

Intuitive Closure, Transmission Failure and Doxastic Justification¹²

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1. Introduction: Closure vs Transmission.

Some philosophers have argued that knowledge is not closed under known logical entailment. Roughly speaking, the thought is that there exist counterexamples to the claim that if one knows that P, and knows that P entails Q, then one knows that Q.³ One such alleged counterexample is the infamous Moorean inference:

Moore

Here is a hand. If this is a hand, then the external world exists. Therefore, the external world exists.

If *Moore* is indeed a case of closure failure, then one might know that there exist things such as hands, and know that this entails that there is an external world, while failing to know that there exists an external world. The closure-denialists claim that the principle of epistemic closure fails to hold unrestrictedly, as exemplified by the Moorean inference.

Others have argued that the rejection of epistemic closure is a philosophical abomination. Indeed, for some authors closure has an almost axiomatic status in epistemology.⁴ If in the end the rejection of closure is the correct theory of knowledge to adopt, we should not lose sight of the fact that the proposal is highly revisionary, forcing us to abandon principles we routinely take for granted.

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³ Very roughly speaking, as the discussion in section 2 will make clear.

⁴ See for example, Stewart Cohen (1999) and also Richard Feldman (1995).

An alternative diagnosis of what is wrong with Moorean reasoning holds that it is not closure that fails but a related though logically stronger principle of transmission of justification or warrant. An inference transmits justification if it presents a route to acquiring justification for its conclusion. Transmission thus appears stronger than closure in the sense that it entails but is not entailed by closure. Closure might hold but transmission fail in cases where one has justification for both premise and conclusion while the latter obtains independently of having carried out the inference. It follows that transmission will fail in cases where one cannot possess justification for the premise unless one already has justification for the conclusion. Those who diagnose *Moore* as exhibiting transmission failure argue that this is exactly what we find. They hold that it is only if one already has some justification to believe that there is an external, mind-independent reality to which one's perceptual experiences correspond that one can acquire justification for beliefs based on perception. If so, one cannot acquire justification for the conclusion of *Moore* by carrying out the inference, on pain of a kind of epistemic circularity. Nonetheless, closure is respected because so long as one has justification for the premise, one is guaranteed to have some (inference-independent) justification for the conclusion.

One purported benefit of this approach is that by diagnosing *Moore* in terms of a failure of transmission but not closure we are able to avoid the kind of epistemological revisionism associated with the closure-failure diagnosis. By rejecting the logically stronger principle of transmission, so the thought goes, we can safeguard the logically weaker principle of closure. The aim of this article is to put pressure on the transmission failure diagnosis by arguing that it is committed to rejecting closure after all. I will show that the formulation of closure used to draw a distinction with transmission is an outdated formulation that, in more recent work on closure, has been shown to be vulnerable to several counterexamples (section 2). With a more intuitive formulation of closure in play, I will then go on to show that it is much harder to see how there can be cases of transmission failure that are not also cases of closure failure. In order to do this, I will distinguish between closure and transmission for different epistemic properties, arguing that while we may be able to make sense of how closure and transmission of propositional justification could come apart (section 3.), it is much more difficult to see how closure and transmission of doxastic justification could come apart (section 4.). The upshot is that if transmission of

doxastic justification fails for the kinds of reasons given by those who defend transmission failure, it looks as though closure for doxastic justification must fail also.

2. The Intuitive Closure Principle

The general idea behind closure is that epistemic operators such as *knows that*, *probable that*, etc, penetrate to the known consequences of a proposition. The first to introduce the idea into the philosophical literature, Fred Dretske formulates closure in the following way.

*Naïve Closure*⁵

If S knows that P, and knows that P entails Q, then S knows that Q⁶

There are, however, several problems with this initial formulation. For example, one might satisfy the antecedent but not the consequent of Naïve Closure simply by failing to form a belief in Q. Such a case presents a relatively trivial counterexample to *Naïve Closure*. Further uninteresting counterexamples include cases where, although one does have a belief that Q, this belief fails to count as knowledge because it is formed on a bad basis, or cases in which one loses the knowledge or justification for P while carrying out the inference. For reasons such as these, more recent discussions around closure tend towards strengthening the antecedent of the principle, formulating closure diachronically, with an explicit emphasis on how closure is meant to capture one way that we may legitimately extend our knowledge through inference. For example, Duncan Pritchard writes that the reason we ought to find epistemic closure so compelling is that “such principles attempt to codify how one might legitimately extend one’s knowledge via competent deduction from what one already knows” (2016, 13). I will borrow the term *Intuitive Closure* from Williamson, to refer to the diachronic formulation of knowledge closure which is meant to capture this idea that inference is a way to extend our knowledge.⁷

⁵ The reason for labelling this *Naïve Closure* will be made clear below.

⁶ Dretske, 1970.

⁷ For various formulations of diachronic closure principles see Williamson (2000, 117), Hawthorne (2005, 29), Silins (2005, 90), Pritchard (2016 & this volume). The formulation used here most closely resembles Pritchard’s formulation, which he simply labels ‘The Closure Principle’ (2016, 13). I borrow the label, however, from Williamson in order to distinguish it from the rejected formulations above.

Intuitive Closure

If S knows that P, and S competently deduces Q from P, thereby coming to believe that Q on the basis of the competent deduction while retaining their knowledge that P, then S knows that Q

This formulation avoids the problems associated with the naïve formulation by stipulating that S has competently deduced Q from P. What makes *Intuitive Closure* so intuitive is the thought that deduction is a paradigm way of growing one's knowledge base. Williamson argues from the intuition that "deduction is a way of extending one's knowledge" to the intuitive closure principle (2000, 117). Echoing Williamson, John Hawthorne argues that "The core idea behind closure is that we can add to what we know by performing deductions on what we already know" (2005, 29). Likewise, in trying to formulate a satisfying closure principle, Steven Luper takes us to be trying to capture the intuition that "we can extend our knowledge by recognizing, and accepting thereby, things that follow from something that we know" (Luper, 2016). And in a similar spirit, Duncan Pritchard articulates the force of the intuitiveness of intuitive closure by asking "How could one draw a competent deduction from one's knowledge ... without thereby coming to know the deduced conclusion?" (2016, 14).⁸

One thing that is interesting to note here is that, if we take these remarks at face value and understand closure as a dynamic, knowledge-extension principle, the line between closure and transmission starts to blur. Recall that the transmission failure diagnosis discussed above is thought that in certain cases closure holds while transmission fails because the justification one has for Q is independent of both the justification one has for P and of the inference from P to Q. For this diagnosis to make sense, Wright has to appeal to a static formulation of closure which states merely that "whenever there is warrant for the premises of a valid argument there is warrant for the conclusion too" (2000, 141).⁹ In order to get the result that he needs, the version of closure Wright appeals to must allow for cases where one has warrant

⁸ Although Pritchard defends something close to *Intuitive Closure*, he nonetheless argues that we cannot have knowledge of the conclusion of the Moorean inference for the reason that it belongs to a special class of propositions—hinges—that are neither in the market for rational doubt nor for rational belief (2016, 63-66). See Jope (2019) for a response to Pritchard's argument.

⁹ See also, Wright (2002, 332; 2003, 57).

for the conclusion that is independent of the warrant one has for the premise(s). This is not a dynamic principle along the lines of *Intuitive Closure* but rather more like the static *Naïve Closure* formulation. Recall that *Intuitive Closure* stipulates that a subject base their belief in *Q* on the competent deduction. With this restriction in play, it is hard to see how *Intuitive Closure* will hold in alleged cases of transmission failure in which the justification for the conclusion is independent of the justification for the premises and thus independent of the deduction from those premises. This somewhat undermines the benefits of the transmission failure diagnosis that Wright offers because the claim that this strategy can retain closure by rejecting the stronger principle of transmission now comes with a caveat: the kind of closure principle that it can retain is a static formulation. It remains to be seen whether the transmission failure diagnosis can retain the kind of dynamic formulation of closure along the lines of *Intuitive Closure*. If it has to reject these closure principles as well, the transmission failure framework for dealing with problems such as diagnosing Moorean reasoning is more theoretically costly than is commonly acknowledged.

In order to fully appreciate the problem, it will be necessary to have a precise formulation of transmission that we can compare to *Intuitive Closure*. In attempting to articulate a comparative transmission principle there are a number of ambiguities that we need to address. Firstly, there is the fact that while the above closure principles are, following Dretske and others, principles concerning knowledge, discussions around transmission and its failure are, following Crispin Wright, usually about justification or warrant. To assess whether closure and transmission can indeed come apart in the way that Wright suggests, we ought to be clear about which epistemic property we have in mind. We will need therefore to articulate transmission principles for knowledge and for justification. Secondly, the term *transmission failure* appears to be ambiguous between a number of distinct phenomena, including inferences that are unable rationally to overcome doubt about their conclusions, inferences that are inapt to provide their conclusions with the same justification enjoyed by their premises, inferences that are unable to strengthen an already justified conclusion, and inferences that are unable to provide a first-time justification for their conclusions. Most of the literature on transmission and transmission failure has tended to focus on this last sense of transmission, including most of Wright's

discussion on the topic.¹⁰ For this reason I will also restrict the focus onto transmission in this sense of an inference providing a first-time justification for its conclusion.

Finally, an additional complication that arises is the fact that philosophers distinguish between two kinds of justification: propositional and doxastic. Propositional justification refers to what one has justification to believe. Doxastic justification refers to the justificatory status of actual beliefs. Propositional justification for a proposition P does not necessarily entail that one's belief that P is justified. For example, I presumably have propositional justification to believe that *oranges are edible*. However, doxastic justification is not guaranteed. I may believe this proposition on a bad epistemic basis (i.e. not on the propositional justification that I in fact have) and therefore fail to have a justified belief despite my having justification to hold this belief. This raises the question of whether transmission of justification is best understood in terms of propositional or doxastic justification. Wright himself seems to have something like the former notion in mind when he talks about transmission. For example, in clarifying the concept of transmission he writes “to acquire a warrant *for the premises* of a valid argument and to recognise its validity is to acquire [...] a warrant *to accept the conclusion*” (2000, 140-141; emphasis added).¹¹ Again, the tendency is for the debate to follow Wright in this regard, as Moretti and Piazza concur: “Most epistemologists investigating transmission and transmission failure broadly identify the epistemic property capable of being transmitted with *propositional* justification” (2018). Nonetheless, we at least want to ask questions about doxastic justification too. After all, it does not seem trivial that if there is transmission failure of propositional justification then there will be transmission failure of doxastic justification, and we surely do want to know whether justified belief transmits. Moreover, one might even go further and say that doxastic justification is the more interesting notion because any interest in whether we would have justification to believe some proposition ultimately derives from our interest in whether could

¹⁰ As indeed Luca Moretti and Tommaso Piazza confirm in their Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy entry on transmission: “Much of the extant literature on epistemic transmission concentrates on examples of transmission of first-time justification” (2018).

¹¹ And again, for example, drawing the closure-transmission distinction in a subsequent article Wright seems to have in mind something more along the lines of propositional rather than doxastic warrant: “Closure says that whenever there is warrant for the premises of a (known) valid argument, there is warrant for the conclusion too. Transmission says more: roughly, that to acquire a warrant for the premises of a valid argument and to recognise its validity is thereby to acquire—perhaps for the first time—a warrant to accept the conclusion” (2002, 331-332).

justifiably believe it. Some authors are sensitive to this distinction between closure and transmission for different types of justification. Most notably, Nicholas Silins (2005) and Chris Tucker (2010) seem to agree that the property we ought primarily to be interested in that of justified belief.

To quickly recap, we now have three kinds of epistemic property about which we want to ask questions: knowledge, propositional justification and doxastic justification. And we have two kinds of epistemic principle that we want to compare: closure and transmission. Given that the question that we want an answer to is whether closure and transmission can come apart for each of our three kinds of epistemic properties, what we really have are three questions on our hands:

Q1: Can closure and transmission for *propositional justification* come apart?

Q2: Can closure and transmission for *doxastic justification* come apart?

Q3: Can closure and transmission for *knowledge* come apart?

With the questions laid out in this way it becomes easier to appreciate that there are a variety of different ways that the transmission failure diagnosis could be understood, and thus a variety of different ways in which closure and transmission could potentially come apart. Earlier on we noted some reservations over whether closure and transmission could come apart once we clarify an ‘intuitive’ closure principle. However, the intuitive closure principle we formulated was a principle that concerns knowledge, while Wright’s characterisations of transmission failure seem to indicate a principle of propositional justification. What we will need in order to substantiate the claim that closure and transmission can come apart are contrasting closure and transmission principles for each of our epistemic properties.

We have already seen that much of the literature on transmission failure has focused on transmission of *propositional* justification or warrant, i.e. on Q1. Wright’s conception of transmission seems to be about the acquisition of warrant “to accept” conclusions (2002, 332).¹² Supposing we grant for the sake of argument his account

¹² It is possible to overstate the sense in which Wright’s account is an account of propositional justification. His formulations of closure and transmission principles are clearly principles about warrant or justification *to believe* or *to accept* propositions rather than about the epistemic status of agent’s doxastic attitudes—as the quoted passages indicate. However, I do not mean to suggest that Wright explicitly intends for his account to apply to propositional warrant or justification rather than doxastic. Instead, all that I am saying here is that the most plausible interpretation of his

of transmission failure, we might then wonder what follows with respect to Q2 and Q3. Does Wright's account of the structure of justification itself entail corresponding failures of transmission for justified belief and knowledge? One reason for thinking that we want answers to these questions in addition to questions about propositional justification is that most of the initial debates around the possibility of counterexamples to closure focused on knowledge closure. Insofar as the transmission failure diagnosis is supposed to offer an alternative to the closure failure diagnosis, it would be somewhat unsatisfying if it had nothing to say about the knowledge questions. Discussion of the knowledge questions can of course be avoided by embracing a wholesale knowledge scepticism. This is in fact close to views Wright has espoused under the label of "The Russellian Retreat" (1991, 88).¹³ If we give up the knowledge questions and retreat to questions of justification, then we can simply ignore Q3, but we'll still want an answer to Q2. For this reason, I will focus on answering Q2.¹⁴ In order to do so, it is going to be helpful to clarify the relevant closure and transmission principles. Since those already enjoy much discussion with respect to propositional justification it is going to be easier to start there and then move on to adapt them into principles for doxastic justification.

3. Transmission failure of Propositional Justification

In order to check whether transmission and closure might come apart for propositional justification, we first need to settle on a closure principle for propositional justification. Fortunately, we have the *intuitive closure* principle for knowledge, which can be easily translated into a corresponding principle for propositional justification.

P-Closure

If S has justification to believe P, and S competently deduces Q from P, while retaining their justification for P, then S has justification to believe Q

account is of an account of propositional warrant or justification and that we might do well to inquire how this account extends to doxastic warrant or justification.

¹³ Wright again refers to the idea of the Russellian retreat in (2012, 473) and seems to espouse something like the view again in (2017, 28-29).

¹⁴ For a discussion see Silins (2005).

There are a couple of differences between *Intuitive closure* and *P-Closure*. Obviously, *Intuitive Closure* concerns knowledge while *P-Closure* concerns propositional justification. But additionally, *P-Closure* weakens the antecedent, dropping the part that required S to have come to believe that Q on the basis of the competent deduction. The reason for this should be clear. It was introduced to the closure principle to avoid trivial counterexamples in which the subject lacks knowledge because they had formed no belief or formed a belief on a bad basis. But given that propositional justification for a proposition P does not require that one have formed any belief in P, this part of the principle is not necessary.

I take it that *P-Closure* is highly intuitive. However, I will not attempt to establish the truth of this epistemic closure principle because it will be sufficient to assume it is true in order to answer the question we are interested in, namely whether closure and transmission for propositional justification can come apart such that closure holds and transmission fails.

There are several ways we can formulate our corresponding principle of transmission. Wright sometimes leans towards formulating transmission in terms of *acquiring* a justification for a proposition on the basis of a competent deduction. Here is one formulation he uses:

(T1) To acquire a warrant for the premises of a valid argument and to recognise its validity is to acquire—perhaps for the first time—a warrant to accept the conclusion¹⁵

Moretti and Piazza on the other hand formulate transmission, not in terms of justification-acquisition, but instead by stipulating in virtue of what it is that one's justification for a proposition obtains. Here is their formulation:

(T2) If (i) one has justification for P and (ii) one competently deduces Q from P then (iii) one has justification for Q in virtue of the satisfaction of (i) and (ii)¹⁶

¹⁵ (2000, 140-141).

¹⁶ (2018).

The differences between these two ways of formulating transmission are perhaps not, ultimately, so substantial. T2 is, however, preferable for current purposes because it is more in line with the ‘competent deduction’ formulation of intuitive closure and will therefore be easier to compare. One thing that we do need to flag is that both principles will be prone to one of the kinds of trivial counterexample that we saw above for *Naïve Closure* in which, while carrying out the inference, the subject loses their justification for P. So the transmission principle we require ought to stipulate that the subject retain their justification for P while carrying out the inference. The transmission principle we will use to compare with *P-Closure* is thus the following:

P-Transmission

If (i) S has justification to believe P and (ii) S competently deduces Q from P, while retaining their justification for P, then (iii) S has justification to believe Q in virtue of the satisfaction of (i) and (ii)

We are now in a position to compare *P-Closure* and *P-Transmission*. On the face of it, it looks like these could indeed come apart in the way that Wright suggests. *P-Closure* simply says that if one has propositional justification for P and competently deduces Q from P then one has propositional justification for Q. It doesn’t specify where the justification for Q comes from and neither does it make reference to the formation and basing of a belief, so there’s no reason to think that it’s incompatible with the kinds of cases Wright has in mind in which one satisfies the consequent by virtue of possessing prior justification for Q that is independent of the inference.

The next thing to do is to check whether our principles can accommodate the diagnosis of transmission—but not closure—failure in *Moore*. This diagnosis follows from a ‘conservative’ account of the structure of justification. According to conservatives such as Wright, certain propositions function like presuppositions of inquiry (2004, 2014). The justification that I have to believe that I have hands depends in part on there being a corresponding perceptual experience, and in part on further justification to presuppose that I am not dreaming, that I am not a brain in a vat, that there is a mind-independent reality and so on. Conservatives think the acquisition of ordinary evidential justification can only take place within a framework in which there is prior justification to presuppose that, roughly, things are as they

appear to be.¹⁷ The notion of presupposition here is a weak one in the sense that it does not require that one form an actual belief in these presuppositions. For example, Wright suggests that the correct way to understand our commitment towards these propositions is a kind of implicit *trust* (2004, 192-193). Nonetheless, conservatism requires that there already be justification in place for these presuppositions. And for this reason, transmission has to fail in all cases where there is an inference from an evidentially justified proposition P to a presupposition for the method of inquiring into P based on the kind of evidence that can be brought to bear on P. Q cannot be justified *in virtue of* the justification for P if justification for Q is among the background conditions that make P justified in the first place. For example, Wright argues that prior background justification for *there is an external world* is necessary in order to acquire justification for *here is a hand* on the basis of the relevant visual experience. On the supposition that this account of justification is correct, it follows that we have a case in which *P-Closure* is satisfied but *P-Transmission* is not. One might have justification for *here is a hand* and also for *there is an external world*, and so satisfy the antecedent and consequent of *P-Closure*. But given that justification for *there is an external world* is among the conditions that make *here is a hand* justified in the first place, it won't be the case that one has justification for *there is external world* in virtue of the justification one has for *here is a hand*, and ergo *P-Transmission* fails.

4. Transmission Failure of Doxastic justification

We have seen how Wright's account of transmission failure works for propositional justification such that it has the result that closure (for propositional justification) and transmission (for propositional justification) could come apart. So the answer to Q1 above seems to be 'yes', at least granted a certain conception of the structure of justification and an accompanying account of default entitlement for presuppositions. What about Q2? As before, we'll need to specify the relevant closure and transmission principles for doxastic justification first before examining whether they come apart. Again, we can adapt our *Intuitive Closure* principle for knowledge into a corresponding principle for doxastic justification:

¹⁷ This is a statement of conservatism about perceptual justification. But we can also think about conservatism for other sources or methods of belief formation such as memory, testimony, and so on. Elsewhere, I have argued that a commitment to conservatism in one of these domains entails a commitment to conservatism in others (2021b).

D-Closure

If S's belief that P is justified, and S competently deduces Q from P, thereby coming to believe that Q on the basis of the competent deduction, while retaining their justified belief that P, then S's belief that Q is justified

The first thing to note is that *D-Closure*, like *Intuitive Closure* but unlike *P-Closure*, contains the strengthened antecedent. This is because doxastic justification, like knowledge but unlike propositional justification, requires one to have formed a belief in the relevant proposition. A weaker formulation of a closure principle for doxastic justification would be subject to precisely the same kinds of trivial counterexamples faced by the naïve closure principle for knowledge in which one fails to form a belief that Q, or the belief is formed on a bad basis, or one loses the justification for the premises while carrying out the inference.

A transmission principle for doxastic justification will be similar to the above *D-Closure* but will stipulate the conditions in virtue of which the belief that Q is justified. In line with the above discussions of transmission, its consequent ought to state that not only is S's belief that Q justified, but it is justified in virtue of competent deduction from justified premises.

D-Transmission

If (i) S's belief that P is justified and (ii) S competently deduces Q from P, thereby coming to believe that Q on the basis of P, while retaining their justified belief that P, then S's belief that Q is justified in virtue of the satisfaction of (i) and (ii)

Formulating the principle in this way mirrors the way that transmission principles for propositional justification—including the above *P-Transmission*—are formulated, stipulating the conditions under which the deduced belief is justified. Notice, though, that one important way that *D-Transmission* differs from *P-Transmission* is that it includes the strengthened antecedent, which was not needed for *P-Transmission* because doxastic justification requires the formulation of a belief while propositional justification does not.

With these closure and transmission principles for doxastic justification now in play, we are able to ask whether they can come apart in the way needed to maintain the transmission failure diagnosis of *Moore*. At first glance, the principles look similar and to some degree it may seem as though satisfying *D-Closure* guarantees the satisfaction of *D-Transmission*. After all, in insisting that S's belief that Q is formed *on the basis of deduction* from P, *D-Closure* seems to imply that justification for Q is inherited inferentially. If so, it is hard to see how there could be daylight between these two principles.¹⁸ Though it is tempting to read *D-Closure* in this way, all that its consequent strictly requires is that the resulting Q-belief is justified. It is compatible with *D-Closure* that this justification is not transmitted via inference but is instead independent of it. For example, it is compatible with *D-Closure* that the justification for one's Q-belief is a matter of default entitlement. This means that, granted an account of default doxastic justification, it ought to be possible for these principles to come apart in cases where a belief that Q is justified (and thus satisfies *D-Closure*) but not in virtue of deduction from justified premises (thus violating *D-Transmission*). Though the principles themselves allow room for such a possibility, the question we need to consider is whether we can make epistemological sense of such a case. That is, whether we can make sense of a conservative account of doxastic justification that allows for the possibility of a belief that is justified independently of the inferential basis on which it is held.

In order to maintain the transmission failure diagnosis of *Moore*, what is needed is an account of how the above two principles could come apart. I will argue that this is much harder to establish in the case of doxastic justification than it was earlier on for propositional justification. To appreciate the problem, we will first assume that *D-Closure* holds. This assumption is both reasonable—since *D-Closure* is extremely plausible—and necessary if the transmission failure project is to be vindicated. After all, a key benefit of the transmission failure strategy is that it promises to avoid a range of problems for the Dretske-style denial of closure for knowledge, but by denying closure for doxastic justification we would simply reintroduce many of these same problems but for justified belief rather than knowledge. Furthermore, to suggest that closure holds for propositional justification but fails for doxastic justification is to entertain the thought that there could be

¹⁸ Thanks to Krista Lawlor for pointing out this worry.

justification to believe a proposition that could not be justifiably believed. It is unclear whether this a coherent possibility. It is tempting to think that if a proposition could in principle not be justifiably believed, then there could not be justification to believe it. All this is to say that we may reasonably assume that *D-Closure* holds for the purposes of assessing whether *D-Transmission* holds.

Assuming that *D-Closure* holds, is it possible for *D-Transmission* to fail? If so, then the thought must be something like this. One can satisfy closure by having justified beliefs in both the P- and Q-propositions, but where the latter belief is justified independently of the deductive inference. A challenge for such an account is then to spell out what it is in virtue of which a belief in a proposition such as *there is an external world* could be justified if not inferentially from a justified belief in a proposition such as *here is a hand*.¹⁹ Perhaps a similar conservative story could be told here to the one told above for propositional justification. Recall that the answer to the corresponding question for propositional justification was that there could be a type of default warrant or justification to presuppose the existence of the external world. This default epistemic status is in no way a type of evidence but, according to Wright, is to be understood as a kind of *epistemic entitlement* or *epistemic right* (2004, 2014).²⁰ It is our right to trust implicitly that certain sceptical scenarios are false. ‘Implicit’ in the sense that such trust need involve no belief in, nor indeed any awareness of, the proposition in question. Nonetheless, the entitlement to presuppose that there is an external world needs to be in place in the structure of justification in order for one to initially acquire justification for *here is a hand*, and it is for this reason that propositional justification fails to transmit across the inference from *here is a hand* to *there is an external world*. If a similar story is going to work for doxastic justification, then it will be necessary to make sense of how it is that a belief in a proposition such as *there is an external world* could be justified independently of deductive inference from a belief in a proposition such as *here is a hand*.

¹⁹ One natural idea here is to appeal to an externalist condition such as safety or reliability. Wright has argued elsewhere that such strategies, despite showing some initial promise, are ultimately unstable (2008). In response to Wright, I have argued elsewhere that the instability argument fails on the grounds that it slips in certain internalist assumptions about evidence which the externalist is under no pressure to accept (2021a).

²⁰ Elsewhere, I have argued that the notion of a default epistemic right leads to a dilemma concerning the apposite degree of warranted confidence one ought to take in a proposition on the basis of an entitlement (Jope, 2021c).

On standard accounts, doxastic justification is explained in terms of propositional justification. The thought is roughly that a belief is justified if and only if it is a belief in a proposition for which there is justification and it is based on that which propositionally justifies its content.²¹ So a belief in a proposition such as *it is raining outside* is justified if and only if (a) there is justification to believe the proposition *it is raining outside* and (b) the belief is based on whatever justifies this proposition—a perceptual experience as of it raining outside, say. For a belief in a Q-proposition to be (doxastically) justified it needs to meet these twin conditions. We can grant that condition (a) is met given the assumption that propositional justification is closed. How about condition (b)? One difficulty here is that the kind of propositional justification that obtains for Q-propositions is not of the ordinary, evidential kind, but rather the default entitlement kind, and it is not immediately obvious that an epistemic right—an entitlement—is the correct sort of thing on which to *base* a belief. As discussed, Wright seems to understand the notion of an entitlement to Q along the lines of a right to *trust* that Q rather than a justification to *believe* that Q. In a very strict sense, then, even closure does not hold for doxastic justification, let alone for transmission. However, the same is true of the conservative account of propositional justification in the sense that evidential justification to believe is not closed.²² Wright manages to rescue closure for propositional justification only by defending a disjunctive account of justification according to which a proposition can be justified either evidentially or by default. Perhaps, then, the more charitable way to a corresponding account of doxastic justification is to see doxastic justification as similarly disjunctive. Building off Wright’s disjunctive conception of propositional

²¹ This standard account of doxastic justification has come under pressure from John Turri who argues that we ought to run the analysis in the other direction, understanding propositional justification in terms of doxastic (2010). For present purposes, nothing hinges on taking a position on this. I stick with the standard account simply because it is standard, but the general point will work just as well if we take doxastic justification to be the more primitive notion.

²² Though this is unambiguously the view Wright advances in his 2004 entitlement article, two caveats are needed. Firstly, although the disjunctive account of warrant entails that *justification to believe* is not closed, the reason for this is one that, at a certain point, Wright seems not entirely wedded to. If indeed the concept of ‘belief’ is evidentially controlled, then justification to believe is not closed. Wright, however, tells us “I do not myself know whether the notion of belief *is* actually so tightly evidentially controlled” (2004, 176). Rather, he seems to prefer to grant this as an assumption, meaning that the claim that justification-to-believe is not closed is ultimately conditional on this assumption. Secondly, in his subsequent 2014 article, in response to concerns regarding the alchemy and leaching problems, Wright’s considered view seems to be that there is closure for justification-to-believe after all, however the resulting notion of belief in Q-type propositions is one whose evidential credentials “depends for its force on our antecedent reason to trust in the truth of those very same propositions, so that the ultimate authority we have for accepting them depends on the rationality of that trust” (2014, 235).

justification, we may suppose that doxastic justification comes in two varieties: either it is a matter of a belief that P being based on that which justifies P, or it is a matter of implicit trust in P where there is an epistemic right to trust.

With the disjunctive account of doxastic justification now on the table, we can try to make sense of what a conservative account of doxastic justification might look like. One may justifiably believe that (P) *here is a hand* only if one antecedently justifiably trusts that (Q) *there is an external world*. This promises to secure closure in the sense that one may have a justified attitude towards both premise and conclusion. Transmission fails because the trust that one has towards Q is not justified in virtue of the inference but in virtue of our epistemic entitlements to take for granted our anti-sceptical commitments. Notice, however, that although this promises to secure closure in this disjunctive sense, it will not secure closure for justified *belief*. For example, *D-Closure* will fail on this disjunctive account. This is because *D-Closure* specifically involves the formation of a *belief*—not merely an implicit trusting—which is *based on* an inference. So whether or not one is entitled to implicitly trust that Q when forming a belief that P, in order for *D-Closure* to hold it is necessary that, in forming a belief that Q on the basis of an inference from a justified belief that P, the resulting belief that Q is itself justified. And this is precisely what the conservative account of the structure of doxastic justification—which we have just tried to develop by analogy with the conservative account of the structure of propositional justification—is committed to denying. We are entitled merely to trust or presuppose that there is an external world, but we are not justified in going further than this and forming a bona fide belief. If one does happen to go beyond merely trusting that Q and forms a belief that Q, transmission failure guarantees that the resulting belief will not be justified. Furthermore, notice that if we suppose that belief is necessary for knowledge, this means that we cannot know that Q. With respect to the Moorean inference, this means the original closure failure diagnosis is vindicated: one can merely *trust* in Moore's conclusion, which is presumably not compatible with knowledge. This is a bad result insofar as one of the key benefits of the transmission failure diagnosis was supposed to be that it avoids the epistemological revisionism associated with the rejection of closure for knowledge.

A natural response that a conservative could offer here is to hold that the foregoing argument attempts to make too much of the distinction between trust and belief. Conservatives introduce this distinction as a way to mirror, attitudinally, two

distinct types of epistemic support: evidential and non-evidential. But if we suppose instead that irrespective of the type of epistemic support in play the corresponding attitude is the same, then the space opens up to avoid the above problem and countenance a form of closure for doxastic justification after all. On this second way of looking at things, beliefs can be justified either evidentially or non-evidentially. In the former case the justification has to be earned, while in the latter case the justification is unearned, however in both cases the propositional attitude is the same. If one satisfies the antecedent of *D-Closure*, then one is guaranteed to satisfy the consequent by justifiably believing the Q-proposition in either of these two ways. Thus, *D-Closure* holds. *D-Transmission*, on the other hand, will fail in cases where one's belief in the Q-proposition is justified by default because it will be false that the belief is justified in virtue of having deduced it from anything. Transmission failure of doxastic justification occurs, according to this proposal, because certain inferences are such that their conclusions may be justifiably believed by default, independently of the inferential basis on which they are held. The account of default doxastic justification needed to support this diagnosis would be highly revisionary, but arguably no more so than the more familiar entitlement theoretic claim that there can be default propositional justification.

The bigger problem that this account faces, beyond the revisionary nature of default justification in general, is that beliefs justified by default would seem to be immune from bad basing. A belief that is justified by default is justified in virtue of its content alone, so the thought would go. That is, certain beliefs enjoy the status of being justified not in virtue of the basis on which they are held but in virtue of the fact that they are beliefs in certain propositions that themselves enjoy default epistemic support. But notice that if the actual inferential basis has no bearing on the justificatory status of one's belief in the conclusion of the Moorean inference, then one could base this belief on any inference, or indeed any basis, without affecting the belief's justificatory status. It looks like whether the inference is valid, for example, has no relevance to the justificatory status of the belief.²³ To appreciate the point, consider the following alternative to Moore's inference:

Unhappy Moore

²³ Perhaps additionally we might want to say that there ought to be no defeaters for the justification, though for the present discussion this caveat seems irrelevant.

I would be very unhappy if the external world did not exist. I do not wish to be unhappy. Therefore, the external world exists.

What to say about one who reasons in this way? Clearly the reasoning is invalid. And yet, because the conclusion of *Unhappy Moore* is the same as that of *Moore*—and is therefore a matter of default entitlement—the account under consideration seems committed to saying that one who reasons in this way, thereby forming a belief in the conclusion, is justified in doing so. If *Moore* fails to transmit justification to its conclusion in virtue of the fact that one who believes its conclusion is justified by default in so believing—that is, justified independently of the inferential basis on which the belief is held—then it seems clear that one could reason instead in accordance with *Unhappy Moore* and be justified as a matter of default too. This is a highly counterintuitive result. Invalid reasoning should not be a way to arrive at justified beliefs.

To reiterate the general problem here, it appears as though the defender of transmission failure of doxastic justification has, broadly speaking, two options. The first option is to deny that Q-type propositions such as *there is an external world* can ever be justifiedly believed, offering instead an account of how they may nonetheless be justifiedly trusted. As we noted above, this has the consequence that closure fails for justified belief. One who goes beyond mere trust in the conclusion of the Moorean inference and forms an actual belief will not be justified in so believing. Moreover, if belief and justification are necessary for knowledge, then it seems as though this first option entails the failure of closure for knowledge. Thus, option one fails to deliver as advertised the result that by rejecting transmission we can safeguard closure. The second option is to accept that Q-type propositions can be justifiedly believed as a matter of default entitlement. The consequence of this is that the justificatory status of beliefs in Q-type propositions is independent of the basis on which they are held, which would seem to immunise such beliefs from bad basing. This gets the result that closure holds but transmission fails for Moore's inference, but at the cost that Moore may just as well have formed his belief in the existence of the external world on anything, including invalid reasoning, guessing, wishful thinking, and so on, which I submit to be a reductio of this second option. A third option is of course to accept that Q-type propositions can be justifiedly believed and that the basis on which they

are believed *is* relevant to their justificatory status, but that is simply to accept that transmission holds after all and thus not available to defenders of the transmission failure approach. The upshot is that there seems to be no way to establish transmission failure for doxastic justification that does not collapse into either a rejection of closure for doxastic justification or the absurdity that certain beliefs are immune from bad basing.

5. Conclusion

One of the purported benefits of the transmission failure diagnosis of the Moorean inference is that it offers a way to safeguard closure. The aim of this article has been to push back against this claim by arguing firstly that it relies on an outdated formulation of closure that we have independent reason to reject, and secondly by arguing that once we shift focus onto transmission and closure for *doxastic* justification, and bear in mind a more intuitive closure principle, it becomes much harder to see how to make sense of an account of transmission failure that does not entail failure of closure also.

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