

Boghossian's template and transmission failure

Alessia Marabini & Luca Moretti
Draft of Dec 16, 2016

ABSTRACT

Within his overarching program aiming to defend an epistemic conception of analyticity, Boghossian (1996 and 1997) has offered a clear-cut explanation of how we can acquire a priori knowledge of logical truths and logical rules through implicit definition. The explanation is based on a special template or general form of argument. Ebert (2005) has argued that an enhanced version of this template is flawed because a segment of it is unable to transmit warrant from its premises to the conclusion. This article aims to defend the template from this objection. We provide an accurate description of the type of non-transmissivity that Ebert attributes to the template and clarify why this is a novel type of non-transmissivity. Then, we argue that Jenkins (2008)'s response to Ebert fails because it focuses on doxastic rather than propositional warrant. Finally, we rebut Ebert's objection on Boghossian's behalf by showing that it rests on an unwarranted assumption and is internally incoherent.

Keywords: Boghossian's template; epistemic analyticity; implicit definitions; a priori, transmission failure; Boghossian; Ebert; Jenkins

1. Introduction¹

Within his overarching program aiming to defend an epistemic conception of analyticity, Boghossian (1996 and 1997) has offered a clear-cut explanation of how we can acquire a priori knowledge of logical truths and rules through implicit definition. The explanation is based on a template—namely, a general form of argument. Although Boghossian (2003a and 2003b) has subsequently switched to a different account of a priori knowledge,² many epistemologists—including Bonjour (1998), Glüer (2003), Ebert (2005), and Jenkins (2008)—have been keeping their attention on that template. One reason is that the template looks insightful—and thus interesting in itself—but also afflicted by difficulties. This article aims to defend an enhanced version of Boghossian's template from Ebert (2005)'s charge that this form of argument is flawed because a

¹ We thank Philip Ebert and Tommaso Piazza for helpful feedback on drafts of this paper.

² Criticized for instance in Williamson (2003) and Jenkins (2008).

segment of it cannot transmit warrant. Ebert's objection is remarkable because—as we will explain—the type of non-transmissivity he attributes to the template has gone unnoticed in key works on this topic (e.g., Wright 2002 and Moretti and Piazza 2013). In the following, we first argue that Jenkins (2008)'s rejoinder to Ebert fails because it focuses on doxastic rather than propositional justification, so it misses its target. Then, we contend that Boghossian can rebut Ebert's objection by showing that it rests on unwarranted assumptions and is internally incoherent.

The paper is organized as follows: § 2 outlines Boghossian's view of a priori logical knowledge. § 3 presents Boghossian's template and discusses some of its problems. § 4 introduces the notion failure of warrant transmission and cognate notions. § 5 presents Ebert's objection and analyzes the type of non-transmissivity attributed to the template. § 6 explains why Jenkins' rejoinder is unsuccessful and articulates our own response. § 7 concludes the paper.

2. Epistemic analyticity and a priori knowledge

Boghossian (1996 and 1997) attempts to rescue a notion of analyticity from Quine's celebrated criticism. Boghossian distinguishes between a metaphysical and an epistemic version of this concept. He argues that only the former notion, but not the latter, falls under Quine's attack (1996: 360-373 and 1997: 331-345). A sentence is *metaphysically* analytic just in case it owes its truth entirely to its meaning and without contribution from the "facts". Whereas a sentence is *epistemically* analytic just in case one's grasp of its meaning can suffice for one's knowledge of or warranted belief in the truth of the proposition it expresses (cf. Boghossian 1996: 363 and 1997: 334). Here 'warrant' refers to a type of internalist justification that turns mere true belief into knowledge (cf. Ebert 2005: 507).³ Epistemic analyticity is important because it helps us explain how there could be a priori knowledge—namely, knowledge attainable without the benefit of

³ This is the type of justification that Boghossian has in mind when he discusses a priori knowledge. So we will follow Ebert (2005) in focusing on warrant rather than generic justification.

empirical evidence—without invoking any special faculty of intuition or rational insight (cf. Boghossian 1996: 363 and 1997: 334).

A central challenge faced by advocates of epistemic analyticity lies in explaining how one's knowledge of the meaning of a sentence S could suffice for one's warranted belief in the truth of the proposition that S expresses (cf. 2003b: 18). Boghossian contends that a priori knowledge is made possible by *implicit definitions*. This is in particular true of our knowledge of logical principles, which appears to be recalcitrant to other types of explanation (cf. 1996: 373-374 and 1997: 345-346). Logical truths are epistemically analytic because one's grasp of them suffices for one's warranted belief in their truth. Inference rules are epistemically analytic because one's grasp of them suffices for one's warranted belief in their validity. The idea of implicit definition is roughly this (cf. 1996: 376 and 1997: 348): it is arbitrarily stipulated that certain sentences are to be true or that certain inferences are to be valid (these are the *implicit definienda*), and that certain components of those sentences or inferences (these are the *implicit definienda*) are to be interpreted in any way that renders those sentences true or those inferences valid.⁴ Accordingly, a logical constant means that logical object, if any, which makes a specified set of sentences or inferences involving the constant respectively true or valid. For instance, we could say that it is by one's arbitrarily stipulating that the sentence

It is not the case that P and not P

is to be true, that one comes to mean *negation* by the logical constant 'not'. And we could say that it is by one's arbitrarily stipulating that all inferences of the form:

P .
If P then Q .
Therefore, Q .

⁴ As Quine (1936) has argued, the meaning of the logical constants cannot be fixed by *explicit* stipulations. For making an explicit stipulation requires using logic. In response, Boghossian suggests that the meaning of the logical constants is fixed by our *acceptance* of certain sentences or inference rules, where this acceptance amounts to a *tacit* stipulation of the truth of those sentences or the validity of those rules (cf. Boghossian 1996: 380-382 and 1997: 352-354).

are to be valid that one comes to mean *if* by the logical constant ‘if’ (cf. 2003b: 20-21). The inferences by means of which a logical constant is implicitly defined correspond to its introduction and elimination rules.

To explain our a priori knowledge of logical truths and rules, Boghossian contends that our knowledge of the meaning of the logical constants together with our knowledge of how their meaning is fixed by implicit definitions put us in a position to know premises from which we can infer that the sentences or the inference rules that serve to determine that meaning are, respectively, true or valid (cf. 1996: 376 and 1997: 348). Let’s see how this machinery works in detail. (A detailed presentation of Boghossian’s overall view is in Marabini 2013).

3. Boghossian’s template

According to Boghossian, we have a priori knowledge of logical rules because we can use instances of the following argument schema to warrantedly conclude that the inference rules are valid:

(TEMPLATE)

(1) If *C* is to mean what it does, then *A* has to be valid...

(2) *C* means what it does.

Therefore,

(3) *A* is valid.

(Boghossian 1996: 386 and 1997: 357)

A priori knowledge of logical *truths* is available to us because we can use instances of an analogous template to warrantedly conclude that the relevant sentences are true. (1) is a material conditional. (2) and (3) are taken to be equivalent to, respectively, its antecedent and its consequent. *C* stands for a logical constant—e.g., the connective ‘and’. *A* stands for a related inference rule, for example, one of the *and-elimination* rules—e.g., ‘*P* and *Q* \Rightarrow *Q*’ (where ‘ \Rightarrow ’ represent inference). (1) is an implicit definition of *C*.

Four remarks are in order. First, for Boghossian, ‘to say that A is epistemically analytic for [a subject] T is to say that T ’s knowledge of A ’s meaning alone suffices for T ’s justification for A [’s validity]’ (1996: 386 and 1997: 356). (TEMPLATE) is introduced by Boghossian to show that—in accordance with his epistemic notion of analyticity— T ’s knowledge of the meaning of A can provide T with a warranted belief that A is valid through T ’s reasoning. (TEMPLATE) is meant to show this by showing that T ’s grasp of the meaning of a logical constant C occurring in A suffices to warrant T ’s belief in A ’s validity. Boghossian assumes that T ’s knowing the meaning of A involves T ’s knowing the meaning of its constituents.

Second. Boghossian admits that (TEMPLATE) fulfills its role only if ‘knowledge of the meaning of A ’ is interpreted *loosely* to refer to, not just the knowledge of what A means, but also the knowledge of how A ’s meaning is fixed via implicit definitions of its terms (cf. 1996: 386 and 1997: 357).

Third. The warrant that T acquires for (3) via (TEMPLATE) is *inferential*. Boghossian must assume, therefore, that T will arrive at having this warrant for (3) on the basis of a warrant for its premises (1) and (2) and a *warrant for taking (TEMPLATE) to be valid*. Accordingly, Boghossian’s claim that saying that A is epistemically analytic for T is saying that T ’s knowledge of A ’s meaning suffices for T ’s justification for A must be interpreted as including an implicit clause. Boghossian must mean that T ’s knowledge of A ’s meaning suffices for T ’s justification for A *provided that T has a warrant for taking (TEMPLATE) to be valid*.⁵

Fourth. Boghossian acknowledges that the man in the street has warrant for believing elementary logical principles. However, Boghossian admits that the way in which the meanings of

⁵ A concern might be that this clause cannot be satisfied when (TEMPLATE) instantiates *rule circularity*—i.e., in the special cases in which (TEMPLATE) uses the very rule that is asserted to be valid in its conclusion (we give an example below). In these cases T cannot be required to possess an antecedent warrant for believing that the rule used in the template is valid to acquire warrant for its conclusion. But we doubt this concern should be seconded. For the clause described above wouldn’t necessarily require T to have a warrant for believing *the relevant rule* to be valid in these cases. The clause would only require T to have a warrant for believing *the specific instance* of the rule instantiated by (TEMPLATE) to be valid. We think that some of Boghossian’s responses to the problem of rule circularity are compatible with the satisfaction of this requirement.

logical constants are fixed will be unknown to such a person. Also, he wouldn't be able to frame this knowledge into (TEMPLATE), should he possess it. So (TEMPLATE) seems unable to explain the warrant that ordinary people have. To address this issue, Boghossian distinguishes between (proper) warrant and *entitlement*. Warrant is possessed by those who know or can easily know the relevant instances of the premises of (TEMPLATE) and can competently infer the conclusion. Entitlement is an *epistemic right*. One can have a right even if one isn't and cannot become aware of it. The fact that the relevant instances of (TEMPLATE) are available to similar beings but with reflexive faculties more developed is what give the man in the street an *entitlement* to believe elementary logically principles, even if the man in the street couldn't appeal to (TEMPLATE) to get warrant for them (cf. 1996: 387 and 1997: 357-358).

Let's go through (TEMPLATE). Take *T* to be a competent speaker. The content of (2) might look obscure at first. Suppose *C* stands for 'and'. (2) then becomes

'and' means *and*

where *and* is the familiar meaning or concept that 'and' expresses.⁶ Boghossian assumes that competent speakers have privileged access to the meanings of their language's terms. Accordingly, *T* will have privileged access to *C*'s meaning. Since *C* is a meaningful term that *T* grasps, *T* will have a warrant for believing that *C* means what it does. So *T* will have a warrant for believing (2).

Let's turn to (1). Call an *implicit definer* of *C* any inference or sentence *A* used to implicitly define *C*. Suppose *T* knows that *C*'s meaning is fixed by a given implicit definition and that *A* is an implicit definer of *C*. Hence, *T* knows that *C* means what it does only if *A* is valid. For *C* couldn't have its meaning if there were no logical object making all its implicit definers valid. *T* thus has a warrant for believing (1).

⁶ Ebert (2005: 509) also considers a *deflationary* reading of (2), according to which *C* means *whatever C* means. But he discards it. For this reading runs into difficulties at the additional "disquotational" step of Boghossian's template, which we discuss below. This step requires *T* to have a *substantial* understanding of *C* (cf. Jenkins 2008: § IV).

By modus ponens, T can warrantably infer (3) from (1) and (2). Since T has a warrant for both (1) and (2), T possesses a warrant for (3)—i.e., for believing that A is valid.

Boghossian's account of logical knowledge resting on (TEMPLATE) is open to criticism. Boghossian (1996: 374 and 1997: 346) himself raises a problem of *rule circularity*. To have warrant for believing (3), T must have warrant for (TEMPLATE)'s premises and know that they entail (3). Take C to be 'if' and A *modus ponens*. Modus ponens is the inference rule to derive (3) from (1) and (2). The instance of (TEMPLATE) in this case *uses* the very rule that its conclusion states to be valid. If to possess warrant for drawing an inference by modus ponens T must have a warrant for *believing* modus ponens to be valid, it will be impossible for T to acquire such a warrant via (TEMPLATE). Boghossian (1996, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2003a, 2003b) has proposed various solutions to this problem, which we cannot hope to discuss here. (TEMPLATE) has been targeted by other objections. Bonjour (1998: 49-51) and Glüer (2003: 57-58) argue that the way in which Boghossian's explain a priori knowledge is *epistemically circular*. Roughly, they contend that T can have a warrant for believing (2) only if T has an independent warrant for believing (3). Boghossian (2003b: 22-24) has responded to both objections. Yet Jenkins (2008) has articulated a version of Bonjour's criticism that Boghossian hasn't addressed. We intend to respond to Jenkins elsewhere. Our goal here is answering Ebert (2005)'s argument that Boghossian's template cannot transmit warrant.⁷

4. Warrant transmission failure

Let's say that T has a *propositional* warrant for P just in case P is epistemically worthy of being believed by T whether or not T believes P for the right reason or at all. Let's say that T has a *doxastic* warrant for P just in case T has a propositional warrant for P and actually believes P for the right reason. Hereafter, when we write 'warrant' we will generally mean *propositional* warrant.

⁷ Ebert (2005: § II) clarifies that his objection doesn't depend on rule circularity. Jenkins (2008: 126) claims that her objection isn't that Boghossian's template cannot transmit warrant.

We focus on propositional (rather than doxastic) warrant because the debate on warrant transmission failure concentrates on the propositional warrant (cf. Moretti & Piazza 2013: § 1).⁸ Also, Ebert (2005) appeals to Wright (2002)'s notion of transmission failure, which applies to propositional warrant. Let's distinguish between *closure of warrant* and *transmission of warrant*. Let T_B be any subject with background knowledge B . A basic formulation of the *closure* principle says that for any P and Q , if T_B has a warrant for believing P and knows that P entails Q ,⁹ T_B has warrant for believing Q . Suppose now T_B has evidence E in support of P . Wright (2002: 332) says that T_B 's warrant for believing P depending on E *transmits* across the entailment from P to Q just in case: (i) T_B has a warrant for believing P from E , (ii) T_B knows that P entails Q , and (iii) T_B has a warrant for believing Q *in virtue of* the satisfaction of (i) and (ii).¹⁰

Closure has been rarely questioned in epistemology but it is widely recognized that transmission sometimes fails. Interesting cases are those in which (i) and (ii) are satisfied but (iii) isn't. In these cases, T_B has a warrant for Q but not in virtue of the satisfaction of (i) and (ii). Suppose T_B 's background knowledge B includes the information that Jim and Jeff are indistinguishable twins, and consider this argument:

(TWINS)
 (I) The guy before me is Jim.
 Therefore,
 (II) This guy before is not Jeff.

Take T_B 's evidence for (I) to be the proposition E that this guy looks like Jim. E can give T_B a warrant for believing (I) only if T_B has *independent* warrant for believing (II). Suppose T_B has such an independent warrant. As T_B learns E , T_B has warrant for believing (I). Furthermore, T_B knows

⁸ It is dubious or controversial that there are cases of warrant transmission failure involving *doxastic* warrant. Cf. Silins (2005) and Tucker (2010).

⁹ Possibly, given B .

¹⁰ Whenever we speak of transmission or failure of transmission of warrant, we mean *first-time* warrant.

that (I) entails (II). Yet in this epistemic setting T_B cannot have a warrant for (II) *in virtue of* her warrant for (I) depending on E and her knowledge that (I) entails (II).

Let's say that a deductive argument from P to Q given background knowledge B is *non-transmissive* of warrant depending on E for P across the entailment just in case condition (iii) couldn't be satisfied even if conditions (i) and (ii) were satisfied (cf. Moretti and Piazza 2013: § 3.1). Non-transmissive arguments are epistemically flawed because they are *structurally* incapable of conveying warrant to their conclusion. Wright has individuated the following condition sufficient for non-transmissivity:

(FAIL) E gives T_B a warrant for believing P only if T has an independent warrant for believing Q .

(Cf. Wright 2002: 332)

(TWINS) satisfies (FAIL). Why does (FAIL) suffice for non-transmissivity? Suppose the notion of *in virtue of* is given a *counterfactual* interpretation. (iii) can then be re-formulated as follows:

(III*) T_B has a warrant for Q , but if T_B hadn't a warrant for P based on E or hadn't known that P entails Q , T_B would have had no warrant for Q .

If (FAIL) is fulfilled, it is false that if T_B hadn't known that P entails Q , T_B would have had no warrant for Q . For if T_B has a warrant for P from E , T_B must have a warrant for Q . So (III*) is false (cf. Moretti and Piazza 2013: § 3.2).

5. Ebert's objection

Ebert contends—correctly, in our view—that Boghossian's (TEMPLATE) is incomplete, for its conclusion (3)—stating that A is valid—is *metalinguistic*. The problem is that (TEMPLATE) is introduced by Boghossian to show that T 's *knowledge of the meaning* of A can provide T with a warranted belief that A is valid. However, T could go through (TEMPLATE) to conclude that A is valid *without knowing the meaning of A* . This is possible because:

The meaning-constituting rules for [*C*...] might be written in Chinese and, as it happens, [*T*'s] Chinese friend tells [*T*] that premise (1) and (2) are true without telling [*T*] which connective he is talking about. Surely, [*T*] would be able to assent to the conclusion [(3)] and agree such and such signs represent valid rules of inference, without grasping the content of the rule in question. That is, it seems questionable—to say the least—that the template as stated is sufficient to provide the right type of warranted belief in the rules/principle [*A*].

(Ebert 2005: 510)

A further step is thus needed to take *T* from a metalinguistic claim like (3) to a first-order claim that *T* understands.¹¹ Accordingly, the adjusted version of (TEMPLATE) put forward by Ebert comes with a fourth “disquotational” step. For ease of exemplification, Ebert interprets *C* as the connective ‘and’ and *A* as one of the *and-elimination* rules—namely, ‘ P and $Q \Rightarrow P$ ’. Here is the adjusted framework:

(TEMPLATE’)

(1’) If ‘and’ is to mean what it does, then ‘ P and $Q \Rightarrow P$ ’ has to be valid.

(2’) ‘and’ means what it does.

(3’) ‘ P and $Q \Rightarrow P$ ’ is valid.

(4’) P and $Q \Rightarrow P$.

(Cf. 2005: 510-511)

(4’) is the “disquotational” step.¹² Ebert (2005: § IV) argues that the entailment from (3’) to (4’) is non-transmissive. So Boghossian would face a dilemma: either he adopts the “disquotational” step and subjects his account to the charge of being non-transmissive, or he drops this additional step leaving the account confronted with the charge of being metalinguistic and thus incomplete (cf. 2005: 256).

We submit that Boghossian can comfortably sit on the first horn,¹³ as the charge of non-transmissivity is fallacious. Before engaging with Ebert’s case, we should settle a last issue. Jenkins (2008: 117) notes that it is hard to make sense of the claim that the entailment from (3’) to (4’) is

¹¹ Jenkins (2008: 117) agrees on this.

¹² This is not a real disquotation, as disquotation applies *truth* rather than validity.

¹³ Boghossian (2003b: 21) himself proposes a re-formulation ‘not materially different’ of (TEMPLATE) that includes a *disquotational* step. So he would probably go this way.

non-transmissive. For, since Ebert uses ‘ \Rightarrow ’ to represent an *inference*,¹⁴ (4’) expresses no *proposition*. Thus there is no entailment from (3’) to (4’). To obviate this difficulty, Jenkins replaces (4’) with:

$$(4^*) P \text{ and } Q \models P.$$

(4*) expresses a schematic proposition saying that P is a logical consequence of P and Q . (4*) is the statement of the *and-elimination* rule asserted to be valid in (3’).

Jenkins’s fix is helpful but still problematic. For the sentence quoted in (3’) isn’t (4*). Thus T ’s understanding (4*) doesn’t guarantee that T understands the sentence quoted in (3’).¹⁵ To settle things once and for all let’s adjust (TEMPLATE) in a way that the *whole* argument is about, not the validity of an inferential rule, but the truth of a statement of the rule. This means turning (TEMPLATE’) into:

(TEMPLATE*)

(1*) If ‘and’ is to mean what it does, then ‘ P and $Q \models P$ ’ has to be true.

(2*) ‘and’ means what it does.

(3*) ‘ P and $Q \models P$ ’ is true.

(4*) P and $Q \models P$.

This framework is sufficiently close to Boghossian’s original template.¹⁶ Ebert himself concedes that (TEMPLATE’) could indifferently be formulated as (TEMPLATE*), as this variant would still fall afoul his charge of non-transmissivity. Ebert writes: ‘nothing hinges on this variation since my

¹⁴ Cf. Ebert (2005: 511, note 12).

¹⁵ Suppose ‘ \Rightarrow ’ is unknown to T . Imagine that, nevertheless, T ’s friend understands that symbol and tells T that (1’) is true and that (3’) implies (4*). T would arrive at warrantably believing that ‘ P and $Q \Rightarrow P$ ’ is valid without grasping the content of the quoted sentence.

¹⁶ If ‘ $R(C)$ ’ is the statement of an implicit definer of ‘ C ’, the general form is this:

- (1) If ‘ C ’ is to mean what it does, then ‘ $R(C)$ ’ has to be true.
- (2) ‘ C ’ means what it does.
- (3) ‘ $R(C)$ ’ is true.
- (4) $R(C)$.

argument concerns a *structural* difficulty with Boghossian's template' (2005: 511, note 12).

Accordingly, we will construe Ebert's arguments to apply specifically to (TEMPLATE*).

Ebert contends that (TEMPLATE*) is flawed because the entailment from (3*) to (4*) is non-transmissive. He argues that *T* could warrantedly take (4*) to be deducible from (3*) via disquoting ' P and $Q \models P$ ' only if *T* grasped the concepts used in the quoted sentence, which would in turn require *T* to *know the meaning of* (4*). Thus, since (4*) is epistemically analytic, by Boghossian's very lights, *T* should have an independent warrant for believing (4*). This would make the entailment from (3*) to (4*) non-transmissive.

Before going into further details, note that Ebert's explanation of non-transmissivity doesn't *fully* match Wright's explanation of non-transmissivity resting on (FAIL).¹⁷ Consider a thinker *T* (provided with background knowledge *B*), a deductive argument from *P* to *Q*, and evidence *E*. (FAIL) says this: *E* gives *T* a warrant for believing *P* only if *T* has an independent warrant for believing *Q*. Whereas the condition for non-transmissivity that *seems* to be satisfied by the argument from (3*) to (4*) says this: *T* warrantedly believes (or knows) that *P* entails *Q* only if *T* has an independent warrant for believing *Q*. If this condition is satisfied, it is intuitive that *T* cannot have a warrant for believing *Q* *in virtue of* (among other factors) her having a warrant for believing *P*. We concede that *if* an argument satisfies this condition, *then* it is non-transmissive.

If the entailment from (3*) to (4*) were non-transmissive in the sense explained, (TEMPLATE*) would be flawed because *T*'s having a warrant for (3*) would be unnecessary for *T*'s having a warrant for (4*). So, *T*'s having warrant for (1*) and (2*) and *T*'s knowing that (1*) and (2*) entail (3*) would also be unnecessary for *T*'s having a warrant for (4*). Thus, (TEMPLATE*) would be redundant. *T* could acquire a warrant for believing (4*) by just appreciating that (3*) entails (4*).

¹⁷ Indeed, it doesn't correspond to any of the explanations based on the alternative conditions for transmission failure described in Moretti and Piazza (2013) and Wright (2002, 2003, 2007 and 2011). We are grateful to Roberta Leporati for bringing this fact to our attention.

Here is Ebert's detailed explanation of why the argument from (3*) to (4*) is non-transmissive:

To have a warrant for disquoting the sentence in (3*), *T* has to have an understanding of the second premise, i.e., (2*). The idea here is that in order to be justified to disquote, *T* has to be in possession of the concept involved—in our case 'and'—which is just the content of the second premise. However, in order to understand the second premise, that is, to understand the intended referent of 'and' (which is the content of the second premise), *T* has to understand the role this term plays in appropriate sentences, due to an application of the Context Principle, i.e., *T* has to have a previous grasp of statements like the conclusion in Boghossian's argument. But, to have an understanding of the conclusion involves knowledge of the meaning of this statement.

However, and this is the crux of the argument, the logical principles in question are, for Boghossian, to be regarded as epistemically analytic. Hence, we can assume Boghossian's conception of epistemic analyticity, according to which, *T* can have knowledge of the meaning of a sentence only if *T* has a warrant for the truth of such sentences. Thus, assuming the transitivity of the conditional, *T* can have a warrant for disquoting the sentence in (3*) in (TEMPLATE*) only if *T* has a prior warrant for the truth of the conclusion.

(2005: 512-513, edited)

Ebert's claims in the initial part of this long quotation are plausible. *T* can warrantably disquote a sentence only if *T* grasps the concepts involved by the meaning of that sentence. For—as Ebert emphasizes—it is trivially true that *T* can warrantably disquote a sentence only if she understands it (cf. 2005: 511-512).¹⁸ To warrantably disquote ' P and $Q \models P$ ', *T* must understand 'and'. Furthermore, once the Context Principle is assumed, it is plausible that *T*'s understanding of 'and' requires *T* to understand sentences involving 'and' such as (4*). The Context Principle—in its simplest formulation—says that the basic unit of semantic understanding is something larger than a word. On this Principle, to grasp the meaning of a term, *T* must know the role played by it in various sentences. The Context Principle is largely accepted. We have no reason to think that

¹⁸ So Ebert acknowledge at the outset that *T* must *understand* ' P and $Q \models P$ '. A puzzling question is why Ebert doesn't simply move from this acknowledgment directly to the penultimate step of his argument, according to which *T* can understand ' P and $Q \models P$ ' only if *T* knows its meaning. Any intermediate step looks unnecessary to us.

Boghossian would reject it.¹⁹ Finally, it is credible that *T* can understand (4*) only if *T* knows the meaning of (4*).

Nevertheless, the conclusion that Ebert draws in the second part of the above quotation—that *T* can have a warrant for disquoting the sentence in (3*) only if *T* has a prior warrant (4*)—is *unjustified*. Ebert arrives at this conclusion because he arbitrarily assumes that *T* is equipped with background knowledge that *T* need not have. We expand on this in the next section.

6. Responding to Ebert

Before articulating our own response, we would like to criticize Jenkins (2008: 118-119)'s independent rejoinder. Jenkins suggests that if pressed with Ebert's objection, Boghossian can reply as follows: saying that (4*) is epistemically analytic for *T* is saying—precisely—that if *T* knows the meaning of (4*), a warrant for believing (4*) is thereby *available* to *T* but not necessarily *possessed* by *T*. To possess that warrant for (4*), *T* should satisfy the additional condition of *running through the steps of (TEMPLATE*) to infer (4*)*.²⁰ This would defuse Ebert's objection because Boghossian 'can safely deny that the warrant [for (4*)] is possessed [by *T*] prior to running through the argument' (2008: 118).

Although somewhat insightful, this response is a non-starter, as it is about the wrong type of warrant.²¹ As stressed above, Ebert's argument is to the effect that (TEMPLATE*) is non-transmissive of *propositional* warrant for (4*). However, the warrant for (4*) Jenkins is speaking of has the following feature: *T* won't possess it until *T* doesn't *come to warrantedly believe* (4*). This is a *doxastic* warrant. Jenkins argues that the thesis that (TEMPLATE*) is non-transmissive of *doxastic* warrant for (4*) is false. There is thus a mismatch between the target of Ebert's objection

¹⁹ A worry might be this: on the Context Principle, *T* has to understand *some* sentences in which 'and' occurs in order to possess this concept, but these sentences may not include (4*). But this look implausible after a second thought: presumably, *T* can grasp the meaning of 'and' if she at least knows what role this term plays in its own *meaning-constituting* sentences, which include (4*) (cf. Ebert 2005: 514).

²⁰ More accurately, Jenkins focuses on her own version of the template.

²¹ Although independently conceived, the first of our responses to Ebert can be seen as a correct formulation of Jenkins' rejoinder applied to the right type of warrant.

and the one of Jenkins' response. Jenkins' response cannot rebut Ebert's argument because it doesn't engage with it.

If the claim that (TEMPLATE*) is transmissive of doxastic justification is correct, one might try to defend (TEMPLATE*) from Ebert's attack by arguing that (TEMPLATE*) is epistemically serviceable, regardless of Ebert's objection, because it transmits *doxastic* warrant.²² But one need not take such an indirect route to shield (TEMPLATE*) from Ebert's criticism. We will now show that Boghossian has two effective responses at hand. Boghossian can rejoin that Ebert's objection rests on an unwarranted assumption and that, even if the assumption were granted, the objection would be internally incoherent. To be fair with Ebert, we want to emphasize that these responses are based on an *interpretation* of Ebert's claims. We think that our interpretation is, nevertheless, a plausible and charitable reading of those claims.

The property of being transmissive or non-transmissive of an argument is typically defined in relation to some *background knowledge* B ²³ (cf. Wright 2003: 58). For example, one of the reasons why (TWINS) is non-transmissive is that T 's B includes the warranted belief that Jim and Jeff are indistinguishable. If B included, instead, the warranted belief that Jim and Jeff don't look alike, everything else being the same (TWINS) would be transmissive. While discussing the alleged non-transmissivity of (TEMPLATE*), we have followed Ebert and Jenkins in leaving reference to T 's background knowledge B implicit. It is now important to make reference to B explicit.

Ebert contends that the entailment from (3*) to (4*) is non-transmissive because if T warrantably believed that (3*) entails (4*), T would understand and thus know the meaning of ' P and $Q \models P$ '. Consequently, *on the very basis of Boghossian's conception of epistemic analyticity*, T would have an independent warrant for believing ' P and $Q \models P$ '—namely, (4*). On Boghossian's conception, T is taken to acquire the warrant for (4*) *through reasoning* (rather than intuition or

²² This is Silins (2005)'s strategy to respond to non-transmissivity objections.

²³ Rather than speaking of background *knowledge* one could speak of background *belief*, provided that 'belief' means *warranted* belief.

rational insight). This reasoning is the one licensed by (TEMPLATE*). Thus, T would have this independent warrant for (4*) only if T knew that (TEMPLATE*) is valid. However, T 's mere understanding the meaning of ' P and $Q \models P$ ' doesn't require T to know that (TEMPLATE*) is valid. Therefore, Ebert's objection relies—or seems to rely—on the implicit assumption that T 's background knowledge B *independently* includes the warranted belief that (TEMPLATE*) is valid.

Boghossian can then legitimately respond that this assumption is implausible, or at very best unjustified. For even if T weren't the man in the street but an individual intellectually sophisticated, the claim that T *wouldn't know* that (TEMPLATE*) is valid looks utterly reasonable. More precisely, what looks reasonable is this: although T wouldn't know that (TEMPLATE*) is valid, T would be *in a position to know* it. For T could easily come to know that (TEMPLATE*) is valid if T only *entertained* (TEMPLATE*) and *analyzed* the logical relations among its component sentences. Suppose, therefore, that T doesn't know that (TEMPLATE*) is valid though T is in a position to know it. Boghossian can reasonably claim that, in these circumstances, if T knew the meaning of ' P and $Q \models P$ ', T would at best be *in a position to have* an independent (propositional) warrant for believing (4*). For T would *possess* this (propositional) warrant for (4*) only if T actually came to know that (TEMPLATE*) is valid. Boghossian can thus rebut Ebert's objection. For T 's being in a position to have an independent warrant for believing (4*), without possessing it, doesn't make the entailment from (3*) to (4*) non-transmissive.

Let's consider possible replies. Ebert might complain that Boghossian's conception of epistemic analyticity can enable T to get a warrant for (4*) from her knowing the meaning of ' P and $Q \models P$ ' with the help of *variants* of (TEMPLATE*). This doesn't sound implausible²⁴ but it doesn't change much. For T need not have any variant of (TEMPLATE*) in B . One might go farther and claim that T can acquire a warrant for believing (4*) from her knowing the meaning of ' P and $Q \models P$ ' on the grounds of a conception of a priori knowledge different from Boghossian's,

²⁴ Boghossian (2003b: 21) actually discusses one variant of this type.

or that T can acquire such a warrant for (4*) in this way simply because it is strongly intuitive that T could do so. A problem with these claims is that they go *too far*. Ebert doesn't argue that Boghossian's template-based account of analyticity is problematic because there are alternative accounts at hand, or because we need no philosophical explanation of our priori knowledge in some cases. What Ebert contends—or seems to contend—is that Boghossian's account is flawed because it is in a sense *internally* flawed.

Ebert (2005) himself considers a possible response to his non-transmissivity argument that is similar to the one we have articulated above (though less detailed). Ebert concedes that Boghossian could rejoin that T 's mere knowing the meaning of ' P and $Q \models P$ ' would only put T in a position to have a warrant for believing (4*) without making T possess it, unless additional conditions are met. Ebert insists that such a rejoinder would nevertheless either force Boghossian to revise his position by introducing further principles 'to such an extent that the conception of epistemic analyticity hardly does any work in an epistemology of the a priori' (2005: 517), or—if Boghossian didn't introduce any new principle—it would yield serious problems 'that are reminiscent of a transmission of warrant-failure' (ibid.). As it would become hard to explain T 's possession of a warrant for (TEMPLATE*)'s premises and conclusion.

We think that Boghossian would *not* be impaled on this dilemma. For, to begin with, the rejoinder we have suggested is in harmony with his conception of epistemic analyticity.²⁵ Moreover, the rejoinder doesn't engender any discernable problem to the explanation of T 's possession of warrant.

Boghossian asserts that when A is epistemically analytic for T , T 's knowledge of A 's meaning suffices for T 's warrant for A . However, as we have suggested, this sufficient condition includes an implicit clause: that T must also know that the reasoning she uses to acquire the warrant for A is valid. If this implicit clause weren't met, T would only be in a position to have a warrant for

²⁵ The conception defended in Boghossian (1996 and 1997).

A. Thus, Boghossian need not revise his conception to claim that *T*'s mere knowing the meaning of ' P and $Q \models P$ ' can only put *T* in a position to have a warrant for (4*).

Let's come to Ebert's second point. Ebert argues that the suggested rejoinder would nevertheless be very problematic. His argument appeals to an internalist assumption—let's call it (IA)—according to which any adequate account of a subject *T*'s possession of a warrant (for cases similar to the one at stake) must entail that if *T* has a warrant for a proposition, *T* can in principle *reflect* on her warrant and *claim* possession of it (cf. 2005: 517). This is Ebert's condensed argument:

According to the above rejoinder on behalf of Boghossian, to possess the warrant for making the Disquotational Step involves the mere availability of a warrant... for the conclusion [of the template]. However, from a reflective stance *to claim to possess a warrant* for this premise also involves a *claim to have available* a warrant for the conclusion. Thus, we need to ask on what grounds can [a subject] make the *claim to have available* a warrant for the conclusion? ... [Apparently,] the only ... route to make such a claim ... is to proceed via the template, reflect on it, and agree that it is correct. This would provide a claim to have available a warrant for the conclusion. However, this ... [method] is ... insufficient in order to claim to have a warrant available for the conclusion, as it presupposes ... that the subject is in a position to go through the argument and consider whether she can claim to *possess* a warrant for the premises. Thus, no progress is made and the initial problem re-occurs. As a result, I believe that Boghossian's template is still insufficient in providing genuine warrants for holding true certain logical principles.

(2005: 517-518)

We can re-construct Ebert's reasoning as follows: if *T* is able to claim possession of a warrant for (TEMPLATE*)'s premises, then *T* must be independently able to claim to have available a warrant for (TEMPLATE*)'s conclusion. This is so because the first claim by *T*—according to Ebert—involves the second. Suppose now that (in line with our suggested rejoinder) *T* possesses a warrant for (TEMPLATE*)'s premises but *T* is only in a position to have a warrant for (TEMPLATE*)'s conclusion. If this is the case, *T* couldn't claim possession of a warrant for (TEMPLATE*)'s premises. For—according to Ebert—*T* would not be independently capable of

claiming to have available a warrant for (TEMPLATE*)'s conclusion. Since *T* couldn't claim possession of a warrant for (TEMPLATE*)'s premises, given the internalist assumption (IA), *T* wouldn't *possess* a warrant for (TEMPLATE*)'s premises, and thus for (4*).

Even if we grant Ebert (IA), his argument is afflicted by difficulties. As some of its steps look *prima facie* unwarranted. We can discuss only one of these problems here. A crucial assumption by Ebert is that 'from a reflective stance *to claim to possess a warrant for* [(TEMPLATE*)' premises] *also involves a claim to have available a warrant for the conclusion*'. Ebert seems to think that, given this, *T* can claim possession of a warrant for (TEMPLATE*)'s premises only if *T* is able to claim to have available a warrant for (TEMPLATE*)'s conclusion. However, as Jenkins (2007: 119) notes, the claim that *T* has available a warrant for (TEMPLATE*)'s conclusion is not part of the *content* of the claim that *T* possesses a warrant for (TEMPLATE*)'s premises. It is thus dubious that, from a reflective stance, the latter claim involves the former claim. It is dubious, therefore, that *T* can claim possession of a warrant for (TEMPLATE*)'s premises only if *T* is able to claim to have available a warrant for (TEMPLATE*)'s conclusion.

The problem is more serious: in the scenario outlined by Ebert, the above conditional looks, not just dubious, but false. Suppose *T* reflected on the warrant she has for (TEMPLATE*)'s premises and *appreciated* that (TEMPLATE*) is valid. In this case, *T* would presumably *possess* a (propositional) warrant for (4*). So *T* could *not* fit into Ebert's scenario, which assumes that *T* doesn't possess this warrant. If, on the other hand, *T* reflected on the warrant she has for (TEMPLATE*)'s premises but *failed* to appreciate that (TEMPLATE*) is valid, *T* would fit into Ebert's scenario—at least in the sense that *T* would not possess a warrant for (4*). In these circumstances, *T* would be able to *claim* possession of a warrant for the premises of (TEMPLATE*). However, it is intuitive that *T* would *not* be able to *claim* to have available a

warrant for (TEMPLATE*)'s conclusion. Thus, a key premise of Ebert's reasoning (in our reconstruction) cannot be true. Ebert's argument is unsound.

Let's consider a last possible response to the rejoinder to Ebert's non-transmissivity objection that we have suggested on Boghossian's behalf. Ebert might concede that T 's background knowledge B won't *typically* include the belief that (TEMPLATE*) is valid, while insisting that his non-transmissivity objection would nevertheless go through whenever B included this belief. Admittedly, this wouldn't be a strong objection. Nevertheless, we want to show that Boghossian could reject it too because his rejoinder—i.e., the one we are going to suggest on his behalf—will unveil a second, lethal flaw in Ebert's non-transmissivity case: the argument is incoherent.

Ebert claims that the entailment from (3*) to (4*) is non-transmissive because T 's understanding and thus T 's knowing the meaning of ' P and $Q \models P$ ' in (3*) would grant T a warrant for (4*) on Boghossian's very conception of epistemic analyticity. This could happen only if T also knew that (TEMPLATE*) is valid—namely, only if he knew that (1*) and (2*) jointly entail (3*) *and* that (3*) entails (4*). Suppose, therefore, that T does have this piece of knowledge. How could T acquire a warrant for (4*) precisely? In this way: T 's understanding the meaning of ' P and $Q \models P$ ' would give T a warrant for believing (1*) and (2*).²⁶ Since T would know that (1*) and (2*) entail (3*), T would have a warrant for believing (3*) via transmission across this entailment. Given this warrant for (3*), since T would also know that (3*) entails (4*), T would have a warrant for believing (4*) via transmission across this second entailment. Ebert's objection to the effect that the entailment from (3*) to (4*) is non-transmissive appears thus to rest on the assumption that the very entailment from (3*) to (4*) is *transmissive*. This is plainly incoherent.

Ebert might complain that we have presupposed that T would get a warrant for (4*) from her understanding ' P and $Q \models P$ ' by exploiting (TEMPLATE*), whereas T could use a *variant* of it.

²⁶ A further possible problem for Ebert is that T 's understanding ' P and $Q \models P$ ' would probably need T to know the meaning of ' P and $Q \models P$ '. However, it is dubious that this understanding alone would need T to know *how the meaning of ' P and $Q \models P$ ' is fixed through implicit definitions*. So it is questionable that T would have a warrant for (1*) from her mere understanding ' P and $Q \models P$ '.

This is not implausible. However, note that even if *T* appealed to a variant of (TEMPLATE*), this argument—like (TEMPLATE*) itself—must include a disquotational step to sidestep the metalinguistic problem. Thus, it will still include the entailment from (3*) to (4*).

To sum up, Boghossian could respond to Ebert that even if the unwarranted assumption on which his non-transmissivity objection appears to be based were granted, the objection couldn't go through because it is internally incoherent.

7. Conclusions

We have outlined Boghossian's account of a priori logical knowledge based on a special template. We have seconded Ebert in maintaining that Boghossian needs to complete the template with an additional disquotational step. We have argued that Boghossian could stick to a completed version of the template while rejecting Ebert's charge that it wouldn't be transmissive of warrant. The rejoinder suggested by Jenkins on Boghossian's behalf fails because Jenkins focuses on doxastic rather than propositional warrant. Nevertheless, Boghossian can contend that Ebert's argument is flawed because it rests on an unwarranted assumption and is internally incoherent. Boghossian's template-based account of epistemic analyticity may prove problematic in various respects, but it is not afflicted by the problem of non-transmissivity of warrant described by Ebert.

References

- Boghossian, P. (1996). 'Analyticity Reconsidered'. *Nous* 30: 360-391.
- Boghossian, P. (1997) 'Analyticity' in B. Hale and C., Wright (eds) *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*, pp. 331-368. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Boghossian, P. (2000). 'Knowledge of Logic'. In P. Boghossian and C. Peacocke (eds.), *New essays on the a priori*, pp. 229-254. Oxford: OUP.

- Boghossian, P. (2001). 'How are objective epistemic reasons possible?' *Philosophical Studies* 106: 1-40.
- Boghossian, P. (2003a). 'Blind Reasoning'. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Sup.* 77: 225-248.
- Boghossian, P. (2003b). 'Epistemic Analyticity: A Defence'. *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 66: 15-35.
- BonJour, L. (1998). *In Defense of Pure Reason*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Ebert, P. (2005). 'Transmission of Warrant-Failure and the Notion of Epistemic Analyticity'. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 83: 505-521.
- Glüer, K. (2003). 'Analyticity and Implicit Definition'. *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 66: 37-60.
- Jenkins, C. S. (2008). 'Boghossian and Epistemic Analyticity'. *Croatian Journal of Philosophy* 8: 113-127.
- Marabini, A. (2013). *La concezione epistemica dell'analiticità*. Roma: Aracne.
- Moretti, L. and T. Piazza. (2013). 'Transmission of justification and warrant'. In E. N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
<<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/transmission-justification-warrant/>>.
- Quine, W. V. O. (1936). 'Truth by Convention'. In: O. H. Lee (ed.), *Philosophical Essays for A. N. Whitehead*, pp. 90-124. New York: Longman's.
- Silins, N. (2005). 'Transmission failure failure'. *Philosophical Studies* 126: 71–102.
- Tucker, C. (2010). 'When Transmission Fails' *Philosophical Review* 119: 497–529.
- Williamson, T. (2003). 'Understanding and Inference'. *Proceeding of the Aristotelian Society Sup.* 77: 249-293.
- Wright, C. (2002). 'Anti-Sceptics Simple and Subtle: Moore and McDowell'. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65: 330-348.

- Wright, C. (2003). 'Some reflections on the acquisition of warrant by inference'. In S. Nuccetelli (ed.), *New Essays on Semantic Externalism and Self-Knowledge*, pp. 57–77. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Wright, C. (2007). 'Perils of Dogmatism'. In S. Nuccetelli (Ed.), *Themes from G. E. Moore: New Essays in Epistemology and Ethics*, pp. 25-48. Oxford: OUP.
- Wright, C. (2011). 'McKinsey One More Time'. In A. Hatzimoysis (ed.), *Self-Knowledge*, pp. 80-104. Oxford: OUP.