concerning the compatibility of the two main premises of the dreaming argument.³¹ So if only (I) could be established, then the anti-sceptical proof would go through. His reasons for accepting (I) are, however, somewhat revealing given the preceding discussion:

So, what can be said for (I)? Well, under what circumstances would it fail? Can it be coherently envisaged that $\text{Axt} [(P1)]$ and $\text{Not: Axt} [(P1^{**})]$ might hold at the same time? The latter, [...] comes to [...] the claim that x has available a second-order warrant at t : a warrant to believe that the belief that she is not then maundering is warrantable. But now the evident difficulty is to understand how such a warrant could indeed be available to a subject without a corresponding second-order warrant being simultaneously available with respect to the supposition that she is not dreaming. What would explain the difference? Dreams—at least those on which scepticism seeks to capitalise—and maunderings are alike in being phenomenologically smooth states, distinguished from genuinely perceptual or intellectual modes of consciousness by aetiological considerations of which the reflective subject on whom the sceptical arguments are targeted can have no direct awareness. How then can the thought that I am not now maundering possibly fare better [...] than the thought that I am not now dreaming—what further disanalogy is there which a counterexample to (I) could exploit?³²

The trouble is that this query is exactly the point at issue. Why *must* the sceptic adopt such a stance about $(P1^{**})$ on the basis of her scepticism about $(P1)$ given that she is able to consistently concede that $(P1^{**})$ is undoubtable since it concerns a hinge proposition? And if she does not proceed in this fashion, of what fault do we convict her? The point is that the sceptic never claimed to be doubting as in the maundering case, and so it is incumbent upon us to show her that she must. But given that she can claim that, like us, she does not doubt hinge propositions—indeed, she believes that she should treat hinge propositions with a kind of epistemic reverence that ordinary empirical propositions do not justify—it seems unclear how we are to *force* her to make this crucial move.

Wright makes one last move that is worthy of mention. He argues that at the very least we should be entitled to affirm

$\text{Axt} [(I) \& (II) \& (III)]$,

where (II) and (III) are two further claims upon which the argument to (VII) depends.³³ However, given the preceding discussion it seems that this is precisely a move that the sceptic will want to

³¹ I have no complaint with the details of this argument, merely with what it is intended to show. See *ibid.*, 108-10 for the full text of the argument.

³² *Ibid.*, 110.

³³ *Ibid.*, 111ff.

disallow. Whatever the merits of (II) and (III), as far as the sceptic is concerned there *is* reason to think that (I) does not hold; to wit, that it concerns a relation between two propositions of different epistemic status, one which is not a hinge (and so doubtable) and another which is.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS.

Although Wright is not explicit about this, his response to the sceptic is of a “non-epistemic” variety. Rather than offering us an epistemic justification for our belief in the contested propositions, he is instead merely attempting to reconfigure the epistemic landscape such that, in certain cases, a lack of justification need not be a spur for legitimate doubt. This strategy is problematic, however, in that it implicitly yields to the sceptic’s central claim—that one’s entitlement to believe the contested propositions is not due to *epistemic* factors. The problem is that once such a concession is made it then becomes difficult to see how we are to evade the sceptic’s concerns. After all, we cannot now accuse the sceptic of incoherence or unintelligibility (we understand and appreciate her arguments perfectly well by the lights of this account). Nor can we simply deny the sceptic’s starting premises, since this sort of response concedes that they are rightly held. The challenge is therefore to allow the *prima facie* coherence of the sceptical argument, along with its premises, whilst nevertheless resisting the subversive element of the sceptical conclusion. But without a substantive *epistemological* critique of the sceptical argument, it is unclear where the theoretical resources necessary to effect this are to come from. As a result, a non-epistemic response to scepticism seems, at best, more of a tactical retreat than an intellectually satisfying engagement with the sceptical foe.

Such a conclusion would be very depressing were it not for the second result that was reached here—that, despite Wright’s extensive theoretical efforts, there was in fact no sceptical argument to implode in the first place. As we saw, Wright’s reconstruction of scepticism involved using an epistemic notion which, being externalist, prevented the crucial first sceptical premise from obtaining. What the failure of Wright’s ‘implosion’ illustrates, then, is that we should look again at the internalistic presuppositions of the sceptical doubt.³⁴

³⁴ This paper has been presented in a number of different guises and at a number of different places. Its first outing was in April 1998 as part of a paper entitled ‘Scepticism, Rationality and “Hinge” Propositions’ which was presented at the University of Edinburgh’s ‘Language, Logic and Mind’ conference. Analisa Coliva responded. It was presented again in May of that year at the University of St. Andrews, where Lars Gundersen responded. A revised version of that paper—now entitled ‘Subverting the Sceptic’—was presented later on in that year at the annual ‘Analytic Philosophy’ conference at the University of Sheffield. Lucy Burroughs responded and Ben Young acted as chair. A more general

paper entitled 'Non-Epistemic Solutions to Scepticism' which closely resembles this version was presented at the 'Phenomenology and Mind' conference at the University of Southampton early in 1999. Aaron Ridley acted as chair. Finally, a more polished version of this paper—now accorded the title 'Scepticism and Dreaming'—was presented at the 'Analytic Philosophy' conference at Oxford University in February 1999. Bill Brewer responded. My thanks go to all the audiences, with special thanks to the chairs, respondents, and Mike Martin, Stephen Mulhall and Timothy Williamson. I'd also like to thank Lars Binderup, Edward Craig, Patrick Greenough, Katherine Hawley, Jesper Kallestrup, Sven Rosenkranz, Leslie Stevenson, Peter Sullivan, Michael Williams and, especially, Crispin Wright, who all read and commented on drafts of this paper.