

# Full Blooded Entitlement

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Entitlement is defined as a sort of epistemic justification that one can possess by default—a sort of epistemic justification that does not need to be earned or acquired. Epistemologists who accept the existence of entitlement generally have a certain anti-sceptical role in mind for it—entitlement is intended to help us resist what would otherwise be compelling radical sceptical arguments. But this role leaves various details unspecified and, thus, leaves scope for a number of different potential conceptions of entitlement. At one extreme there are conceptions that portray entitlement as a weak, attenuated epistemic status and, at the other, we have conceptions that portray entitlement as something potent and strong. Certain intermediate conceptions are also possible. In this paper, I shall argue that the weak and moderate conceptions of entitlement do not survive careful scrutiny, and the stronger conceptions—while they do, in a way, strain credulity—are the only conceptions that are ultimately viable.

## 1 Is Entitlement Too Good to Be True?

In the day to day we acquire justification for believing a great many things. If I'm sitting indoors, watching the dim light slanting through the blinds and listening to the sound of water droplets striking the window pane behind, I have justification for believing that it's raining. If I'm greeting a friend and I see that he has slightly reddened eyes and tearstained cheeks, I have justification for believing that he's been crying and that he's feeling upset. If I'm wandering along the beach and notice crisp footprints in the wet sand, I have justification for believing that someone has recently passed this way. For most epistemologists, these kinds of

claims are not in question. What *is* in question is how such claims can be sustained in the face of sceptical arguments that purport to refute them.

Suppose I immediately come to believe that my friend is upset as I see his face. One sceptical strategy for placing the justificatory status of such a belief under pressure is to exploit sceptical hypotheses that are compatible with my evidence, but incompatible with the belief that I form. It seems imaginable that my friend, in truth, feels nothing—that he has no experiences, no emotions, no inner mental life behind his overt behaviour. Philosophers have long been captivated by the idea that we have no direct access to the mental states of other people—that we, in some sense, just suppose them to exist, and could coherently suppose them not to. When I judge that my friend is feeling upset, of course, the possibility that there are no other minds is not likely to occur to me. If it did, it would be unwelcome and swiftly dismissed.

The sceptic is well aware that our habits of reasoning and judging involve systematically ignoring possibilities like this one—but the question he will want to press is whether these habits are legitimate. The no-other-minds hypothesis does seem to be an epistemically possible one—and when have I ever acquired any justification for thinking that it's false? What investigation, what reasoning, what cognitive accomplishment of any kind, could I point to that could possibly amount to the acquisition of such justification? But if I lack justification for rejecting this hypothesis, the sceptical reasoning continues, then how could I have justification for believing that my friend is upset? Such a judgment would be premature, and the appropriate conclusion to draw would be a more guarded one—either my friend is upset or there are no other minds, or something like that.

There are several ways that one might attempt to respond to this short argument—several premises or steps in the reasoning that one might try to challenge. My concern in this paper is

with a response that seeks to target the following step: From the fact that I haven't acquired justification for rejecting the no-other-minds hypothesis it is inferred that I have no justification for doing so. This inference falters if there is a kind of justification that one can possess for rejecting sceptical hypotheses that does not have to be earned or acquired. This kind of justification—or *entitlement* as it's come to be known—is in place purely by default.<sup>1</sup> If I have an entitlement to reject the no other minds hypothesis then, while the initial premises of the sceptical argument may be accepted, the route to the sceptical conclusion will be blocked.

A number of epistemologists have embraced a notion of entitlement that may be used to respond to sceptical arguments of this kind (Wright 1985, 2004a, 2004b, 2014; Cohen 1999: 76–7; Davies 2000; Hazlett 2006; White 2006: section 9; Pedersen 2009; Coliva 2012; Smith 2009: section III, 2013). Some trace the provenance of the notion back to Wittgenstein's remarks in *On Certainty*. The majority of epistemologists, however, have serious reservations about the very idea of entitlement. If one acknowledges a hypothesis to be epistemically possible, then to simply reject it without investigating it or unearthing any evidence against it would seem, in general, to be a dogmatic, irresponsible way of proceeding. To claim that there is a special epistemic commodity—entitlement—that we all possess and that makes this

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<sup>1</sup> Some entitlement theorists use a different terminology to this—defining entitlement as unearned 'warrant' and reserving the term 'justification' to describe warrant that is earned (see, for instance, Wright 2004a, 2004b). I, like Pryor (2004) and some others, use 'justification' as the overarching term and define entitlement as unearned justification. Nothing substantial hinges on the terminology we choose—it is straightforward to translate from one to the other—but I will have a little more to say about this terminological issue in the next footnote.

conduct somehow acceptable in the case of sceptical hypotheses can seem like pure wishful thinking (see Wright 2004a: 175). Call this the too-good-to-be-true problem.

There are, however, several different ways in which we might elaborate or develop the notion of entitlement, some of which may seem better placed when it comes to this problem. In one sense, my aim in this paper is to argue that entitlement theorists must, ultimately, face the too-good-to-be-true problem in an unflinching way—attempts to avoid the problem or placate those who press it ultimately lead to more serious problems down the track.

The first question that we face in further elaborating the notion of entitlement is the question of what, exactly, entitlement entitles us to *do*. A natural first thought is that an entitlement must be a justification for *believing* something—that there are other minds, perhaps. But all that is strictly required in order for entitlement to play its anti-sceptical role, vis-à-vis the above argument, is that it be a justification for *rejecting* something—namely, the hypothesis that there are no other minds. Perhaps it would be hasty to assume that rejecting the hypothesis that there are no other minds, in the relevant sense, is tantamount to believing that there are other minds. Rejecting a hypothesis may involve some kind of positive attitude towards its negation, but perhaps this needn't be an attitude quite as strong as belief.

As Wright points out, we seem to recognize, in our ordinary discourse, acceptance-like attitudes that fall short of belief. We speak, for instance, of people presuming or taking it for granted or implicitly trusting that something is the case. Suppose I'm in a foreign city and I ask a stranger the way to the train station, receiving detailed directions. Since I know nothing about this person, I probably wouldn't assert or assent to the proposition that he is being honest and that his directions are genuine, but I follow the directions, and do so with some expectation that I'll soon arrive at the train station. Even if I don't believe, in this situation, that the person is being honest, it's natural to describe me as implicitly trusting that this is the

case. It's also natural to describe me as rejecting, in some sense, the hypothesis that he's deceiving me—I'm not giving it attention or taking it seriously.

The contrast between trust and belief opens up an intriguing possibility—perhaps it is generally easier to have justification for *trusting* a proposition than to have justification for *believing* it. And perhaps having justification for rejecting a hypothesis, in the way demanded by the sceptical argument, requires nothing more than having justification for trusting its negation. This could provide us with a way of 'watering down' the notion of entitlement—making it weaker than it first appeared. The first conception of entitlement that I shall consider, then, is a view on which an entitlement to a proposition is a justification for trusting that it's true, and nothing more. On this view, I'm justified in trusting that there are other minds, but if I were to actually believe that this is the case, I would overstep my epistemic bounds. Earned justifications can license beliefs, but entitlements cannot.

It is helpful, perhaps, to think of this as a minimal theory of entitlement. On this theory, entitlement provides the bare minimum required in order to answer the kind of sceptical argument that I've outlined—and it provides nothing more than this. The picture that emerges is one of a very dilute, anaemic epistemic status. I shall refer to this as the *weak* conception of entitlement. This conception is endorsed, in slightly different forms, by Wright (2004a, 2004b, 2014), Pedersen (2009), and Coliva (2012). Adopting a weak conception of entitlement may enable us to partly address the too-good-to-be-true problem. Perhaps our resistance to the idea that one could automatically be justified in rejecting a substantial hypothesis stems, in part, from a confusion between rejecting a hypothesis and believing its negation. Perhaps it really would be epistemically irresponsible to *believe* a substantial proposition without investigating it, but merely trusting such a proposition seems not so bad.

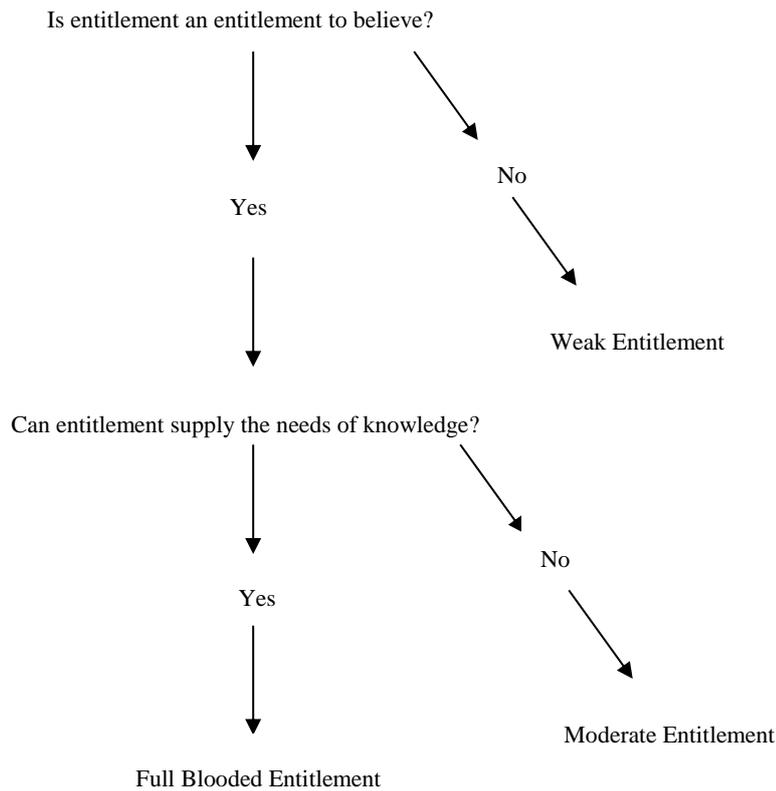
By exploiting the difference between believing and trusting, the weak entitlement theorist undoubtedly succeeds in making the notion of entitlement somewhat more palatable. But suppose we reject this picture and claim that an entitlement to a proposition is a justification for believing, and not just trusting, it. This immediately raises a further question: Could I be in a position to *know* a proposition to which I'm merely entitled? Could I be in a position to know, for instance, that there are other minds? If I have an ordinary earned justification for believing a proposition, and the proposition is true, and the situation is normal and I'm not in any way Gettiered, then, conventionally, this would be regarded as enough for me to be in a position to know the proposition. If I believed the proposition, and my belief was appropriately based upon my justification, then it would qualify as knowledge. But what if the justification in question is not an earned one, but an entitlement instead? Can entitlement supply the needs of knowledge in the same way that earned justification can?

Undoubtedly there is a certain temptation to answer 'no' to this question. The idea that I could automatically have justification for believing that there are other minds is one thing—the idea that I could automatically be in a position to *know* that there are seems to be taking things a considerable step further. And this extra commitment might seem superfluous to the anti-sceptical role that entitlement is intended to play—at least vis-à-vis the kind of sceptical argument outlined here. If we do answer 'no' to this question, we arrive at the second conception of entitlement that I shall consider. On this view, an entitlement to a proposition is a justification for believing it, but entitlement does not connect with knowledge in the same way that earned justification does—I can never be in a position to know a proposition to which I'm merely entitled, even if it is true and all anti-Gettier conditions are met. I shall call this the *moderate* conception of entitlement. This kind of view may be suggested by some of Wittgenstein's remarks in *On Certainty*, in particular by his distinction between propositions that are known and propositions that are certain in the sense of 'standing fast' for us—a

distinction he appears to regard as exclusive (see for instance Wittgenstein 1969: §151–2, §175–6).

By rejecting the idea of weak entitlement, the entitlement theorist foregoes one opportunity to address the too-good-to-be-true problem. By accepting the idea of moderate entitlement, however, the entitlement theorist can, in a way, exploit a second opportunity to do so. Our resistance to the idea that one could automatically have justification for believing a substantial proposition may stem, in part, from the conventionally tight connection between justification and knowledge. If this connection is deliberately severed, and it is explicitly conceded that an entitlement to a proposition could never put one in a position to know that it's true, this resistance may be weakened somewhat.

The notion of moderate entitlement is arrived at by answering 'yes' to the question of whether entitlement is an entitlement to believe and 'no' to the question of whether entitlement can supply the needs of knowledge. If we answer 'yes' to both of these questions, then we arrive at a third conception of entitlement. On this picture, an entitlement to a proposition is a justification for believing it and, provided the proposition is true and there are no Gettier conditions in play, it will put one in a position to know it as well. I shall call this the *full blooded* conception of entitlement. On this view, entitlement effectively provides us with all of the epistemic goods that earned justification does—what separates entitlement from earned justification is its source, and not its strength or value. This conception of entitlement is endorsed by Hazlett (2006) and by Smith (2013) (see also McGlynn 2014: section 9.5). The relationship between these three conceptions of entitlement might be depicted in the following decision tree:



Another way of thinking about these three conceptions of entitlement is in terms of the roles that epistemic justification is conventionally expected to play. Richard Foley identifies two central roles:

- (i) Justification is the property that makes belief in a proposition epistemically permissible or responsible.
- (ii) Justification is the property that yields knowledge when added to truth, appropriately based belief and an anti-Gettier condition.

(See Foley 2004, 2005.)

Entitlement theorists may agree that earned justification can play these roles, but will differ on which roles can be played by entitlement. On the weak conception, entitlement will

play neither of these roles. On the moderate conception, entitlement will play the first role but not the second. Only on the full blooded conception will entitlement play both roles.<sup>2</sup>

In the remainder of this paper, I shall deploy a series of arguments, first against the weak conception and then against the moderate conception, leaving the full blooded conception as the last alternative standing. Some of these arguments are new, others are re-worked versions of arguments already present in the literature (see, in particular, Davies 2004: section II; Pritchard 2009; Tucker 2009: section II; McGlynn 2014). Nevertheless, I think there is some value in gathering these arguments together in one place, in what I hope are their most persuasive forms.

As I noted at the outset, introducing a notion of entitlement is but one strategy for resisting radical sceptical arguments.<sup>3</sup> Since I won't be criticizing any alternative strategies (not in the

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<sup>2</sup> As I remarked in note 1, some opt to define entitlement not as unearned 'justification', but as unearned 'warrant'. One might think that (i) and (ii) capture strong associations that the term 'justification' has, while the term 'warrant' is less loaded. If that is true (I'm unsure whether it is) then a weak, or even a moderate, entitlement theorist might regard the warrant terminology as a better choice. Naturally, though, no substantial objections to the weak or moderate conceptions can be answered merely by moving to a new terminology. While I use the justification terminology here, the objections I give could be easily rephrased in terms of the warrant terminology.

<sup>3</sup> Two possible alternatives, when it comes to the kind of sceptical argument outlined here, are the *neo-Moorean* strategy (see Pryor 2000, 2004; Davies 2004) and the *closure-denial* strategy. The neo-Moorean, very roughly, denies that we can never earn or acquire a justification for believing that there are other minds and insists that my observing my friend's reddened eyes and tearstained cheeks can precisely constitute the acquisition of such a justification. According to the closure denier, on the other hand, certain kinds of positive epistemic status, such as justification and knowledge, need not be preserved across relations of deductive entailment, so that I could have

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justification for believing that my friend is upset, while lacking justification for believing the deductive consequence that there are other minds. As will become clear, the boundary between the closure-denial strategy and the entitlement strategy can become porous for certain conceptions of entitlement. The closure-denial strategy is perhaps more familiar when it comes to sceptical arguments targeting the possibility of *knowledge* rather than justified belief (Dretske 1970; Nozick 1981).

The contextualist anti-sceptical strategy is another that is often wielded against arguments targeting the possibility of knowledge. But this strategy could also be adapted for use against the kind of argument at issue here (see Smith 2009: section III, 2016a: section 6.4). On one way of implementing this strategy, there will be a number of ‘justification-like’ relations that can feature in the truth conditions of justification attributions in different contexts. In particular, there will be a lenient relation that I bear both to the proposition that my friend is upset and to the proposition that there are other minds and which features in the truth conditions of justification attributions in ordinary, everyday contexts. There will also be a demanding relation that I bear to neither proposition and which features in the truth conditions of justification attributions in contexts where sceptical possibilities have been made salient. Notably, this strategy does seem to require something very much like the existence of entitlement. On this strategy it is possible to stand in a ‘justification-like’ relation to a substantial proposition without having in any way investigated it (see Cohen 1999: 76–7). It would be interesting to compare this kind of strategy with the entitlement strategy—but I won’t undertake this here.

Another anti-sceptical idea that has long held a certain appeal for epistemologists is the claim that sceptical hypotheses, such as the no-other-minds hypothesis, offer a more contrived, ungainly explanation of one’s observations than their commonsense alternatives, such as the hypothesis that my friend is upset (see, for instance, Strawson 1985: section 1.2, 1.4). As it stands, though, it is unclear exactly how this thought is supposed to help with the sceptical argument under consideration. The thought may, I suspect, be taken either in an entitlement-like direction or in a

body text at any rate), my final conclusion will, in effect, be a conditional one: If we introduce a notion of entitlement in order to deal with sceptical arguments, then it had better be a full blooded notion of entitlement—nothing less is acceptable. One may, of course, be inclined to treat this as a *reductio* of the entitlement strategy. While I don't think that this would be the right lesson to draw, I will say relatively little here to discourage it. A full defence of the entitlement strategy will have to await another occasion.

## 2 Against Weak Entitlement

According to the entitlement theorist, the fact that I'm entitled to the proposition that there are other minds is part of what makes it the case that I have justification for believing that my friend is upset. Although entitlement, on the weak conception, is not itself a justification for believing anything, it must still *underwrite* a justification for believing something—the entitlement strategy demands this much. The arguments that I shall offer against the weak conception all, in one way or another, exploit this tension.

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neo-Moorean direction (for discussion, see Wright 1985: section II). I won't explore this further here.

Finally, one might react to sceptical arguments by challenging the very meaningfulness of the sceptical hypotheses deployed—alleging that their surface grammar dupes us into supposing that they describe genuine ways the world might be when, in fact, they do not. Manoeuvres of this kind are also, on occasion, associated with the Wittgenstein of *On Certainty* (see for instance Wright 1985: section III; McGinn 1989: chs 7 and 8; Williams 2004). Even if this kind of view could be motivated in the present case (I'm doubtful that it could), the prospects of extending this strategy to all sceptical hypotheses that might be conceived seems very bleak, in which case the proponent of this strategy is at best postponing a choice between the others (see Smith 2016b).

The first thing to note is that the propositions that I must have justification for believing, if entitlement is to do its anti-sceptical job, very often entail the propositions to which I'm entitled. The proposition that my friend is feeling upset, for instance, entails that there are other minds—indeed obviously so, once the two propositions are considered in tandem. The latter is a logically weaker, less committal proposition than the former. And yet, on the weak conception, I have justification for believing that my friend is feeling upset, given the appropriate evidence, but do not have justification for believing that there are other minds. Consider the following principle: For any propositions P and Q, if I have justification for believing P and it's obvious that P entails Q, then I must also have justification for believing Q.<sup>4</sup> This principle seems very natural. It's odd to think that I could be epistemically permitted to believe a proposition P and epistemically prohibited from believing a proposition Q, even when I recognize that Q is obviously entailed by P. And yet, if we adopt the idea of weak entitlement, then this kind of situation will arise—and will, indeed, be very widespread.

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<sup>4</sup> This is what is sometimes termed a 'closure principle' for justification—it states, in effect, that justification for believing is closed under obvious entailment. In denying this principle, the weak entitlement theorist is brought very close to the closure-denial response to scepticism mentioned in note 3. The weak entitlement theorist can, presumably, maintain a weaker closure principle concerning *justification for trusting*: If I have justification for trusting P and P obviously entails Q, then I must also have justification for trusting Q. A strident opponent of closure might deny that I have justification even for trusting that there are other minds and, thus, deny even this weakened principle. If the closure denier were to accept this principle, though, then he will have arrived at what is effectively the very same anti-sceptical strategy as the weak entitlement theorist—albeit from a different kind of starting point. The closure denier will, in any case, be equally exposed to the criticisms that I'll make in this section, given that they effectively trade, in one way or another, on the failure of the original closure principle.

Another way to think about this issue is in terms of degrees of confidence. Should I invest more confidence in the proposition (P) that my friend is feeling upset, or in the proposition (Q) that there are other minds? A moment's reflection will reveal that I should not, under any circumstances, be *more confident* of P than Q—such an attitude would clearly be irrational. I know that P could not possibly be true unless Q were true too. If I were more confident of P than Q, then I would effectively be reserving some confidence for the possibility that P is true but Q is not—even though I know that there is no such possibility. On the weak view, then, it can happen that I'm epistemically permitted to believe P, epistemically obliged to be at least as confident of Q as I am of P, and yet epistemically prohibited from believing Q—all at once.

This position already seems very difficult to accept, but the screw can be turned even further: If I believe a proposition P, and invest equal or greater confidence in a further proposition Q, then it's plausible that I must also count as believing Q. Suppose that this is so. In the situation just described, then, if I believe P, as I'm epistemically permitted to do, and invest greater or equal confidence in Q, as I'm epistemically obliged to do, then I automatically count as believing Q, which I'm epistemically prohibited from doing. The weak conception presents us, then, with a straightforwardly inconsistent picture of our epistemic obligations.

Yet another way to put pressure on the weak conception of entitlement is by introducing a notion of evidential or epistemic probability. It is widely assumed by epistemologists that propositions can be assigned probability values, given one's evidence or epistemic position (see for instance Williamson 2000: ch. 10; White 2005). Consider, then, the propositions to which I'm supposed to have an entitlement. Are such propositions likely to be true, given my epistemic position? Is it likely, for me, that there are other minds? This question presents the weak entitlement theorist with an immediate dilemma. If the answer is 'yes' then this seems

difficult to square with the claim that I lack justification for believing that there are other minds. If it's likely, given my epistemic position, that there are other minds, then why shouldn't I believe it?

Many epistemologists hold that justification is nothing more than epistemic likelihood—if a proposition is likely, given one's epistemic position, to be true, then this is all that is required in order for one to have justification for believing it. But, even if justification and epistemic likelihood are not as intimately related as this picture suggests (see Smith 2010, 2016a: ch. 2), it's clear that epistemic likelihood will be indicative of epistemic justification in many cases. Why think that the proposition that there are other minds is an exception to this?

What, then, if the weak entitlement theorist were to answer 'no' to the preceding question—and deny that the propositions to which I'm entitled are likely, given my epistemic position, to be true? This answer does seem to fit more naturally with the picture of entitlement as a feeble epistemic status, and those who are sympathetic to weak entitlement often do take this to be a commitment of the view (see Wright 2004a: 177, 2004b: 53; Pedersen 2009, particularly section 9). Unfortunately, this answer will all but completely neutralise any anti-sceptical force that entitlement might have had.

Let  $P$  be the proposition that my friend is feeling upset,  $Q$  be the proposition that there are other minds and  $E$  be the proposition that my friend has reddened eyes and tearstained cheeks. Finally, let  $Pr$  represent my own personal epistemic probability function, prior to observing my friend. The fact that I've observed that my friend has a certain appearance does not bear upon the hypothesis that there are other minds—this is part of what makes the hypothesis so effective for use in sceptical arguments. In particular, then, the epistemic probability of  $Q$  conditional upon  $E$  is no higher than the prior epistemic probability of  $Q$ —

$\Pr(Q \mid E) \leq \Pr(Q)$ .<sup>5</sup> However, since P entails Q and  $\Pr(E) > 0$ , it follows from the probability axioms that  $\Pr(P \mid E) \leq \Pr(Q \mid E)$ . Contracting these inequalities, we obtain the result that  $\Pr(P \mid E) \leq \Pr(Q)$ .

What this shows is that the prior epistemic probability of Q places an upper limit on the epistemic probability of P conditional upon evidence E—the latter cannot possibly rise any higher than the former. As such, if it is not likely, given my epistemic position, that there are other minds, then neither is it likely, given my epistemic position, that my friend is feeling upset, even once I've observed his reddened eyes and tearstained cheeks. How then could I have justification for believing that he's feeling upset, when this comprises all of the relevant

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<sup>5</sup> This claim may be denied—though it is reasonable to take it as common ground amongst entitlement theorists. Its denial may be associated with the *neo-Moorean* response to scepticism as discussed in note 3. According to the neo-Moorean, my experience of my friend's reddened eyes and tearstained cheeks can itself provide justification for believing that there are other minds—a claim that strongly suggests that the epistemic probability of Q conditional upon E should be higher than the prior epistemic probability of Q. There are various well-known ways of pressuring this particular aspect of the neo-Moorean position. Proposition Q could, for instance, be altered in such a way that its negation *entails* E (we could for instance make Q the proposition that it's not the case that: there are no other minds and my friend has reddened eyes and tearstained cheeks). In this case  $\Pr(Q \mid E) \leq \Pr(Q)$  could, in fact, be *proved* as a theorem of classical probability theory, given just that  $\Pr(E) > 0$  (see, for instance, White 2006: section 5; Silins 2008: section 3.3). The neo-Moorean is left, then, with little choice other than denying that epistemic probabilities are described by classical probability functions or reconceiving the relationship between justification and epistemic probability (see Weatherson 2007; Weatherson and Jehle 2012; Zardini 2014).

evidence I have? If I don't have justification for believing this, then the sceptic has carried the day and entitlement has failed in its anti-sceptical aspirations.

To put this in a slightly different way, if the proposition that there are other minds is not epistemically likely, then a substantial portion of the available epistemic probability mass must be assigned to possibilities in which there are no other minds, including possibilities in which there are no other minds and my friend has reddened eyes and tearstained cheeks. But in this case, eliminating all of the possibilities in which my friend does not have reddened eyes and tearstained cheeks can only redistribute limited mass to the possibilities in which he's feeling upset, since much of the mass will go to possibilities in which there are no other minds and he has reddened eyes and tearstained cheeks. As such, it's difficult to see how I could possibly have justification for believing that my friend is feeling upset, rather than the more guarded disjunction. If, on the other hand, the proposition that there are other minds is epistemically likely, then very little mass will be assigned to the various no-other-minds possibilities. But in this case it's difficult to see why I wouldn't have justification for believing that there are other minds.

### 3 Against Moderate Entitlement

My case against the moderate conception of entitlement also begins with a dilemma. When I notice that my friend has reddened eyes and tearstained cheeks it is, as already discussed, very intuitive that I have justification for believing that he's feeling upset. But, assuming that he really is feeling upset, and has been crying as a result, and there are no Gettier circumstances in play, it also seems very intuitive that I'm in a position to *know* that he's feeling upset. If the moderate entitlement theorist were to deny this, then this would amount to a very substantial concession to scepticism. And yet, if the moderate entitlement theorist

were to accept this, he would leave himself exposed to versions of the very same arguments that I have levelled against the weak conception.

The view that we are rarely, if ever, in a position to know propositions, even though we often have justification for believing them, is sometimes termed ‘Russell’s retreat’, as it’s a kind of response to scepticism that Russell flirted with in *The Problems of Philosophy* (Russell 1912/2004, see Wright 1991: 88; McGlynn 2013: section 9). The idea, in essence, is to concede the notion of knowledge to the sceptic and to make one’s stand in defence of the notion of justification instead. I won’t discuss this kind of position in depth—but it is important to point out that it seems a particularly unnatural path for a moderate entitlement theorist to take.

The retreat forces us, in effect, to reconceive the notion of justification and to depart substantially from the conventional picture of its role as set out at the end of Section 1. While justification may still be linked to epistemic permissibility and responsibility in the way described by (i), it can no longer be linked to knowledge in the way described by (ii). In effect, the Russellian retreat commits us to a moderate conception of *earned* justification. The reason this might be troubling for the moderate entitlement theorist is that it effectively restores the parity between entitlement and earned justification, while the moderate conception derives what benefits it has by exploiting a contrast between the two.

The primary advantage of the moderate account, recall, is that it makes it easier to accept that we could automatically have justification for believing substantial propositions about the world. It does this by conceding that such justification could never put one in a position to know the propositions in question. But this only has bite on the supposition that ordinary earned justification for believing a proposition *can* put one in a position to know it—otherwise what exactly is being conceded? If earned justification seldom or never puts one in

a position to know, as the Russellian retreat would have it, then there is nothing distinctive about entitlement in this regard. We would arrive back at the result that entitlement provides us with everything that earned justification does, and face the full force of the too-good-to-be-true problem.

Turning then to the other option, if the moderate entitlement theorist grants that I *can* be in a position to know that my friend is upset, he finds himself in a very similar position with respect to knowledge as the weak entitlement theorist is in with respect to justification. While entitlement cannot itself put one in a position to know things, on this view it will serve to underwrite one's being in a position to know things. Henceforth I will take this to be a commitment of the moderate conception and put the Russellian retreat to one side—though I will have a little more to say about it at the end of the section.

Many of the propositions that we are intuitively in a position to know will entail the propositions to which we are putatively entitled. On the moderate conception, I am in a position to know that my friend is feeling upset, given appropriate evidence and conditions, but am not in a position to know that there are other minds, in spite of the fact that the former obviously entails the latter. Consider the following principle: If I know a proposition P, and P obviously entails Q, then I must be in a position to know Q.<sup>6</sup> The principle is very natural—it's odd to think that I could know P, but not even be in a position to know an obvious

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<sup>6</sup> This is, of course, a closure principle featuring knowledge rather than justification—it states that being in a position to know is closed under obvious entailment. By denying this principle, the moderate entitlement theorist also flirts, in a sense, with the closure denial strategy—but is able to maintain a certain distance by holding on to the claim that justification for believing is closed under obvious entailment. Of the three conceptions of entitlement on offer, only the full blooded conception offers us an anti-sceptical strategy that is fully distinct from the closure-denial strategy.

consequence Q. And yet, if we adopt the idea of moderate entitlement, then this principle must be abandoned.

For the moderate theorist, not only is it possible for one to know a proposition P without being in a position to know an obvious consequence Q, it's possible for one to know a proposition P even though one could *never* be in a position to know an obvious consequence Q—Q may lie beyond the scope of possible knowledge altogether. As the original sceptical argument makes clear, it's not that I simply haven't got around to acquiring justification for believing that there are other minds. Rather, I have absolutely no inkling of how such justification could ever be acquired. Any investigation into a proposition about the mental states of others must be predicated, from the get-go, on the assumption that there are other minds. Furthermore, it seems plausible that any proper investigation must begin with an open-mindedness about the very proposition to be investigated and cannot be set up in such a way as to presuppose that proposition's truth. Clearly, though, the proposition that there are other minds is itself a (very general) proposition about the mental states of others, in which case it follows, from these two premises, that this proposition could never be properly investigated.<sup>7</sup> An entitlement, then, is the only sort of epistemic credential that I could ever

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<sup>7</sup> The short sceptical argument that has been guiding discussion so far could be embellished by appending some reasoning of this kind. What before was a premise—I haven't acquired justification for rejecting the proposition that there are no other minds—could be recast as an intermediate conclusion supported by the foregoing reasoning. The argument, so embellished, would take on a shape similar to the argument for inductive scepticism as set out by Hume (1739/2000) in book I, part III of the *Treatise*—a shape that has been much refined and reproduced since (see, for instance, Wright 2004a: 169–71). The argument, so modified, would explicitly

hope to possess for the proposition that there are other minds. If entitlement can never put one in a position to know, then this is a proposition that I could never be in a position to know—even though it is obviously entailed by a proposition that I do know, namely that my friend is feeling upset.

This position can, I think, be further pressured by thinking about the situation in terms of degrees of confidence, in the way suggested in the last section. If I know that my friend is upset, and it's obvious to me that this entails that there are other minds then, as argued in the last section, I am epistemically obliged to invest at least as much confidence in there being other minds as I invest in my friend being upset. Since I must believe that my friend is upset, as a requirement on my knowing it, my epistemic obligations would also compel me believe that there are other minds. And yet, according to the moderate entitlement theorist, this is a belief that could never constitute knowledge under any circumstances. If the moderate account is correct then, by simply following through on my epistemic obligations, I would be

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support a conclusion that is, at best, implicit, in the original—namely, that the sceptical predicament in which we find ourselves is *inescapable*.

The premise that is being bolstered here by additional reasoning—namely, that I haven't acquired justification for rejecting the proposition that there are no other minds—is, as discussed in note 3, the very premise that the neo-Moorean anti-sceptical strategy seeks to discredit. As such, the neo-Moorean must somehow find fault with this additional reasoning—and will do so, I suspect, by denying that any investigation into my friend's mental state must be predicated on the assumption that there are other minds. The neo-Moorean is in some difficulty here, as this contention seems a very plausible one. The entitlement theorist, in any case, has every reason to accept it and to acquiesce in the rest of the reasoning.

led to form a belief that could never constitute knowledge. This would seem to be a very surprising place for one's epistemic obligations to lead.

Some epistemologists have defended the view that knowledge serves as the norm of belief, in the sense that one should never believe things that one does not know (see, for instance, Williamson 2000: section 11.4; Adler 2002; Sutton 2007; Bach 2008). If this is right, then the moderate conception of entitlement would present us with a straightforwardly inconsistent picture of our epistemic obligations. While there is something attractive about the idea that knowledge serves as the norm of belief, many epistemologists may be inclined to resist the claim on the strength of examples such as the following: Suppose I wander into a room for the first time, have an experience as of a red wall before me and come to believe that there is a red wall before me. Suppose, in actual fact, the wall is white but illuminated by tricky red lighting. In this case, my belief will not qualify as knowledge—but it may seem overly harsh to judge that I should not have formed the belief.

Here is one thing we might observe about this case though: Although my belief that there is a red wall before me falls short of knowledge, it is still a viable *candidate* for knowledge—and it would have been knowledge if only circumstances in the external environment had been more obliging. If, however, I believe a proposition to which I am merely entitled, and the moderate conception of entitlement is correct, then this belief would be very different—it would be a belief that falls short of knowledge no matter what the external circumstances are like, a belief that is not a candidate for knowledge in any sense. Even those who deny that knowledge is the norm of belief may well grant that holding a belief like this would be in violation of my epistemic obligations.

This leads naturally to the final objection that I will level at the moderate account—an objection that concerns the epistemic version of Moore's paradox (see Moore 1962: 277).

There is something deeply problematic about asserting a proposition while simultaneously denying knowledge of that proposition. Suppose I assert ‘It’s raining but I don’t know that it’s raining.’ The assertion comes across as absurd or self-conflicted—almost like asserting a contradiction. But the content of the assertion is not, of course, contradictory and the assertion could perfectly well express a truth—thus the paradox. While this is the way that the paradox is conventionally presented, it’s not essential that the content in question be actually asserted—if I merely believed that it’s raining but I don’t know that it’s raining, then this would seem to be every bit as self-conflicted, even if I never gave expression to the belief. The moderate entitlement theorist, however, would seem committed to treating certain epistemic Moore’s paradoxical beliefs as being justified.

Suppose I come to believe a proposition Q for which I have an entitlement, but no earned justification. On the moderate conception, such a belief could be justified, but could never constitute knowledge. Presumably I could, on minimal reflection, come to realize that I lack earned justification for the belief. If the moderate theory of entitlement is correct then presumably I could, on sufficient reflection, come to realize that this theory is correct. But I would then be in a position to conclude that my belief in Q could not constitute knowledge. Generally speaking, though, if I learn that a certain belief of mine fails to constitute knowledge, then this would serve to defeat any justification I had for the belief, and oblige me to give it up (see Huemer 2011: section 3).

Suppose I’m having a conversation with an eminent, highly respected primatologist and, in a feeble attempt to impress, remark that the bonobo is the closest living relative to humans. Suppose the primatologist responds ‘Actually, we don’t know that.’ This remark might seem rather cryptic if she simply left things there and didn’t elaborate—but we could imagine, perhaps, that the conversation was interrupted before she could continue. Cryptic or not, if I accept the primatologist’s assertion, and accept that I don’t know that the bonobo is the

closest living relative to humans, it seems clear that I should stop believing that it is. I should become open minded on this matter—to continue to believe this would be a violation of my epistemic obligations.

For the moderate entitlement theorist, the discovery that my belief in Q does not constitute knowledge had better not have the same effect as the primatologist's testimony. Rather, this standard defeat mechanism would have to be somehow suspended when it comes to propositions like Q, to which I'm entitled. Otherwise, learning the true theory of entitlement would oblige me to give up believing all of the propositions to which I'm entitled and, presumably, all of the ordinary everyday propositions that entail them. But if this defeat mechanism is suspended for Q and for other propositions like it then, after reflecting on the epistemic status of my Q belief, I would find myself justifiably believing Q and justifiably believing that I don't know Q. But what, then, could prevent me from combining these two beliefs and inferring the conjunction? In this case I could justifiably believe: Q and I don't know Q (see Huemer 2011).

The moderate entitlement theorist need not claim, of course, that just any epistemic Moore's paradoxical belief could be justifiably held—there may be no way for me to justifiably believe, for instance, that it's raining and I don't know that it's raining. But I doubt that the moderate theorist can take much comfort from this. If the moderate theory is correct, then there is a way for me to justifiably believe that: There are other minds and I don't know that there are other minds. Such a belief seems no less absurd. Indeed, the particular content

of a Moore's paradoxical belief is generally thought to be unimportant when it comes to our adverse reaction to it.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> One might reply, at this point, that the problem I've outlined is a more general one—and will also be confronted by weak and full blooded theorists and perhaps even those who reject the entitlement strategy altogether. The problem I've outlined does not after all essentially rely on the *truth* of the moderate account, but merely on the possibility that the moderate account be *justifiably believed*. But shouldn't everyone accept this possibility? After all, there are prima facie persuasive arguments in favour of the view, and a reasonable person could surely be moved by such arguments.

It's obvious that we don't, and shouldn't, regard our philosophical opponents as *irrational* simply because they accept philosophical theories that we take to be false. But this is not to say that we must always credit our opponents with epistemic justification for believing their theories. If we do, however, grant that one can justifiably commit to any false philosophical theory that has prima facie persuasive arguments in its favour, then it should come as no surprise that such commitments could defeat one's justification for believing all manner of ordinary propositions. *Other minds scepticism*—the view that I cannot have justification for believing things about others' mental states—is a view that has prima facie persuasive arguments in its favour (such as the argument outlined at the outset). If it's possible to justifiably believe the moderate account of entitlement, then perhaps it would also be possible to justifiably embrace other minds scepticism. But such a belief, if justified, would obviously defeat my justification for believing things about others' mental states. Those who reject the moderate account of entitlement should, perhaps, take a similar attitude towards its acceptance—if justifiably believed, this theory would also serve to defeat one's justifications for believing a broad range of ordinary propositions. The proponent of the moderate account cannot comfortably take such a stance.

It's worth noting, finally, that the problem I've raised here could also be levelled against a proponent of the Russellian retreat—indeed on a much grander scale. Suppose, as the retreator would have it, that many of the beliefs I hold are justified, but none, or next to none, qualifies as knowledge. Presumably, this is something that I could come to realize by reflecting on the requirements of knowledge, the strength of sceptical arguments etc. For the retreator, this realization had better not defeat my justification for all the beliefs that I hold, else a proper understanding of my epistemic position would lead from retreat to full capitulation—a concession that none of my beliefs is justified. To maintain a viable position, the retreator would, in effect, have to suspend the lack-of-knowledge defeat mechanism across the board. As such, the retreator is committed to the justifiability across-the-board of epistemic Moorean paradoxical beliefs.

## 4 Conclusion: Full Blooded Entitlement

In declaring the full blooded conception of entitlement to be the last surviving conception, one might accuse me of a certain bias or imbalance in my approach. While I have put the weak and moderate conceptions under the microscope here, the full blooded conception has not been subjected to the same level of scrutiny. The full blooded conception does, of course, have its disadvantages—but, unlike the other two conceptions, it largely wears those disadvantages on its sleeve. On the full blooded approach, we can automatically have justification for believing, and can automatically be in a position to know, certain substantial propositions that we haven't in any way investigated. On the full blooded approach, there is no shirking this.

Perhaps the view does have further problems that are less obvious—this cannot be decisively ruled out. But it is clear, in any case, that the full blooded conception will not be

subject to the kinds of difficulties that I have identified for the weak and moderate conceptions. For these difficulties all stem from the attempt to make entitlement into a weaker, lesser epistemic status than the very kinds of epistemic status that are supposed to rest upon it.

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