

Dogmatism and Moorean Reasoning

Markos Valaris
University of New South Wales

1. Introduction

By inference from her knowledge that past Moscow Januaries have been cold, Mary believes that it will be cold in Moscow next January. Other things being equal, most of us would take Mary's belief to be justified, and indeed to count as knowledge (setting aside any worries about the truth of contingent propositions about the future). Not so the skeptic. The sort of skeptic I have in mind will point out that Mary has apparently overlooked certain alternative hypotheses, which are not ruled out by her evidence.¹ For example, the skeptic might ask us to consider the hypothesis that a hitherto dormant but all-powerful demon will make it the case that, despite past cold Moscow Januaries, it will be warm in Moscow next January. What right does Mary have to disregard this hypothesis? It is, after all, perfectly consistent with her evidence — indeed, it *predicts* her evidence.

Broadly speaking, there seem to be two ways to respond to such a skeptic. On the one hand, one might try to argue that, contrary to what the skeptic alleges, Mary's evidence — perhaps together with other relevant epistemic facts about her, such as her default warrants — *does* rule out all relevant skeptical hypotheses, even independently of the disputed inference. Alternatively, one might reject the skeptic's demands altogether: one might attempt to make the case that Mary can know by inference that it will be cold in Moscow next January, even if she has no independent way of ruling out skeptical hypotheses incompatible with this conclusion. This

¹ This is not the only kind of argument a skeptic might employ. A humean skeptic about induction, for example, might challenge us to provide justification for taking inductive inference to be *in general* a reliable method of belief-formation. Nothing I say in this paper is intended to speak to that form of skepticism.

is the dogmatist response to skepticism about inference. This is the view I aim to defend in this paper.

The dogmatist response to skepticism about inference seems attractive: we confidently make inferences such as Mary's all the time, apparently with no independent way of ruling out skeptical hypotheses. If dogmatism is false, then either we have no right to those inferences, or otherwise we are prone to underestimating our anti-skeptical evidence. Nevertheless, dogmatism may seem to have counter-intuitive consequences. Suppose that Mary, after concluding that it will be cold in Moscow next January, goes on to reason as follows:

- (1) It will be cold in Moscow next January.
- (2) If it is true that it will be cold in Moscow next January, then it is not the case that an evil demon will cause it to be warm in Moscow next January.
- (3) Therefore, it is not the case that an evil demon will cause it to be warm in Moscow next January.

This argument seems sound. However, if Mary's grounds for premise (1) consist entirely in her having inferred it from her knowledge that in the past it has been cold in Moscow in January, there would seem to be something wrong with her reasoning in this way. In general, there seems to be something wrong with using the conclusion of an inference as a premise in an argument against a skeptical hypothesis that would undermine that very inference. According to many of dogmatism's critics, the fault of dogmatism lies in licensing such so-called "Moorean" anti-skeptical inferences.

My aim in this paper is to defend dogmatism against this line of criticism. For one thing, critics of Moorean reasoning have tended to misidentify what is wrong with such reasoning, in a way that undermines their arguments against dogmatism. In particular, I will argue that the common assumption that standard Bayesian principles suffice to prove that there is something wrong with Moorean reasoning is false.

However, my positive aim in this paper is not to argue that Moorean reasoning is cogent. My aim, rather, is to argue against the assumption that dogmatism must license Moorean reasoning in the first place. More specifically, I will argue that it is one of the consequences of dogmatism, properly construed, that Moorean reasoning suffers from a clearly identifiable defect.

Now, some dogmatists have argued that Moorean inferences are only *dialectically*, not *epistemologically* defective (see Davies (2004), Pryor (2004)). According to such views, although Moorean inferences might be useless in trying to overcome a skeptic's doubts about their conclusion, they might nevertheless add to one's own justification for it. I will remain neutral on this topic. My goal is to argue that dogmatism predicts that Moorean inferences suffer from a particular kind of defect. How *bad* that defect is — whether it renders them epistemologically idle, or just dialectically weak — is a separate question, which I will not try to resolve in this paper.

Let me also note that the negative and positive parts of my paper are logically independent of each other. One might accept my criticism of Bayesian arguments against dogmatism while rejecting my suggestion for how dogmatists should deal with Moorean reasoning, or the other way around.

Before moving on, a note about terminology is in order. Dogmatism, as I understand it here and as has been mostly discussed in the literature, is primarily a thesis about *evidence*. It is a thesis about the conditions under which a set of evidence supports belief in a hypothesis. Nevertheless, the term “dogmatism” in its current usage derives from Pryor (2000), who uses it to describe a thesis about perception. However, it is not at all clear that perceptual knowledge is best construed as based on evidence. Suppose that I know (and so believe) that *A* by visual perception. On one type of view of perceptual knowledge, my belief counts as knowledge because *I can see that A*, rather than because I have other evidence for *A* (see, for example, McDowell (1983, 1995), Williamson (2000)). Similar points might be made about knowledge from sources like memory or testimony: in such cases, just like in the perceptual case, it is at least

arguable that the relevant beliefs count as knowledge because of the subject's relation to the proposition known, rather than to other propositions that might be construed as providing support for it (see McDowell (1998)).² For this reason, my discussion in this paper will concern only cases of *inference* — i.e., cases in which one considers the question whether A is true, and one comes to believe that A on the strength of other propositions which one takes to be relevant to that question.

2. Skepticism and Dogmatism

Let us begin by setting out the issues a bit more rigorously. Consider a subject's claim to know a proposition p by inference from a premise r — for example, consider Mary's claim to know that it will be cold in Moscow next January by inference from her knowledge that it has been cold in Moscow in January in the past. The skeptic invites us to consider a skeptical hypothesis which entails r but is incompatible with p . For example, the skeptic might ask us to consider a world whose history is, so far as Mary can tell, identical to that of the actual world, but in which a demon causes it to be warm in Moscow next January. The skeptical hypothesis may be the proposition that this world is Mary's world.

Let us now say that evidence r is *misleading* with respect to p if and only if r is true but p is false (this is a stipulated use of “misleading”). Let q be the proposition — entailed by the skeptical hypothesis — that r actually is misleading with respect to p . According to the skeptic, then, q has the following properties:

² Wright (2007, 28) notes — correctly — that such views satisfy the letter of Pryor's (2000) definition of dogmatism. But I think it is clear that they are different in spirit from the view that Pryor proposes. One might construct an argument against such views on the basis of the observation that *they too* seem to license Moorean reasoning. It is not clear, however, that the issues raised by such an argument would be the same as those that arise in the case of evidential knowledge. See also the discussion of “externalism” in Weatherson (2005).

- (4) One is in a position to know $\sim q$ only in a way that partly depends on one's knowing p .
- (5) In order to know p by inference from r one must be in a position to know $\sim q$ independently of knowing p .

It is easy to see that, from these premises, it follows that:

- (6) One does not know p by inference from r .

For suppose that one knows p by inference from r . In that case, (5) tells us that one must be in a position to know $\sim q$ independently of knowing p . But this contradicts (4).

To appreciate the force of the argument some clarifications are in order. To begin with, recent writers on skepticism — including, in particular, Pryor (2000) — tend to focus on justification rather than knowledge, and in particular on so-called *propositional justification*. On this construal, the question raised by skepticism is whether a subject in a given situation has justification to believe a given proposition, regardless of whether she actually believes that proposition. The question raised by the skeptical argument I presented above is different: assuming that the subject believes p as a result of a particular course of reasoning, does that belief amount to knowledge? The reason why I do not follow tradition here is that I am unsure how to understand the concept of propositional justification. I suspect (although I cannot substantiate my suspicions here) that we cannot understand propositional justification except in terms of *doxastic* justification (i.e., the epistemic status of beliefs or related mental states), and that we cannot understand the latter except in terms of knowledge. Very roughly, a proposition is justified for one just in case one could have a doxastically justified belief in that proposition while one's epistemic state is held constant in relevant respects, while a belief is doxastically justified depending on how close it is to being knowledge. If this is right, then questions about knowledge should naturally take precedence over questions about justification.³

³ For a similar claim concerning the relation between propositional and doxastic justification, see Turri (2010) and Willenken (forthcoming). For a similar claim concerning the relation between doxastic

The argument employs a notion of epistemic dependence. Under what conditions does one's knowing that A depend in the relevant sense on one's knowing that B ? It is not enough that knowing that B be a necessary condition of knowing that A . Perhaps in order to possess the concept *red* I must know that everything red is colored. If this is true, then knowing that everything red is colored is a necessary condition of knowing that the wall I am facing is red, even though the latter piece of knowledge does not depend on the former in the relevant sense. Intuitively, this is because my knowledge that everything red is colored is neither among my reasons for believing that the wall is red, nor does it play any other role in determining the epistemic status of that belief. These remarks obviously don't amount to an analysis of the notion of epistemic dependence, but hopefully they help make it clear enough for our purposes.⁴

Finally, the argument employs the notion of "being in a position to know". Being in a position to know that A does not entail knowing that A . However, neither is it entailed by merely being *able* to know that A — perhaps as the conclusion of further investigations. If one is in a position to know that A one has already done all the epistemic work needed to know that A . All one needs to do in order to get to know that A is, at most, *consider* whether A . (For this notion of being in a position to know, see Williamson (2000, 95).)

justification and knowledge, see Bird (2007). It is sometimes suggested that skepticism that targets knowledge rather than justification is shallow, in that we could live with the conclusion that we have much less *knowledge* than we thought we did, so long as it is granted that we have a lot of *justified belief*. If justification and knowledge are related in the way I have suggested, however, it would seem that if it turned out that we have much less knowledge than we thought we did, it would inevitably also turn out that we have much less justified belief.

⁴ Pryor (2000, 524-525) introduces his related notion of antecedent justification by means of the notions of epistemic presupposition and question-begging. His discussion seems compatible with mine, but I am not sure that these notions are clearer than the notion they are meant to illuminate.

How should one respond to this skeptical argument, then? Some anti-skeptics seem prepared to accept (5), and thus they assume the burden of showing (4) false.⁵ However, if Mary is like most of us, it seems plausible that she has no independent way of knowing that, for example, she does not live in a world where a demon causes it to be warm in Moscow next January. Thus, the option of rejecting (5) instead of (4) seems worth exploring. This is the dogmatist position. The dogmatist says that one can know p by inference from r even if one is not in a position to know $\sim q$ independently of p .

Of course, given a plausible closure principle for knowledge, and supposing that one recognizes the incompatibility between p and q , knowing p entails that one is in a position to know $\sim q$.⁶ But, according to the dogmatist, that knowledge need not be *independent of* one's knowledge p .

And here is the rub, for dogmatists: for it would seem that saying as much suffices to allow for Moorean reasoning, in which the subject believes $\sim q$ by *deducing* it from p . (This is just what Mary did in our example from §1.) But, intuitively, Moorean reasoning is not acceptable: there seems to be something wrong with using the conclusion of an inference as a premise in an argument against a skeptical hypothesis that would undermine that very inference. This, one might think, is a significant cost for dogmatism.

In what follows I will argue that this argument against dogmatism is not persuasive. My argument has two sides. First, in §3, I will argue that some currently influential attempts to work out this argument within the Bayesian framework fail: for all that uncontroversial Bayesian principles have to say on the matter, Moorean reasoning may well be cogent. Second, I will argue that, in fact, dogmatism does not license Moorean reasoning. On the contrary, as I will

⁵ The list here includes both so-called *conservatives* who believe that one's justification for p partly *derives from* one's independent justification for $\sim q$ (e.g., Wright (2004)), and some *liberals*, who deny this further claim (Silins 2007). Dogmatism itself is, of course, also a liberal position.

⁶ Although most epistemologists agree that *some* closure principle holds for knowledge, its precise formulation has been a subject of some controversy. I assume that, whatever the correct formulation of closure turns out to be, it will have the consequence I mention in the text.

argue in §4, one of dogmatism's consequences is that Moorean reasoning suffers from a clearly identifiable defect. In §§5-6 I will clarify my positive proposal and address some objections.

3. Bayesianism and Moorean Reasoning

Suppose that one knows p by reasoning from r . Given closure, this entails that one is in a position to know $\sim q$. But, intuitively, one cannot know $\sim q$ by *deducing it* from p . Why should this be so?

According to the most common diagnosis of the problem, the reason why one cannot know $\sim q$ by deducing it from p has to do with the grounds on which one believes p . By hypothesis, the subject believes p by inference from r ; so how — the objection goes — could she legitimately rely on p in order to deduce $\sim q$ (i.e., that r is not misleading with respect to p)? After all, $\sim q$ is perfectly compatible with the subject's evidence for p — indeed, it *entails* her evidence.⁷

This diagnosis has been helpfully formalized within a broadly Bayesian framework.⁸ Let $\Pr(x)$ be a probability function. Then, since q entails r , we can prove that $\Pr(q|r) > \Pr(q)$, and therefore:

$$(7) \quad \Pr(\sim q|r) < \Pr(\sim q).^9$$

Conditionalizing on r , in other words, has the effect of *lowering* the probability of $\sim q$. Returning to our example, Mary's knowledge that it has been cold in Moscow in January in the past *decreases*, for her, the probability that the skeptical hypothesis is false.

⁷ Variations of this diagnosis have been offered by Wright (1985, 2002, 2004), Schiffer (2004), White (2006). The problem is often said to be "transmission-failure": one's justification for p does not transmit to $\sim q$, even though $\sim q$ is deductively entailed by p .

⁸ In what follows I will draw mostly on White (2006) and Weatherson (2007), but see also Hawthorne (2004), Schiffer (2004), Cohen (2005), Silins (2007).

⁹ Proof: $\Pr(q|r) = \Pr(r|q)\Pr(q)/\Pr(r)$. But $\Pr(r|q) > \Pr(r)$, since q entails r and we may assume that $\Pr(r) < 1$. Thus $\Pr(q|r) > \Pr(q)$. It follows that $\Pr(\sim q|r) < \Pr(\sim q)$. Weatherson (2007) employs a slightly different formulation of (7), but the substance of the worry is the same. Assuming classical logic, Weatherson's version follows from (7) simply by substituting $(r \& \sim p)$ for q .

This, of course, is just a result in probability theory, and as such it has no direct philosophical import. But, the thought goes, we can combine it with plausible epistemological principles to get a conclusion inconsistent with taking Moorean arguments to be cogent, and hence problematic for dogmatism. Consider the following claim, which would seem unexceptional by Bayesian lights:

- (8) If $\Pr(x|y) < \Pr(x)$, then one cannot go from not being in a position to know x to being in a position to know x simply by receiving evidence y .¹⁰

If (8) is true, then from it and (7) we can infer the following:

- (9) If one is not in a position to know $\sim q$, then simply adding r to one's evidence does not put one in a position to know $\sim q$.

Thus, one cannot come to know that the skeptical hypothesis is false simply as a result of adding r to one's evidence. According to (9) Mary cannot, just as a result of knowing that it has been cold in Moscow in January in the past, be in a position to know the falsity of the skeptical hypothesis. This is the result that is supposed to cause problems for Moorean reasoning, and — by implication — for dogmatism.

Now, as I have already indicated, I do not deny that Moorean reasoning is problematic. However, the above argument does not capture what is wrong with it. This is because, on the face of it, (9) is perfectly consistent with taking Moorean reasoning to be cogent. A dogmatist who wishes to embrace Moorean reasoning need not say that adding r *by itself* to one's evidence puts one in a position to know $\sim q$. Such a dogmatist should only commit to the claim that one may know p by inference from r , *and hence* be in a position to know $\sim q$. Thus, such a dogmatist can simply insist that r does not exhaust one's evidence concerning the question whether q : one's relevant evidence also includes p itself. Since $\sim q$ is entailed by p , if p is added to one's evidence

¹⁰ This principle is a combination of the two principles called "Learning" and "Bayes" in Weatherson (2007).

there can be no objection to taking one to be in a position to know $\sim q$. (Obviously, $\Pr(\sim q|p)=1$. Since we may assume that $\Pr(\sim q)<1$, (8) causes no problems.)

Thus, the uncontroversial Bayesian principles (7) and (8) do not suffice to turn (9) into an argument against Moorean reasoning. The following premise would also seem to be necessary:

- (10) When considering one's epistemic relation to $\sim q$, p is not to be included among one's evidence.

Notice, however, that this claim is very close to the skeptical premise (5) that dogmatists reject — namely, the premise that one must be able to know $\sim q$ independently of knowing p . Simply *assuming* (10) amounts to a flat denial of dogmatism. At the very least, dogmatists are entitled to ask for an argument in defense of (10).

So far as I can tell, opponents of dogmatism have not defended (10) explicitly. White (2006, 533) comes closest, in suggesting that the following probabilistic result makes trouble for dogmatism:

$$(11) \quad \Pr(p|r) \leq \Pr(\sim q)^{11}$$

Assuming conditionalization, (11) entails that the posterior probability of p cannot exceed the prior probability of $\sim q$. This, as White points out, suggests that being rationally able to infer p from r requires already having a fair amount of confidence in $\sim q$; therefore, White seems to conclude, it is illegitimate to use p as a premise for inferring $\sim q$. But we must tread carefully here. We may grant the principle that, *if* one needs independent justification for $\sim q$ in order to infer p from r , then one is not able to use p as a premise in an argument for $\sim q$. Still, (10) does not follow, because (11) says nothing about the *justification* of one's prior probability $\Pr(\sim q)$. It is, therefore, entirely unclear why it should be thought inconsistent with using p as a premise from which to infer $\sim q$. Informally, all that (11) says seems to be this: one cannot rationally infer p

¹¹ Proof: From (7), we know that $\Pr(\sim q) \geq \Pr(\sim q|r)$. But p entails $\sim q$, so $\Pr(\sim q|r) \geq \Pr(p|r)$. Thus $\Pr(p|r) \leq \Pr(\sim q)$.

from r unless one is already fairly confident that r is not misleading with respect to p . The dogmatist need not deny that: the dogmatist can allow that worrying about skepticism can deprive one of inferences which would otherwise have been rationally available to one. What the dogmatist denies is only that, in order for those inferences to be available to one, one needs *independent justification* for not worrying about skepticism; but (11) has nothing to say about this.

Perhaps one might attempt to defend (10) by restricting the range of propositions that can be included in one's evidence. Perhaps, one might suggest, only propositions known *non-inferentially* — such as by perceptual experience, or by introspection — are to be included among one's evidence. Since everyone agrees that our subject knows p inferentially if at all, that would rule out p from her evidence.

Such a restriction to what can count as evidence, however, would involve a rather radical departure from our ordinary understanding of our inferential practices. We often seem to reason from premises which themselves are believed only on the strength of earlier reasoning. Perhaps Mary knows that it has been cold in Moscow in January in the past only by inference. Should this lead us to retract the claim that her knowledge that it has been cold in Moscow in January in the past constitutes evidence for her for the proposition that it will be cold in Moscow next January? A theory of evidence which had such counterintuitive consequences would need to be supported by strong argument.

One might try to motivate such a restriction by appealing to considerations of certainty. In classical Bayesianism, if a proposition is included in one's evidence it is automatically assigned probability 1.¹² Moreover, if a proposition is assigned probability 1, then so long as updating occurs only by conditionalization, its probability is guaranteed never to decrease. Thus, it might be thought, we ought to restrict what can count as evidence only to propositions that meet a high standard of certainty — a standard so high that it cannot be met by the conclusions of non-

¹² This is not so on views that use Jeffrey conditionalization. But this would make it even harder to argue that p should be excluded from one's evidence.

demonstrative inferences. The problem with using this point in order to motivate a restriction to what can count as evidence is that it seems unlikely that *anything* can meet the standard of certainty implied by these conditions. Surely there is no reason to think that most sorts of non-inferential knowledge — including perceptual and introspective knowledge — would meet such a standard.¹³ If there is a problem here, therefore, it would seem to be a problem about how to combine Bayesianism with *any* plausible theory of evidence, rather a problem specific to dogmatism.

Alternatively, perhaps one might be led to endorse (10) as a consequence of the view that Silins (2005, 87), calls the “Relay view of reasoning”. According to this view, if one’s evidence for believing a proposition y is x , and one infers z from y (and one has no other evidence for z), then one’s evidence for z include, at most, x — not y itself. But, as Silins goes on to argue, the Relay view is implausible. We can see this by considering a simple example. Suppose that Fred believes that whales are mammals because his biology teacher told him so. Suppose that Mary also believes that whales are mammals, but on different grounds: she believes it because of a nature documentary. Finally, suppose that both Fred and Mary reason that, since whales are mammals, and whales live in the ocean, there exist some oceanic mammals. Now, on a natural construal of the case, we would say that Mary and Fred share at least *some* of their evidence for believing that there exist some oceanic mammals: in particular, both their evidence includes the proposition that whales are mammals. But notice that this perfectly natural construal of the case is inconsistent with the Relay view of reasoning: on that view, neither Fred’s nor Mary’s evidence includes the proposition that whales are mammals. This suggests that the Relay view is not correct, and hence it cannot help opponents of dogmatism bolster their case for (10).

Perhaps one might worry that abandoning the Relay view of reasoning entails thinking of reasoning as generating justification out of thin air, as it were. But this worry is confused. There is no inconsistency in rejecting the Relay view of reasoning while maintaining that the epistemic

¹³ For discussion of this and related points see Williamson (2000, 205-207).

status of one's belief in the conclusion of an inference can be *no higher* than the epistemic status of one's beliefs in its premises. This latter principle is not violated by Moorean reasoning: after all, as everyone (except for the skeptic) agrees, in the Moorean cases the subject *knows* her premises.

Of course opponents of dogmatism can always point to the intuition that Moorean inferences simply *seem* illegitimate. But we cannot assume that a true explanation of these appearances must involve anything along the lines of (10). Indeed, as I will argue in the next section, there is a plausible alternative explanation of these appearances, which is perfectly consistent with dogmatism. What matters for present purposes, however, is that, without any independent support for (10), the above diagnosis of Moorean reasoning fails. So far as these considerations go, the dogmatist is free to insist that a subject may come to know p by inference from r , and hence be in a position to deduce $\sim q$.

4. What Is Wrong with Moorean Reasoning?

We have seen that one influential diagnosis of Moorean inferences fails. However, an alternative diagnosis has occasionally been suggested too. For example, consider the following passage, by Wright (2000, 141; emphasis altered from the original):

[An inference transmits warrant] when we may envisage a perfectly rational subject coming to believe a proposition *for the first time* in a way which depends on their recognition *both* of the validity of the inference in question and of their possession of warrant for its premises.

A belief is warranted, in Wright's terms, just in case it is *rational*, all things considered, for one to hold that belief (in an alternative terminology, such beliefs would be said to be doxastically justified). Thus, according to Wright, in order for a piece of reasoning to transmit warrant the following must be possible: a subject who recognizes its validity, and who believes its premises on good grounds, is *thereby*, and *for the first time*, in a position to acquire a warranted belief in, or

even knowledge of, its conclusion. As I will argue, the intuitive unacceptability of Moorean inferences is due to their failing to meet this condition (although, as we will see, it is not clear that this is indicative of transmission-failure, as Wright's passage suggests).

We can begin by reformulating Wright's condition in the terminology I have been using in this paper:

- (12) If, in order to be in a position to infer a proposition y from another proposition x one must already be in a position to know y *via* a different route, then the inference from x to y is defective.

What sort of defect is at issue here? Wright's view might be — although, so far as I can tell, he never asserts this explicitly — that the *only* way for an inference to fail this condition is for one's belief in x to epistemically depend on one's belief in y . If that were correct, then arguably the defect in question would be a form of *begging the question* — or, in Wright's terms, a form of transmission-failure. But it is not clear why this should be the only way in which an inference may fail this condition. (Indeed, as I will argue below, the dogmatist should claim that Moorean inferences fail the condition specified by (12), even though — on the dogmatist view — they don't exhibit the pattern of epistemic dependence characteristic of question-begging or transmission-failure.) Consequently, it is not clear that the defect captured by (12) is a form of question-begging or transmission-failure. More simply, one could suggest that the defect captured by (12) is *redundancy*: such an inference can never be useful to one, because whenever one is in a position to make the inference one already is in a position to know its conclusion, *via* a different route.

How bad is it for an inference to suffer from such a defect? Most obviously, such an inference would be dialectically weak. If one's interlocutor were to have doubts about y , one could not be able to appeal to this inference in order to convince her, since whatever doubts one's opponent had about y would also be doubts about whether the inference were available to

one.¹⁴ It is harder to determine whether the defect captured by (12) amounts to an *epistemological* failure, as well as a dialectical one. Perhaps one might think that it does, since inferring y from x in this way can do nothing to *improve* the epistemic standing of one's belief in y — after all, if one is in a position to know y *via* a different route, and one considers the question whether y , one comes to *know* y without needing to perform the inference.¹⁵ If, however, propositional justification can swing free from the epistemic standing of an actual or possible belief, then that might not matter. As I am not discussing the relations between propositional and doxastic justification in this paper, I will have to leave this as an open question. For present purposes, what matters is that (12) captures *some* kind of defect, which — as I will now explain — dogmatists *can*, and *should*, maintain Moorean inferences suffer from.

The basic idea I will exploit is the following: if one knows p by inference from r , one is in a position to know that one's reason for believing p is r , and this entails that, if one is rational, one believes that r is good evidence for p . As I will suggest, it follows from this that dogmatists should accept that, in cases where one *knows* p by inference from r , one might be in a position to know that r is not misleading with respect to p without any independent grounds (and without having inferred it from p).

Let us now trace this line of thought more carefully. To begin with, the following seems true of inference in general:

- (13) If one believes p by inference from r , one is in a position to know that r is one's reason for believing p .

I will defend (13) against objections in §5; for present purposes I will assume that it is true.

Notice, now, that it is a familiar point that, although one may well suspect that *some* of one's

¹⁴ In the terminology of Pryor (2004), that would be a Type 4 dependence.

¹⁵ Perhaps one might challenge this, on the grounds that even if one knows y , it does not follow that y 's epistemic standing for one could not be improved (perhaps one's knowledge might be strengthened if one finds new evidence for y). Even so, it seems unlikely that the kind of inference in question here could have that effect. I cannot consider this issue in more detail here.

beliefs are held for bad reasons, one cannot *simultaneously* recognize that one's reason for believing p is r , and also doubt that r is good reason for p . Restricting our attention to *full* belief and reflective subjects that consider the reasons for their beliefs, this suggests the following:

(14) If one believes p by inference from r , one believes that p follows from r .

What exactly is the content of this belief that one proposition *follows from* another? This is a difficult question, which I cannot go into here. For present purposes, I will assume that one's belief that p follows from r is at least as strong as the material conditional $r \supset p$ — or, in the terminology I introduced back in §2, that r is not *misleading* with respect to p . (This should not be controversial. After all, we are focusing on cases in which one has a full belief in p , and so cases in which one is already fully committed to the truth of $r \supset p$.) Thus, we can get the following:

(15) If one believes p by inference from r , one believes that r is not misleading with respect to p .

Note that (15) does not claim that one needs *independent grounds* for believing that r is not misleading with respect to p . On the contrary, (13) and (15) together suggest that believing that r is not misleading with respect to p might be based on no grounds at all — it might just be *by-product* of one's believing p by inference from r .

Let us now consider the implication of these general points for dogmatism in particular. The dogmatist's characteristic claim is that one may know p by inference from r without having independent grounds for believing that r is not misleading with respect to p . If the above considerations are correct, then the dogmatist must nevertheless accept that one *believes that* r is not misleading with respect to p (assuming that one reflects upon the issue). This belief, moreover, can be based on no independent grounds: it must be simply a by-product of one's believing p by inference from r .

Furthermore, the dogmatist should admit that this belief has a very strong claim to the title of *knowledge*. For one thing, this belief in the relevant cases will be *true*: if one knows p , then p is true, and so is $r \supset p$. The question, then, is whether such a belief would be (epistemically)

rational or *justified*, even though it is based on no independent grounds. The dogmatist, I believe, has no choice but to say that it would be. For suppose that the subject *lacks* this belief — suppose, in particular, that the subject (fully) believes *p* by inference from *r*, recognizes that *r* is her reason for believing *p*, but nevertheless does not believe that *r* is not misleading with respect to *p*. Such a subject, it seems, is guilty of some sort of incoherence or irrationality. Assuming that dogmatism is true, and thus that the subject *knows p*, it would seem that the rational way out of the incoherence involves *believing that r* is not misleading with respect to *p*. It seems, then, that the dogmatist should accept that if one knows *p* by inference from *r*, one may rationally believe that *r* is not misleading with respect to *p*, even without evidence. Since in those cases *r* really is not misleading with respect to *p*, this is a strong *prima facie* case that the dogmatist should accept that it is a case of knowledge.¹⁶

If this is correct, then the dogmatist should accept the following:

- (16) If one knows *p* by inference from *r*, then one is in a position to know that *r* is not misleading with respect to *p*, even if one has no independent grounds for believing that *r* is not misleading with respect to *p*.

This, combined with (12), gives the dogmatist's explanation of why Moorean arguments are defective. They are defective because they are redundant: if one knows their premises, then one is in a position to know their conclusion, *via* another route.

There are important questions that must be answered about this account. First, one might take issue with (13): doesn't (13) insist on more self-knowledge than it is plausible to require for inferential knowledge? I will address this objection in §5. But even if the argument itself is granted, one might wonder whether it really changes the dialectical situation in dogmatism's favor. According to the view I have defended, dogmatism does not license Moorean inferences; but it must countenance a kind of non-inferential knowledge that might seem just as mysterious. Is this really a *gain* for dogmatism? I will discuss this question in §6.

¹⁶ I discuss objections to the possibility of such ungrounded knowledge in §6.

5. Luminosity

My argument above depends on (13), which embodies a *luminosity* claim — i.e., a claim to the effect that, for a certain condition C , one is in a position to know that it obtains in every case in which it does obtain.¹⁷ In particular, according to (13) if one believes p by inference from r , one is in a position to know that one does so. Although this claim seems intuitive, and many philosophers would accept it, it has also come in for some severe criticism. My goal in this section is not to defend (13) against all possible objections; it is only to indicate how it should be construed, so as to avoid some of the more obvious or prominent objections.

To begin with, notice that (13) is relatively modest, as luminosity claims go. For one thing, it does not say that one must *always* be in a position to know what one's reasons for one's beliefs are. It only concerns one very specific way of believing p — namely, by *inference*. There may be cases in which one simply finds oneself with a belief in p , and one is at a loss to explain *why* one believes p ; but such cases, it seems to me, are *ipso facto* not cases of inference. Moreover, (13) concerns only the propositions that play the role of *premises* in one's thinking. Typically, one's inferences take place in the context of much background knowledge, without which they might have been rationally unavailable to one (see Wright (2003) for a discussion of this phenomenon). (13) does not say anything about this background knowledge; it only requires that one be in a position to know what one's *premises* for a given inference are.¹⁸ (Notice also that (13) only requires that one be *in a position to* know one's reasons, not that one actually do so; thus, it allows for *unreflective* cases of inference.)

¹⁷ For this terminology, see Williamson (2000, 52, 95). Cases are equivalent to centered possible worlds, and conditions are equivalent to propositions — what is specified by “that”-clauses.

¹⁸ Williamson (2000, 184-208) argues for the thesis that one's evidence is all of what one knows. Clearly, Williamson's notion of evidence has no room for the distinction between propositions that play the role of premises in one's reasoning and propositions that belong to one's background knowledge. It follows from this that the claim that we are not always in a position to know what our evidence (in Williamson's sense) is is entirely compatible with (13).

Even though (13) is a relatively modest luminosity claim, it would still seem to fall within the scope of Williamson's (2000, 96-98) influential argument that *no* non-trivial condition is luminous. As I will argue in the rest of this section, however, there seems to be a way of construing (13) that avoids this argument too.

Williamson's argument, stripped down to its barest essentials, has the following structure. Suppose that C is a non-trivial condition, and a_1 to a_n a series of cases such that the difference between a_i and a_{i+1} is very slight for all i such that $1 \leq i \leq n$. C gradually goes from definitely obtaining in a_1 to definitely not obtaining in a_n . (Williamson's example is the condition of feeling cold: one definitely feels cold at dawn, and gradually goes to definitely not feeling cold by noon.) Williamson also holds that knowledge requires a margin for error principle:

- (17) If one is in a position to know that C obtains in a particular case, then C obtains — regardless of whether one knows, or indeed believes, that it does — in all relevantly similar cases.¹⁹

Cases in which one *knows that* C obtains, in other words, must be surrounded by cases in which C obtains (regardless of whether one believes that it does or not). In particular, for all i such that $1 \leq i \leq n$, if C obtains in a_i then C obtains in a_{i+1} . But now, it is easy to see that, if we assume that C is luminous — that whenever it obtains, one knows that it does — we are led to a contradiction. For, if C is luminous, then given that it obtains in a_1 one knows that it obtains in a_1 . But then, from the margin for error principle, it follows that C obtains in a_2 too. We can obviously argue in the same way all the way to the conclusion that C obtains in a_n — which, however, by hypothesis it does not. Thus, Williamson concludes, C is not luminous.

What should we conclude from this argument? Williamson claims that his result generalizes to *all* non-trivial conditions. If that were correct, then that would undermine (13). It

¹⁹ Williamson (2000, 129). My statement is cruder than Williamson's. Williamson adds that C 's obtaining is a function of a real-numbered parameter, which differs in value only slightly between a and a^* . Nothing in my argument hinges on this.

is, however, arguable that Williamson's claim is not correct. In particular, as some recent authors have noted — see Weatherston (2004), and especially Berker (2008), on which the argument of this section largely relies — it is arguable that there are conditions knowledge of which *does not* require a margin for error. If there are indeed such conditions, Williamson's argument does nothing to show that they cannot be luminous.

Williamson's defense of his margin for error principle rests on his *safety* condition for knowledge: if one knows that C obtains in a case a , then in every relevantly similar case a^* in which one believes that C obtains, C must indeed obtain.²⁰ Notice that this principle is not by itself a margin for error principle, and it does not suffice for the anti-luminosity argument. This is because safety says nothing about cases in which one *does not* believe that C obtains. Safety alone does not guarantee the inference from the fact that one knows that C obtains in a_i to the conclusion that C obtains in a_{i+1} , unless one also *believes that* C obtains in a_{i+1} .

Does safety nevertheless provide support for a margin for error principle, like (17)? The conditions under which one can derive a margin for error principle from safety are discussed by Williamson (2000, 127-129). We can derive a margin for error principle from safety if we assume that one's powers of discrimination with regard to C are limited, in the following sense: if one believes that C obtains in case a , then in any case a^* relevantly similar to a , one still believes that C obtains (regardless of whether C obtains in a^* or not). Now, if we add that one *knows* that C obtains in a , then it follows from safety that one's belief that C obtains in a^* is not false; hence C obtains in a^* . Thus, on the assumption of limited powers of discrimination, safety requires a

²⁰ Williamson (2000, 100, 128). Note that Williamson suggests that this is only a crude version of the safety principle, whose fuller statement would involve degrees of confidence, as well as consideration of the *basis* of one's belief in each case. Some have challenged about Williamson's anti-luminosity argument by questioning whether safety really is a necessary condition for knowledge (see Neta and Rohrbaugh (2004)). I will not discuss such arguments here; in the rest of the present section I will assume that safety *is* a necessary condition of knowledge. Nothing I say in the rest of this paper depends on this assumption.

margin for error: in order for one's belief that C obtains in a case a to be safe, a must be surrounded by cases where C obtains too.

Clearly, the crucial assumption here is that one's powers of discrimination with regard to C are limited. If there are conditions with regard to which our powers of discrimination are not limited in this way, then for those conditions safety will not entail a margin for error principle; and Williamson's argument will provide no reason to doubt that such conditions are luminous.²¹

It may seem incredible that there are such conditions: how can finite beings like ourselves have perfect powers of discrimination, with regard to any non-trivial condition? But this ignores the fact that beliefs may relate to their subject-matter in different ways. Sometimes our belief-forming mechanisms have the role of simply *detecting* how things are with their subject-matter. For example, our perceptual faculties have the role of putting us in touch with a reality which is entirely independent from the operation of those faculties. In such cases, it is indeed very plausible that our belief-forming mechanisms give us only limited powers of discrimination: there are bound to be cases in which one believes by perception that some condition C obtains, even though it fails to obtain. Hence, it is very plausible that knowledge of such conditions requires a margin for error, and thus that such conditions are not luminous.

But detection is not the only way in which beliefs may relate to their subject-matter: sometimes beliefs may partly *constitute* their subject-matter, in the sense that, for some condition C , it is a sufficient condition of C 's obtaining that one *believe* (perhaps after rational reflection) that C obtains. Most obviously, this is so for conditions such as the condition that there is at least one believer. But other, less contrived conditions might share this feature. For example, it is arguably sufficient for Fred's being a fan of the Pittsburgh Steelers that he *believe that* he is a fan of the Pittsburgh Steelers. If so, it is not the case that one's powers of discrimination with regard to C are limited: no case in which C fails to obtain will be a case in which one believes that C obtains, at least upon reflection. It follows that, for such a C , safety does not require a margin

²¹ This is the conclusion of Weatherson (2004) and Berker (2008) as well.

for error: in *any* case in which one believes that C obtains one's belief will be safe, regardless of how similar cases in which C does not obtain might be. For such a condition, Williamson's anti-luminosity argument does not get a grip.

The path is clear, then, for a defender of (13) to argue that our beliefs about our own reasons relate to their subject-matter *constitutively*: if one is rational and one actively considers the question, then it is a sufficient condition of r 's being one's reason for believing p by inference that one *believe that* r is one's reason for believing p by inference. If this is correct, then (13) may stand: if one believes p by inference from r , one is in a position to know that r is one's reason for believing p .

6. In Defense of Dogmatism

In this paper I have argued against the standard account of why Moorean reasoning is defective, and I proposed an alternative which is available to dogmatists. I framed this as a *defense* of dogmatism; and it is clear that my account, if true, would enable the dogmatist to explain why Moorean reasoning fails. But my account depends on the claim that one is in a position to know the conclusions of Moorean inferences non-inferentially and not on the basis of evidence. One might wonder whether being saddled with a commitment to this type of knowledge is any kind of dialectical *gain* for the dogmatist. I would like to close this paper by suggesting that it is.

On my account, if one knows p by inference from r one is in a position to know $\sim q$ — i.e., that r is not misleading with respect to p . This knowledge is non-inferential: as I explained in §4, it relies only on an exercise of one's capacity for self-knowledge. Therefore, to the extent that the intuitive difficulties with Moorean reasoning had to do with seeing how p could function *as a premise* in an inference to $\sim q$, these difficulties are avoided by my account. In this sense, then, my account is a defense of dogmatism.

Of course, one might wonder how the sort of knowledge of $\sim q$ that my account envisages is so much as possible: how could one know $\sim q$, without any grounds? In §4 I argued

that, *if* dogmatism is true, then there is a strong *prima facie* case to be made that such knowledge must be possible. After all, if dogmatism is correct one's belief that $\sim q$ is not only true, but also required by constraints of coherence. Since I think the intuitive attractions of dogmatism are strong, I am inclined to think that that such ungrounded knowledge is indeed possible. But, of course, if there is independent reason to think that such knowledge is impossible, we might have to conclude that dogmatism cannot be correct instead.

Why would one deny the possibility of such knowledge? Considerations of reliability cannot be to the point here. One's belief in $\sim q$ is guaranteed to be true at least as often as one's inferential belief in p is. Thus, if considerations of reliability do not prevent one from knowing p , they cannot prevent one from knowing $\sim q$.

Some might balk at the idea that one might ever be (epistemically) rational or justified in believing anything *without evidence*. The general question of what makes for rational belief is of course too large to take up here, but I think that this kind of radical evidentialism is not intuitively compelling. Suppose that Mary believes that whales are mammals. Other things being equal, Mary would be rational to believe that she believes that whales are mammals. But it does not seem that that this is because of any *evidence* that Mary has for the proposition that she believes that whales are mammals. What would such evidence consist in? We often attribute beliefs to others on the basis of behavioral evidence — for example, on the basis of what they say. But it seems clear that our beliefs about our *own* beliefs do not normally depend for their justification on such evidence. Moreover, although there are such things as feelings of conviction, it is clear that one may believe something without ever experiencing such feelings — for example, navigating across the room depends on a large number of egocentric beliefs about one's environment, which normally come and go without producing any feelings of conviction. It seems that our beliefs about our own beliefs may be rational, regardless of what (if any) evidence we have for them. If so, then the thesis that we may never rationally believe without evidence is false.

Thus I see no compelling reason to think that ungrounded knowledge is impossible. If this is right, then dogmatists are well-placed to explain what is going wrong with Moorean reasoning. It follows that arguments against dogmatism that focus on its alleged connection to Moorean reasoning fail.

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