

Two Purposes of Arguing and Two Epistemic Projects*

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In this paper, my aim is not to criticise Frank Jackson, but to borrow from him. I want to take what he says about propounding arguments, a phenomenon in the dialectical domain, and adapt it to the epistemological domain.

In chapter 6 of *Conditionals* (1987),¹ Jackson distinguishes two purposes of arguing – *teasing out* and *convincing*. With respect to the convincing purpose of arguing, he describes a way in which a propounded argument may be ill-suited to its purpose – the argument as propounded may *beg the question*. Jackson’s account of begging the question is quite different from a more familiar account that can be found, for example, in Irving Copi’s textbook, *Introduction to Logic* (1961). Copi’s account is, it seems to me, more closely related to the teasing-out purpose of arguing. So we have two purposes of arguing, the teasing-out purpose and the convincing purpose, and, for each purpose, we have a property of arguments that makes an argument ill-suited to that purpose. Both properties are called ‘begging the question’, and the two accounts of begging the question provide principled limitations on the arguments that can properly be used for the respective purposes.

I want to transpose all this to the epistemological domain in order to clarify the notion of transmission of epistemic warrant and, particularly, the idea of failure of warrant transmission (*transmission failure*). In this transposition, there will be, corresponding to the two purposes of arguing, two kinds of epistemic project. For each kind of project, there will be a property of arguments that makes an argument ill-suited for use in projects of that kind. Each property might be called ‘transmission failure’ and the two accounts of transmission failure provide principled limitation on the arguments that can properly be used in pursuing projects of that kind. Just as there are, in the dialectical domain, two notions of begging the question corresponding to the two purposes of arguing, so also there will be, in the epistemological domain, two notions of transmission failure corresponding to the two kinds of epistemic project. My hope is that this transposition will shed light on some recent discussions of transmission failure.

1. Background: Epistemic Warrant and Its Transmission

In talking about transmission of epistemic warrant and transmission failure, I follow Tyler Burge (1993, 2003a, 2003b) in using ‘epistemic warrant’ (or just ‘warrant’) as a more inclusive term than ‘justification’. Warrant confers positive epistemic status on a

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¹ Page references are to this chapter unless otherwise indicated.

proposition and rationally supports the attitude of belief. If a subject has a warrant to believe a proposition P – perhaps, by having a justification to believe P – then it is epistemically appropriate for that subject to believe P.²

1.1 Propositional warrant and doxastic warrant

There is a familiar distinction in epistemology between propositional justification and doxastic justification. The notion of warrant that I have just introduced is propositional warrant; it can be contrasted with doxastic warrant. Facts about propositional justification or warrant are not, in themselves, facts about actual beliefs or other psychological states. A subject may have a propositional warrant to believe P while not actually believing P and, indeed, while having no inclination to believe P. We might highlight this by speaking of an abstract space of warrants just as we speak of a logical space of entailment relations. Questions about the abstract space of warrants are amongst the most basic questions in epistemology; but they are not the only questions (Pryor, 2000, p. 521).

If a subject has a propositional warrant to believe P – so that it is epistemically appropriate for the subject to believe P – and the subject does believe P then, to that extent, the subject does well doxastically. He thinks the thing that is the thing to think. But the notion of doxastic warrant, or warranted belief, demands more than this. If a subject's believing P is to be doxastically warranted then there should be the right relation between the propositional warrant to believe P and the subject's own grounds for believing P (what the belief is based on).³ Roughly speaking, warranted belief demands, not that the subject should believe something that happens to be the thing to think, but that the subject should believe something *because* it is the thing to think.⁴

In addition to the notion of warranted belief and the less demanding notion of believing something for which there is a propositional warrant, there are two other notions of doing well doxastically that can be mentioned briefly. The first is the notion of rational answerability to what one takes to be relations of propositional warrant, even though one may be mistaken about those relations. Suppose that a subject makes an error

² In Burge's terminology, warrants include both justifications and entitlements. The distinction is this: 'Justifications . . . involve reasons that people have and have access to . . . they must be available in the cognitive repertoire of the subject' (1993, p. 459); in contrast, 'entitlements are epistemic rights or warrants that need not be understood by or even accessible to the subject' (ibid., p. 458). Wright (1985, 2004) also allows that warrants include both justifications and entitlements, but he uses the terms 'justification' and 'entitlement' for a different contrast, between cases of evidential support and cases where it is 'reasonable to accept a . . . proposition without reason; that is, without evidence' (1985, p. 450). Pryor (2000, 2001, 2004, 2005) prefers to use 'justification' as the inclusive term and to use 'warrant' in Plantinga's (1993a, 1993b) way for whatever has to be added to true belief to yield knowledge. In Pryor's terminology, 'you have a justification to believe P iff you are in a position where it would be epistemically appropriate for you to believe P' (2005, p. 181).

³ For reviews of work on the basing relation, see Korcz, 1997, 2003.

⁴ In at least two respects, this is only a rough formulation of what doxastic warrant requires. First, it may suggest an overly intellectualised account of warranted belief. Second, there may be additional necessary conditions for warranted belief (Pryor, 2005, p. 182).

about the structure of the abstract space of warrants and is convinced that there is a warrant to believe not-P, rather than P. Suppose that, on the basis of this flawed conviction, the subject believes not-P. The subject does not believe something for which there really is a propositional warrant and *a fortiori* does not have a warranted belief. But still, *modulo* his initial mistaken conviction, the subject's belief has been formed quite rationally; given that conviction, believing P instead of not-P would seem quite irrational.

The second notion of doing well doxastically to be mentioned briefly here is a more refined version of the notion of rational answerability to what the subject takes to be relations of warrant. It is a notion of *blamelessness* in believing that takes into account whether the subject is doxastically culpable or epistemically irresponsible in making an error about the structure of the abstract space of warrants. If it is possible for a subject to arrive blamelessly at a belief for which there is no propositional warrant then blameless belief is certainly not sufficient for warranted belief. Indeed, even blamelessly believing something for which *there is* a propositional warrant is not sufficient for warranted belief. There might be a propositional warrant to believe P and yet a subject might believe P on the wrong grounds. Such a belief would not be properly based, and so would not be a warranted belief, even if the subject were to be blameless in making his error.

1.2 Closure and transmission of epistemic warrant

In the present context, transmission of epistemic warrant is transmission of warrant from the premises to the conclusion of a valid argument. Questions about warrant transmission are similar to, but not quite the same as, questions about the closure of warrant or knowledge under known entailment (Dretske, 1970, 2005; Nozick, 1981). Crispin Wright (1985, p. 438) was the first to draw the distinction explicitly. For the case of arguments with just one premise, the question whether there are exceptions to *closure* of warrant is the question whether it is possible that a subject should have a warranted belief that P and a warranted belief that Q follows from P and yet not be in a position to arrive at a warranted belief that Q. The question whether there are exceptions to *transmission* of warrant is the question whether it is possible that a subject should have a warranted belief that P and a warranted belief that Q follows from P and yet not *thereby* be in a position to arrive at a warranted belief that Q. The idea as to how the distinction turns on the 'thereby' is this. Closure requires that the subject has some warrant or other to believe Q and is in a position to ground a belief that Q on that warrant. Transmission requires that the subject is in a position to ground a belief that Q on the very warrants that ground his belief that P and his belief that Q follows from P. In principle, it seems that the subject might not be in a position to ground a belief that Q on those very warrants but might still be in a position to ground a belief that P on some other warrant.

As Wright introduces the distinction, there could be exceptions to transmission that were not exceptions to closure, and there could be exceptions to transmission even if

there were no exceptions to closure. Nevertheless, there may be ways of understanding the notion of warrant transmission on which exceptions to transmission are no more possible than exceptions to closure.⁵ If there is a construal of warrant transmission as exceptionless then we shall do well to assume that it is different from Wright's construal.

1.3 Transmission failure

Wright (1985) proposes that epistemic warrant is not transmitted from premises to conclusion in some anti-sceptical arguments such as G.E. Moore's (1939) 'proof' of the existence of the external world. When Moore holds up his hands in front of him, his visual experience as of hands furnishes an epistemic warrant to believe: 'I have hands'. From this premise there is a valid inference to the conclusion that an external world exists, relying on the rule of inference *modus ponens* and the *a priori* knowable conditional premise: 'If I have hands then an external world exists'. Yet Moore's argument does not seem to provide a satisfying response to the sceptic. Following through the argument does not seem to provide a route to an epistemic warrant for believing the proposition that the sceptic calls into question. Wright connects his claim that Moore's argument is an example of transmission failure with a point on which Wright agrees with the sceptic – a point about the dependence relation amongst warrants. It is only if Moore *already* has an epistemic warrant to believe something tantamount to his conclusion – that there is an external world – that he has a warrant to believe his premise, 'I have hands'.

My own interest in transmission failure arose from work in philosophy of mind and cognitive science on *the problem of armchair knowledge* (Davies, 2003a). Each instance of the problem is a palpably valid argument whose premises can apparently be known to be true from the comfort of the philosopher's armchair yet whose conclusion is a proposition whose truth or falsity cannot, it seems, be settled without rising from the armchair and conducting some empirical investigation. I proposed that a variation on Wright's notion of transmission failure could help me avoid these paradoxical epistemological results.⁶ However, the arguments that concerned me did not clearly exemplify the pattern that Wright found in Moore's argument and my own account of the

⁵ If a subject has a warrant to believe something then it is epistemically appropriate for the subject to believe that thing. Consider a subject who has a warranted belief that P and a warranted belief that Q follows from P. Then it is epistemically appropriate for the subject to believe P and to believe that Q follows from P. Plausibly, it is also epistemically appropriate for the subject to believe Q. Suppose that the subject competently deduces Q from P, drawing on his appreciation that Q follows from P. Then, ahead of more information about the basing relation, it is at least somewhat plausible that the subject ends up with a properly based and warranted belief that Q. The apparently plausible upshot is that, *by* having warranted beliefs that P and that Q follows from P, the subject is in a position to arrive at a warranted belief that Q.

⁶ Early versions of the proposal were presented at the Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association in December 1994 and at a conference in St. Andrews in August 1995. See Davies, 1998, 2000, 2003a, 2003b; Wright, 2000, 2003.

principles that limit transmission of warrant came to look rather different from Wright's. The question naturally arises whether the two accounts of transmission failure differ in substance or only in formulation.

My account does agree with Wright's in classifying Moore's argument as an example of transmission failure. But as against this Wright-Davies view, James Pryor has argued that '[Moore's] justification to believe [that he has hands] *does* transmit to the hypothesis that there's an external world' (2004, p. 351). So far as Wright's version of the view goes, Pryor's opposition turns on a disagreement about the structure of the dependence relation amongst warrants. For, according to Pryor's account of perceptual knowledge as basic knowledge, Moore's warrant to believe his premise, 'I have hands', *does not depend* on his having an antecedent warrant to believe something tantamount to his conclusion, that there is an external world. Rather, Moore's belief that he has hands is warranted by his visual experience that represents there being one hand and another and this warrant does not depend on an antecedent warrant to believe any other proposition (Pryor, 2000). Pryor also discusses my version of the view that Moore's argument is an example of transmission failure and says that the property of the argument that I call transmission failure is 'only a dialectical or persuasive failing' (2004, p. 374, n. 32).

I believe that the notions of warrant transmission and transmission failure are significant for epistemology and, indeed, for other areas of philosophy. But the three features that I have just mentioned make an epistemological landscape including transmission failure difficult to appreciate. First there are differences of formulation and focus between Wright and me. Second, there is an outright disagreement between Wright and Pryor. Third, there is an apparent disagreement between Pryor and me, and Pryor says that the phenomenon that I call 'transmission failure' is 'only dialectical' rather than genuinely epistemological.

Jackson's topic, the two purposes of arguing, definitely belongs in the dialectical domain.⁷ My aim is to shed some light on warrant transmission and transmission failure by transposing Jackson's distinction to the epistemological domain. In the end, there will be two notions of transmission failure. I claim that this distinction helps to explain the differences of formulation and focus and the outright disagreements that appear in recent work on warrant transmission and transmission failure. I also hope that the setting provided by this paper will help to substantiate the idea that both notions of transmission failure are genuinely epistemological, though both can be seen as epistemological analogues of notions of a propounded argument being ill-suited to its dialectical purpose.

⁷ See *OED*. **Dialectical** or **dialectic** (adj.): Of, pertaining to, or of the nature of logical disputation; argumentative, logical.

2. Two Purposes of Arguing

With so much by way of background, I turn to Jackson's distinction between the teasing-out purpose of arguing and the convincing purpose.

2.1 *The teasing-out purpose of arguing*

It may sometimes happen that you wonder about the answer to a question even though your beliefs already commit you to an answer. You wonder, perhaps, whether or not a proposition Q is true even though your beliefs already commit you to the truth of Q . One way in which this may happen is that you simply overlook your antecedent belief that Q ; for some reason it is not activated or accessed. In such a case, a bald assertion that Q may help you to answer your question, not so much by informing you that Q as by reminding you that Q .

Another way in which you may wonder whether or not Q is true even though your beliefs already commit you to the truth of Q is that you have beliefs P_1, \dots, P_n from which Q can be validly derived but either you overlook one of your premise beliefs, P_i , or else you overlook or otherwise fail to follow through the valid argument that leads from those premises to Q . In the first kind of case, someone's propounding the argument from P_1, \dots, P_n to Q may help you answer your question simply by reminding you of some of your antecedent beliefs. But in the second, more usual, kind of case, someone's propounding the argument will help you, at least in part, by highlighting the relevance of your antecedent beliefs to the issue at hand. Jackson (p. 102) calls this the 'teasing-out' function of propounding an argument.

When someone propounds a valid argument from premises P_1, \dots, P_n to conclusion Q with the teasing-out purpose, the aim is not to provide the hearer with any new reasons to believe P_1, \dots, P_n . Rather, the propounder's aim is to show the hearer that to the extent that he believes P_1, \dots, P_n – whether he believes those premises for good reasons, bad reasons, or none – he is also committed to believing the conclusion Q . Equally, to the extent that he does not believe Q he is committed to reconsidering his beliefs P_1, \dots, P_n .

2.2 *The convincing purpose of arguing*

When an argument is propounded with the purpose of teasing out the consequences of someone's beliefs, there is, in general, no need for the propounder to offer the hearer considerations in support of the premises. The propounding does its work by highlighting the entailment relation and so revealing that whatever considerations support the premises also provide reasons to believe the conclusion. But when an argument is propounded with the purpose of convincing someone of the truth of its conclusion then the person propounding the argument usually offers the hearer considerations that support the premises. The person to whom the argument is propounded is implicitly invited to

‘borrow’ these considerations and to be persuaded by them of the truth of the premises, and thence of the truth of the conclusion.⁸

A hearer who has an antecedent doubt about the truth of the conclusion may, for that very reason, start out by doubting that the conjunction of the premises is true. But the speaker’s propounding the argument provides the hearer with new information. The considerations that are offered for borrowing support the premises. They go into the scales on the side opposite from the considerations that initially led the hearer to doubt the conclusion. So, by propounding the argument, the speaker may change the balance of considerations and convince the hearer. In short, Jackson says (p. 107):

The utility of valid argumentation (over and above the teasing-out function) in convincing audiences of conclusions lies in the evidence implicitly offered for borrowing by the presentation and selection of premises.

3. Jackson on Begging the Question

What is important for the notion of ‘begging the question proper’ (p. 110) is the particular way in which the considerations offered for borrowing support the premises of the argument.⁹ The issues are particularly clear if they are presented initially in terms of a Bayesian account of the confirmation of hypotheses by evidence.

3.1 Evidential support and background assumptions

Evidence E supports hypothesis H relative to background assumptions B if the probability of H given E plus the background assumptions B, $\Pr(H/(E \& B))$, is greater than the prior probability of H given B alone, $\Pr(H/B)$. It can happen that E supports H relative to one set of background assumptions but not relative to another set of background assumptions. So, in particular, it may happen that E supports H relative to a

⁸ The term ‘borrow’ is Jackson’s, and he connects it with ‘the division of epistemological labour’ (p. 104). The speaker’s choice of premises may convey important information to the hearer about the nature and structure of the considerations that are being offered for borrowing. Thus consider, for example, the arguments ‘P, Q; therefore Q’ and ‘P, if P then Q; therefore Q’. The conjunction of the premises of the first argument, ‘P & Q’, is logically equivalent to the conjunction of the premises of the second argument, ‘P & (if P then Q)’. But, according to Jackson, the speaker’s choice of the *modus ponens* argument generates the *argumentative implicature* that there are considerations available that support the conditional premise, ‘if P then Q’, and are independent of the considerations that support P: ‘The cases for the two premises do not stand or fall together’ (p. 105).

One kind of dialectical misdeed in propounding an argument is to choose premises in a way that generates an implicature to the effect that particular kinds of consideration are being offered for borrowing when, in fact, the available considerations are quite different. Jackson calls this misdeed ‘misleading advertising’ (ibid.). Given the overall aim of this paper I shall not dwell on this misdeed, for it has no obvious analogue in the epistemological domain.

⁹ Jackson (p. 110) asks us to consider examples in which an argument is propounded with the convincing purpose and there is no mismatch between the considerations available for borrowing and the argumentative implicatures generated by the speaker’s presentation and selection of premises. So there is no question of misleading advertising.

speaker's background assumptions but not relative to the background assumptions of a hearer.

Suppose, then, that a speaker propounds an argument to a hearer who needs to be convinced of the argument's conclusion Q. Suppose, too, that P is among the argument's premises. By propounding the argument with those particular premises, the speaker implicitly offers for borrowing evidence of a certain kind for P. We may suppose that this evidence does indeed support P *relative to the speaker's background assumptions*. But it does not follow that the evidence supports P relative to the hearer's background assumptions. In fact, the hearer's doubt about the truth of Q may virtually guarantee that the speaker's offered evidence does *not* support P *relative to the hearer's background assumptions*. In that case, propounding the argument will be ineffectual. The argument as propounded is ill-suited to its purpose. It will not convince the hearer of the truth of the conclusion Q because the evidence offered for borrowing will not provide the hearer with any grounds for accepting the premise P.

Thus, Jackson says (pp. 111, 112; emphasis added):

[I]t may be that a given argument to a given conclusion is such that anyone – or anyone sane – who doubted the conclusion would have background beliefs relative to which the evidence for the premises would be no evidence . . . Such an argument could be of no use in convincing doubters, and is properly said to *beg the question*.

Consider one very simple kind of case. A speaker propounds an argument with the purpose of convincing a hearer of the truth of Q, which is itself among the speaker's background assumptions B^s . The argument has just one premise (or just one premise that stands in need of support), P, and the evidence offered for borrowing supports the premise relative to the speaker's background assumptions: $\Pr(P/(E \ \& \ B^s)) > \Pr(P/ B^s)$. The hearer needs to be convinced of the truth of Q and starts out thinking that Q is, or may well be, false. So the hearer must have background assumptions, B^h , that are different from the speaker's. It may happen that, considered against the background of these assumptions, the evidence offered for borrowing does not support premise P at all: $\Pr(P/(E \ \& \ B^h)) \leq \Pr(P/ B^h)$.

Cast in these Bayesian terms, G.E. Moore's (1939) 'proof' of the existence of the external world appears as a case of this kind. The argument can be set out as follows:

MOORE(1) I have hands.

MOORE(2) If I have hands then an external world exists.

Therefore:

MOORE(3) An external world exists.

Given Moore's background assumptions, the evidence provided by a visual experience as of one hand and another supports the premise MOORE(1). But the evidence does nothing

to support that premise when it is considered against the background of the sceptic's assumption that it may well be that there is no external world as ordinarily conceived – that it may be, instead, that I am the envatted victim of a powerful but deceptive scientist.¹⁰ So, propounding Moore's argument cannot serve the purpose of convincing the sceptic. The sceptic's doubt about Moore's conclusion rationally requires that the sceptic does not share Moore's background assumptions. The sceptic is bound to adopt different assumptions; and against the background of those assumptions the evidence that Moore offers for borrowing does nothing to support the premise. Thus, on Jackson's account, Moore's argument begs the question.

Next, I want to propose a small refinement to Jackson's account of begging the question.¹¹

3.2 A refinement: Assumptions and premises

We note as a preliminary point that it is important for Jackson's account that background assumptions should not be assimilated to additional premises. Being question begging is not a property of arguments in themselves. It is not constituted by a relationship between premises and conclusion. Rather begging the question is a phenomenon in the dialectical domain of *propounding* arguments. Propounding an argument is question begging when the hearer's antecedent doubt about the conclusion rationally requires that the hearer should not share the speaker's background assumptions. The hearer is rationally required to adopt different assumptions against the background of which the considerations offered for borrowing no longer support the premises. If, at the outset, background assumptions are assimilated to additional premises, then the structure of begging the question is assimilated in the direction of a structure in which the hearer's antecedent doubt about the conclusion of an argument rationally requires that the hearer should doubt a particular premise. But, for any obviously valid argument, antecedent doubt about the conclusion rationally requires that the hearer should doubt the conjunction of the premises. So the risk involved in the assimilation of background assumptions to premises is that it is liable to have the consequence that too many arguments, perhaps all obviously valid arguments with only one premise, will be classified as begging the question.

The main point of this section, however, is that, even with the distinction between premises and background assumptions securely in place, there is still a worry about Jackson's account of begging the question. For it may still seem that every obviously valid argument with only one premise (or only one premise that stands in need of

¹⁰ It would be more accurate to say that the evidence does nothing to support that premise as against the incompatible proposition that a powerful scientist is producing a deceptive impression as of my having hands.

¹¹ I am grateful to Daniel Nolan for insisting on the importance of this refinement.

support) will still turn out to be question begging, if the considerations offered for borrowing provide support for the premise only against a background of assumptions.

To see how the worry arises, suppose that you doubt that any birds are black and I intend to convince you that some are. Pointing at a black swan, I say, ‘Some swans are black’, offering for borrowing the evidence provided by a visual experience as of a black swan. My argument, as propounded, can be set out as follows:

BLACK (1) Some swans are black.

BLACK (2) If some swans are black then some birds are black.

Therefore:

BLACK (3) Some birds are black.

The experience as of a black swan supports the premise BLACK(1). The other premise, BLACK(2) is (let us agree) an obvious *a priori* truth that does not stand in need of support in this dialectical context. And the argument is clearly valid.

Since you antecedently doubt that there are any black birds, you are antecedently committed to doubting that there are black swans. When I propound my argument, I provide you with new information and you do not doubt that it *seems* to you that you see a black swan. But perhaps you maintain your doubt as to whether there are *really* black swans, and you come to suspect that there is a trick of the light, or that your perceptual apparatus (and mine) is behaving oddly. Perhaps, because of your antecedent doubt about BLACK(3), you come to doubt the assumptions about normal conditions against the background of which the visual experience as of a black swan supports the premise BLACK(1). In short, it could be that, because you doubt the conclusion of the propounded argument, you doubt its premise; and because you doubt its premise, you call into question the background assumptions. But we do not want the (BLACK) argument as propounded to be classified as begging the question. For intuitively it seems clear that propounding the (BLACK) argument could be of use in convincing someone who doubted that any birds are black.

In defence of Jackson, it may be said that, even as his account stands, it will not classify the (BLACK) argument as begging the question. It is true that you might maintain your doubt about the conclusion by calling my background assumptions into question. But Jackson’s criterion is that ‘*anyone sane* who doubted the conclusion would have background beliefs relative to which the evidence for the premises would be no evidence’ (p. 111; emphasis added). And it has not been shown that calling my background assumptions into question is the *only* rational response for a doubting hearer to make. Surely it at least might be rational for a hearer to accept the perceptual evidence and stop doubting that there are black birds.

However, strategic considerations argue for adding a small refinement to what Jackson actually says. For, first, accounts of begging the question very often face the

objection that they classify all valid arguments as question begging, or at least all valid arguments with only one premise. It would be strategically useful to block this line of objection. Second, if we rely on Jackson's criterion and consider the route to doubt about background assumptions that goes via doubt about the premise, then the classification of an argument as question begging is liable to depend on potentially delicate questions about the balance of considerations for and against the premise.

The refinement that I propose is this. If an argument is to be question begging, then doubt about the conclusion should have a direct impact on the background assumptions, not merely an impact mediated by doubt about a premise. Antecedent doubt about the conclusion should *directly* rationally require the adoption of assumptions against the background of which the considerations offered for borrowing would no longer support the premises. With the refinement in place, Moore's argument remains an example of begging the question since the sceptic's doubt about Moore's conclusion directly rationally requires that the sceptic should not share Moore's background assumptions.

4. The Textbook Account of Begging the Question

So far, I have explained Jackson's distinction between the teasing-out purpose of arguing and the convincing purpose of arguing and I have set out and refined his notion of begging the question as a property of propounded arguments that renders them ill-suited to the convincing purpose. We turn now to the more familiar notion of begging the question.

4.1 Circularity and begging the question

According to Copi's *Introduction to Logic* (1961, pp. 65–6), someone who 'assumes as a premise the very conclusion he intends to prove' commits the fallacy of begging the question. The fallacy is glaringly obvious if the premise and the conclusion are formulated in exactly the same words. But even when the formulations are very different, the fallacy is still committed if the same proposition occurs both as premise and as conclusion. Furthermore, the fallacy is committed even if the premise is separated from the conclusion by several steps of argument. Thus, a proposition Q might be the conclusion of an argument from intermediate lemmas including R, while the argument in support of R relied on the proposition Q (in the same or a different formulation) as a premise. In short, propounding a circular argument is committing the fallacy of begging the question. It is said to be a fallacy because the act of propounding the argument is rendered pointless (1961, p. 65):

If the proposition is acceptable without argument, no argument is needed to establish it; and if the proposition is not acceptable without argument, then no argument which requires its acceptance as a premise could possibly lead anyone to accept its conclusion.

Now, as Jackson (pp. 100, 110) points out, there is a problem for any account of begging the question as a property of arguments considered in themselves if the account *both* relies on the idea of including the conclusion among the premises *and* allows for differences in formulation. For it is difficult to avoid the consequence that propounding any valid argument is begging the question. The argument ‘Q; therefore Q’ is patently circular, and ‘P, Q; therefore Q’ is no less circular. In that case, propounding the argument ‘P & Q; therefore Q’ is begging the question. But ‘P & Q’ can be reformulated as ‘P & (if P then Q)’, so propounding the argument ‘P & (if P then Q); therefore Q’ is begging the question, and so is propounding the *modus ponens* argument ‘P, if P then Q; therefore Q’. The conclusion to be drawn from this problem with the textbook account is that we need to restrict the notion of reformulation. It remains to say, of course, what the restriction should be. But a natural suggestion would be that we should begin by considering arguments, not just in themselves, but as propounded – considering them, that is, in a dialectical, and not just a logical, setting. In particular, we can make a start on motivating a restriction on reformulation by considering arguments as propounded with the teasing-out purpose.

It is true that, because ‘P & Q’ and ‘P & (if P then Q)’ are logically equivalent, any considerations that make the first conjunction probable equally make the second conjunction probable. And it is true that, because the arguments ‘P, Q; therefore Q’ and ‘P, if P then Q; therefore Q’ are valid, any considerations that make the conjunction of the premises probable make the conclusion no less probable. But there is an important difference between the two arguments considered as propounded with the purpose of teasing out the consequences of someone’s beliefs. Someone who propounds the argument ‘P, Q; therefore Q’ may make salient the considerations that a hearer already regards as supporting P and Q considered separately. But the argument does not provide a route to a new realisation that these considerations support the conclusion Q. In contrast, propounding the *modus ponens* argument may not only make salient the considerations that the hearer regards as supporting P and ‘if P then Q’ considered separately, but also allow the hearer to realise, perhaps for the first time, that these considerations, taken together, should also be regarded as providing a reason to believe the conclusion Q.

Let us conjecture, then, that a pragmatic development of the textbook account of begging the question will say that an argument that is propounded with the teasing-out purpose begs the question if it does not offer the hearer a route to any new appreciation of the support (or what the hearer is bound to regard as support) for the conclusion that is provided by the considerations that the hearer regards as supporting the premises. In general, propounding a blatantly circular argument is begging the question by this account. As Copi himself might say, it is generally pointless to propound a circular argument with the purpose of teasing-out a hearer’s commitment to believing the conclusion Q. For if the hearer can appreciate his or her commitment to Q without

argument, then no argument is needed but only a reminder. And if the hearer cannot appreciate his or her commitment to Q without an argument to reveal that Q is entailed by premises that the hearer already regards as adequately supported, then no argument that includes Q amongst its premises could possibly secure that appreciation. In short, a circular argument is ill-suited to the teasing-out purpose because propounding the argument offers a hearer, not a route to new appreciation of support for the conclusion provided by considerations that support the premises, but, at best, a gratuitous detour.

4.2 Two notions of begging the question

According to Jackson's notion of begging the question, Moore's argument begs the question. According to Copi's notion, the following blatantly circular variation on Moore's theme begs the question:

CIRCULAR(1) I have hands.

Therefore:

CIRCULAR(2) I have hands.

Propounding this argument with the teasing-out purpose does not offer a hearer a route to any *new* appreciation of the support for the conclusion that is provided by the considerations that the hearer regards as supporting the premise. And the situation is no better if we make the circularity less blatant by inserting a lengthy but needless detour between premise and conclusion.

But is the CIRCULAR argument also an example of begging the question in Jackson's sense? It is not. It is true that a blatantly circular argument 'merely marks time' and is 'a waste of breath' (p. 110). It is true that anyone sane who doubted the conclusion would also doubt the premise. But it is not the case that anyone sane who doubted the conclusion would have background beliefs relative to which the evidence for the premise would be no evidence. Believing that I may well not have hands does not directly rationally require the adoption of assumptions against the background of which a visual experience as of hands provides no support for the premise that I have hands. If I am troubled by the thought that an evil surgeon may have hacked off my hands and attached flippers to the bloody stumps I may reasonably be assured that I do have hands by a visual experience as of hands.¹²

¹² Roy Sorensen (1991) has argued for a pragmatic account of begging the question and against a syntactic account by considering examples of persuasive arguments of the form 'P; therefore P', including (1991, p. 249):

Some arguments are composed solely of existential generalizations.

Therefore:

Some arguments are composed solely of existential generalizations.

Such arguments would certainly be reckoned circular if considered in themselves (syntactically or formally), but can be recognised as not begging the question if they are considered as propounded

It is possible, then, for a propounded argument to beg the question in Copi's sense without begging the question in Jackson's sense. Is the reverse dissociation – begging the question in Jackson's sense but not in Copi's – also possible? In particular, is Moore's argument, which is an example of begging the question in Jackson's sense, also an example of begging the question in Copi's sense? The answer is not obvious. The conclusion, MOORE(3), does not occur amongst the premises, MOORE(1) and MOORE(2). So the argument is not blatantly circular and, to that extent, it is not ill-suited to the teasing-out purpose. But still it might be said that the conclusion does figure as an essential background assumption in cases where the hearer regards the premise MOORE(1) as supported by a visual experience as of hands. For, as we noted earlier, such an experience does nothing to support that premise against the background of the assumption that the conclusion may well be false. If this claim about the role of MOORE(3) in supporting MOORE(1) is correct, then it is natural to say that Moore's argument does beg the question in Copi's sense (or in a natural extension of Copi's sense) if it is propounded to a hearer whose belief in MOORE(1) is supported by visual experience. For we have already said, on Copi's behalf, that if a hearer cannot appreciate his or her commitment to Q without an argument to reveal that Q is entailed by premises that the hearer already regards as adequately supported, then *no argument that includes Q amongst its premises* could possibly secure that appreciation. Now we may add that *no argument whose premises depend for their support on Q as a background assumption* could possibly secure that appreciation either.

In short, if it is correct that Moore's conclusion is an essential background assumption for support of his premises then Moore's argument is an example of begging the question in both Jackson's sense and Copi's. The epistemological analogue of this point will be important in what follows.

5. Generalising Jackson's Account of Begging the Question

The core idea of Jackson's account of begging the question, refined as in section 3.2, is this. A speaker propounds an argument, offering for borrowing considerations that, by the speaker's lights, support the premises of the argument. The argument, as propounded, is question begging if a hearer who antecedently doubted the conclusion would be directly rationally required to adopt assumptions against the background of which the putative support for a premise afforded by one of the considerations offered for borrowing would

(pragmatically or dialectically). For propounding the argument makes salient the fact that the argument itself exemplifies the very claim that the premise, and also the conclusion, makes.

Sorensen's example is formally circular and it is plausible that it would be classified as begging the question in Copi's sense if it were considered as propounded with only the teasing-out purpose. But, as Sorensen points out (p. 248), arguments that are formally circular can be persuasive when propounded, and his example plausibly does not beg the question in Jackson's sense if it is considered as propounded with the convincing purpose.

be no support. If the argument is question begging then it ‘could be of no use in convincing doubters’ (p. 112).

If an argument has several premises, then it is question begging according to this account if the following condition is met:

Begging the question: Jackson’s account (basic condition)

For one of the premises, P_i , which is supported (according to the speaker) by the consideration C_i , a hearer who antecedently doubted the conclusion would be directly rationally required to adopt assumptions (B^h , different from the speaker’s background assumptions B^s) against the background of which C_i would provide no support for P_i .

However, an argument might be ‘of no use in convincing doubters’ even though this basic condition is not met.

5.1 When propounding an argument is of no use in convincing doubters

Consider, for example, Bruce and Charlene. Bruce propounds a clearly valid argument with two premises, P_1 and P_2 , and conclusion Q ; and he offers for borrowing evidence C_1 that supports P_1 and evidence C_2 that supports P_2 . If Bruce is to convince the doubting Charlene of the truth of Q by propounding this argument then he needs to ensure that, despite her antecedent doubt, Charlene can rationally do two things. First, Charlene must be able rationally to accept the evidence, C_1 and C_2 , that Bruce offers for borrowing. But second, Charlene must be able to do more than just accept that evidence *in itself*. She must be able rationally to accept the evidence *as supporting Bruce’s premises*.

Charlene starts out with a doubt about the truth of Q and Bruce’s argument is clearly valid. So Charlene regards herself as having reason to doubt – considerations that go against – the conjunction of Bruce’s premises ‘ P_1 & P_2 ’. But Charlene’s antecedent doubt does not by itself mean that Bruce’s argument can be of no use in convincing her. Bruce’s act of propounding his argument may fulfil its purpose of convincing Charlene by changing Charlene’s evidential situation. Once the argument has been propounded, she has evidence to put into the scales on the side opposite from her reasons for originally doubting the truth of Q . Given this new evidence, she may accept P_1 and accept P_2 . She may accept those premises because they are supported by the evidence C_1 and C_2 respectively. So she may come to be convinced of the truth of Q , despite her antecedent doubt.

Suppose that Charlene’s antecedent doubt about the truth of Q would *not* directly rationally require adoption of assumptions that would remove the support for one or other of the premises P_1 and P_2 . Then Bruce’s argument as propounded does not meet the basic condition for begging the question. But now suppose that Charlene’s antecedent doubt about the truth of Q , *taken together with her acceptance of the evidence C_2 offered in*

support of P₂, would directly rationally require her to adopt assumptions against the background of which the putative evidence, C₁, offered in support of P₁, is no evidence. Then, despite the fact that Bruce's argument as propounded does not meet the basic condition for begging the question, it could be of no use in convincing Charlene of the truth of Q. For Charlene could not rationally regard *both* premises as being supported by the considerations that Bruce offers for borrowing. This motivates a first step of generalisation in the condition for begging the question:

Begging the question: Jackson's account (simple two-premise condition)

Acceptance of the putatively supporting consideration, C₂, in itself, when taken together with antecedent doubt about the conclusion, would directly rationally require the adoption of assumptions against the background of which C₁ would no longer support P₁.

We can then motivate a second step of generalisation. For suppose that Bruce's argument, as propounded, could be of no use in convincing Charlene of the truth of Q because it begs the question according to the simple two-premise condition. Then, even if Charlene accepts both the evidence C₂ in itself *and* the premise that the evidence supports, premise P₂, she still has her antecedent reason to doubt the conjunction 'P₁ & P₂', and she has nothing to put into the scales on the side of accepting P₁. Furthermore, Charlene *still* has nothing to put into the scales on the side of accepting P₁ even if she accepts the putative evidence that is supposed to support that premise – that is, accepts the evidence C₁ in itself. For, in the situation described, Charlene is unable rationally to regard the evidence C₁ as supporting the premise P₁. Thus, having begun from the assumption that Bruce's argument as propounded begs the question according to the simple two-premise condition, we now observe that it would have been of no use in convincing Charlene of the truth of Q provided that it met the following slightly less demanding condition:

Begging the question: Jackson's account (generalised two-premise condition)

Acceptance of the putatively supporting considerations, C₁ and C₂, in themselves and acceptance of the premise P₂ as supported by C₂, when taken together with antecedent doubt about the conclusion, would directly rationally require the adoption of assumptions against the background of which C₁ would no longer support P₁.

What goes for two premises goes generally. If propounding an argument is to serve the purpose of convincing a doubter, then it must be possible for the doubter to do two things. First, the doubter must be able rationally to accept all the considerations offered for borrowing. But second, the doubter must be able to do more than just accept those considerations in themselves. The doubter must also be able rationally to accept all the premises as supported by those considerations. Offering for borrowing considerations

C_1, \dots, C_n in support of premises P_1, \dots, P_n will be of no use in convincing a doubter if, for example, acceptance of the considerations C_2, \dots, C_n in themselves, and acceptance of the premises P_2, \dots, P_n as so supported, when taken together with doubt about the conclusion, would directly rationally require the adoption of assumptions against the background of which C_1 would no longer support P_1 .

And, as we just noted in Bruce and Charlene's case, the propounded argument will still be of no use even if the doubter accepts *all* the considerations C_1, \dots, C_n in themselves. Acceptance of C_1 in itself is no help unless the doubter is able rationally to regard the premise P_1 as being supported by it. Otherwise, the doubter still has nothing to put into the scales on the side of accepting P_1 . Indeed, a propounded argument might be of no use in convincing doubters precisely because antecedent doubt about the conclusion, taken together with acceptance of the consideration C_1 in itself, would directly rationally require the adoption of assumptions against the background of which that very consideration C_1 would no longer support the premise P_1 .

Thus, the following very general condition ought to be sufficient for a propounded argument to be question begging:

Begging the question: Jackson's account (generalised condition)

Acceptance of the putatively supporting considerations, C_1, \dots, C_n , in themselves and acceptance of all the premises save P_i as so supported, when taken together with antecedent doubt about the conclusion, would directly rationally require the adoption of assumptions against the background of which C_i would no longer support P_i .

5.2 Begging the question and dialectical effectiveness

Jackson says that a question-begging argument 'could be of no use in convincing doubters' (p. 112). But the notion of begging the question is not supposed to encompass every way in which an argument might be dialectically ineffective.¹³ For example, an argument might be of no use in convincing a particular doubter who has an utterly unassailable doubt about the truth of one of the premises, or a particular doubter who is beset by doubts about the validity of *modus ponens*. A propounded argument begs the question if it could be of no use in convincing doubters because of a structural property of the argument as propounded, a rational relationship between antecedent doubt about the conclusion and the adoption of one set of background assumptions rather than another. An argument that could be of no use in convincing doubters because, for example, a

¹³ As David Sanford says (1972, p. 198): 'A primary purpose of argument is to increase the degree of reasonable confidence which one has in the truth of the conclusion. Not every argument which fails this purpose begs the question, but every question-begging argument fails this purpose.'

speaker's propounding it would drive the hearer insane is not – or, at least, is not in virtue of that fact alone – question begging.

6. Generalising Copi's Account of Begging the Question

Once we have seen that Jackson's account of begging the question can be generalised, it is inevitable that we should ask whether the pragmatic development of Copi's textbook account of begging the question (section 4.1) can be generalised in a similar way.

The core idea of the pragmatic development of Copi's account is this. A speaker propounds an argument with the teasing-out purpose, not offering the hearer any new support for the premises, but drawing the hearer's attention to the inferential connection between the premises – however the hearer regards them as supported – and the conclusion. The argument as propounded is question begging if it does not offer the hearer a route to any new appreciation of his or her commitment to believing the conclusion. In such a case, propounding the argument with the teasing-out purpose is pointless; what it offers is, at best, a gratuitous detour.

6.1 Variations on circularity

As Copi himself points out (1961, p. 65), if an argument has several premises then it is question begging according to this account if the following circularity condition is met:

Begging the question: Copi's account (circularity condition: premise)

For one of the premises, P_i , which is supported (according to the hearer) by the consideration C_i , the conclusion Q is identical to P_i .

Propounding an argument with the teasing-out purpose would also be pointless if the conclusion were the same as the consideration that the hearer regarded as supporting one of the premises. For the hearer would be bound to regard that supporting consideration as itself already adequately supported – or perhaps as not standing in need of support – ahead of the propounded argument:

Begging the question: Copi's account (circularity condition: supporting consideration)

For one of the premises, P_i , which is supported (according to the hearer) by the consideration C_i , the conclusion Q is identical to C_i .

Furthermore, as I suggested in section 4.2, once the role of background assumptions is considered it is also natural to say that a propounded argument is question begging in Copi's sense (or in a natural extension of Copi's sense) if the following condition is met:

Begging the question: Copi's account (circularity condition: background assumption)

For one of the premises, P_i , which is supported (according to the hearer) by the consideration C_i , acceptance of the premise as so supported rationally requires the adoption of a background assumption, B , and the conclusion Q is identical to B .

In this kind of case, the hearer's taking the premises P_1, \dots, P_n to be supported by the considerations C_1, \dots, C_n rationally requires the hearer to regard B as something that it is legitimate to assume. So the hearer is bound to regard B as adequately supported – or perhaps as not standing in need of support – ahead of the propounded argument. But the background assumption, B , is the same proposition as the conclusion Q . So the propounded argument does not offer the hearer a rational route to any new appreciation of his or her commitment to believing Q .

Earlier (section 4.2), I said that, given a particular claim about the role of MOORE(3) in supporting MOORE(1), propounding Moore's argument with the teasing-out purpose would be begging the question according to this circularity condition for Copi's account, just as propounding the argument with the convincing purpose would be begging the question according to the basic condition for Jackson's account. We should now pause to consider more carefully the relationship between the two accounts.

Suppose that there is a valid argument from two premises, P_1 and P_2 , to conclusion Q , that the premises are supported by considerations C_1 and C_2 , respectively, but that acceptance of the premise P_1 as supported by consideration C_1 rationally requires the adoption of a background assumption, B , identical to the conclusion Q . Then propounding this argument with the teasing-out purpose, in a case where a hearer already accepts the premises P_1 and P_2 as supported by C_1 and C_2 , begs the question according to the circularity condition (background assumption) for Copi's account. For anyone who accepted P_1 as supported by C_1 would be rationally required to adopt assumption B . Also, propounding this argument with the convincing purpose, offering considerations C_1 and C_2 for borrowing, begs the question according to the basic condition for Jackson's account. For anyone who doubted Q – that is, doubted B – would be rationally required to adopt different assumptions, according to which C_1 would provide no support for P_1 .

In general, if supporting considerations are held constant, then a propounded argument that begs the question according to Copi's account, and does so in virtue of meeting the circularity condition (background assumption), also begs the question according to Jackson's account.¹⁴ For, if acceptance of P_1 as supported by C_1 rationally

¹⁴ This is not to say that every propounded argument that begs the question according to Copi's account also begs the question according to Jackson's account. We observed earlier (section 4.2) that an argument (CIRCULAR) could beg the question according to Copi's account in virtue of meeting a different condition, the circularity condition (premise), *without* begging the question according to Jackson's account.

requires adoption of assumption B, then someone who adopts different assumptions cannot rationally regard C_1 as supporting P_1 .

The converse inference is also plausible: if a propounded argument begs the question according to the basic condition for Jackson's account, then it also begs the question according to Copi's account in virtue of meeting the circularity condition (background assumption). But that latter inference would not hold if there were possible cases in which, on the one hand, someone who adopted a background assumption along the lines of not-B could not rationally regard C_1 as supporting P_1 yet, on the other hand, acceptance of P_1 as supported by C_1 would not rationally require the adoption of the assumption B. If such cases are possible, they are unlikely to be visible in a Bayesian framework (in which a probability distribution must assign some probability, high or low, to the proposition B). But the epistemological analogue of this possibility will be important later (section 7.2).

6.2 Indirectness

Consider now a variation on the example of Bruce and Charlene that we used to motivate generalisations of Jackson's account (section 5.1). This time Bruce does not offer any new reasons for believing the premises P_1 and P_2 . Charlene starts out already believing P_1 and P_2 on the basis of supporting considerations C_1 and C_2 and Bruce, with the teasing-out purpose, propounds a clearly valid argument from the two premises, P_1 and P_2 , to the conclusion Q. Suppose that Q is not identical to either of the premises, nor to either of the supporting considerations, nor to any essential background assumption. Then Bruce's argument does offer Charlene a route to a new appreciation of her commitment to believing Q. It enables her to see that Q is supported by the considerations that she already takes to support P_1 and P_2 . But now suppose that there is a more direct argument that leads from C_1 and P_2 to Q without going via P_1 . Then the route to believing Q that Bruce's propounded argument offers Charlene, while it is not straightforwardly circular, still involves a gratuitous detour. Like a circular argument, it is needlessly indirect.

I accept that it is not especially natural to extend Copi's notion of begging the question, based on circularity, to cases like this. But, in the interests of exploring a generalisation of Copi's account parallel to our generalisation of Jackson's, we can say that a propounded argument is question begging* if the following indirectness condition is met:

Begging the question*: Copi's account (indirectness condition: supporting consideration)

For one of the premises, P_i , which is supported (according to the hearer) by the consideration C_i , there is a more direct argument from the remaining premises and C_i to the conclusion Q.

Once we have seen this kind of case, it is straightforward to frame a similar indirectness condition involving a background assumption:

Begging the question*: Copi's account (indirectness condition: background assumption)

For one of the premises, P_i , which is supported (according to the hearer) by the consideration C_i , acceptance of the premise as so supported rationally requires the adoption of a background assumption, B , and there is a more direct argument from the remaining premises and B to the conclusion Q .

Continuing with Bruce and Charlene, we consider a case in which, as a rational requirement for regarding P_1 as supported by C_1 , Charlene assumes B and regards B as adequately supported – or perhaps as not standing in need of support – ahead of Bruce's propounded argument. The conclusion, Q is different from any of P_1 , P_2 , C_1 , C_2 or B , and so the argument offers Charlene a route to a new appreciation of her commitment to believing Q . But there is a more direct argument from B and P_2 to Q , an argument that does not go via P_1 . Bruce's argument is needlessly indirect.

If there is a direct argument from B and P_2 to Q then there is also a direct argument from not- Q and P_2 to not- B . So someone who doubted the conclusion Q and who regarded P_2 as supported by C_2 would be rationally required to adopt the assumption not- B , against the background of which C_1 would no longer support P_1 . Furthermore, this requirement would be direct – it would not go via doubt about the premise P_1 (see again, section 3.2) So Bruce's argument, which would be question begging* according to this generalisation of Copi's account (indirectness condition: background assumption), would also be question begging according to the generalisation of Jackson's account (the generalised two-premise condition in section 5.1).¹⁵

In summary, the relationship between Copi's and Jackson's account of begging the question is this. An argument may beg the question according to Copi's account without begging the question according to Jackson's account (for example, the argument CIRCULAR). But if an argument begs the question (or begs the question*) according to Copi's account as a result of circularity or indirectness involving a background assumption then it will beg the question according to Jackson's account as well.

There is also a plausible, but not watertight, inference in the opposite direction. The critical case occurs when the support for a premise P provided by a consideration C does not depend on any positive assumption of B , yet C fails to support P against the background of the assumption not- B . If such a case is indeed possible then a propounded

¹⁵ The condition for indirectness involving a background assumption can be further generalised to include the case in which (for a two-premise argument, for example) there is a more direct argument from B , P_2 , and C_1 to Q , an argument that does not go via P_1 . If there is such an argument then there is also a direct argument from not- Q , P_2 , and C_1 to not- B . So, once again, the propounded argument would also be question begging according to the generalisation of Jackson's account.

argument may beg the question according to Jackson's account without exhibiting circularity or indirectness, and so without begging the question (or begging the question*) according to Copi's account.

7. Transition

We have now explained two purposes of arguing and two notions of begging the question. One purpose of arguing is teasing out the consequences of a person's beliefs or, as Jackson puts it (p. 104), 'extracting from audiences what they, in a sense, already implicitly know'. The other purpose of arguing is convincing an audience of the truth of a conclusion by offering for borrowing considerations that (by the speaker's lights) support the premises. Copi's notion of begging the question goes with the teasing-out purpose of arguing; Jackson's notion of begging the question goes with the convincing purpose of arguing.

An argument (considered as propounded) that begs the question is ill-suited to its purpose. So the two accounts of begging the question provide principled limitations on the arguments that can properly be used for the respective purposes. What Copi actually says can be developed in a pragmatic direction (section 4.1) to provide a limitation on arguments that can properly be used with the teasing-out purpose. The core idea is that the propounded argument should offer the hearer a route to a new appreciation of his or her commitment to believing the conclusion. An argument cannot properly be used with this purpose if it is blatantly circular; for a circular argument offers, not a route to any new appreciation of commitment to believing the conclusion, but a gratuitous detour. We have also generalised that core idea to suggest that some propounded arguments, though not altogether ill-suited to the teasing-out purpose, are nevertheless not ideally suited to it because, while they are not circular, they are needlessly indirect.

Jackson's account of begging the question, in contrast, provides a limitation on arguments that can properly be used with the convincing purpose. An argument cannot properly be used with this purpose if it meets any of the progressively more general conditions in section 5. In particular, an argument is ill-suited to the convincing purpose if it meets the basic condition that, for one of the premises, P_i , which is supported (according to the speaker) by the consideration C_i , a hearer who antecedently doubted the conclusion would be directly rationally required to adopt assumptions against the background of which C_i would provide no support for P_i .

It is now time to transpose all this from the dialectical domain to the epistemological domain. The main idea is that, within the thinking of a single subject, there seem to be analogues of the dialectical phenomena of arguing with the teasing-out purpose and arguing with the convincing purpose.

8. The Epistemic Project of Deciding What to Believe

One aspect of the management of your web of beliefs is teasing out the consequences of your own beliefs, checking for relationships of support, tension, or inconsistency. If you review some of your beliefs, P_1, \dots, P_n , and notice a valid argument from those premises to Q then you should adopt the belief Q or, if other considerations argue against Q , then you should reconsider your beliefs P_1, \dots, P_n . We might say that the epistemic project of deciding what to believe is the analogue of the dialectical phenomenon of propounding an argument with the purpose of teasing out the consequences of a hearer's beliefs.¹⁶

8.1 Two standards for belief management

In fact, the project of maintaining and revising your web of beliefs seems to be answerable to two rather different standards. On the one hand, it might be said that, if *there really is a valid argument* from P_1, \dots, P_n to Q , then you should bring your beliefs about P_1, \dots, P_n and your belief about Q into a coherent relationship. Ideally, you should structure your web of beliefs in accordance with the entailment relations that really obtain. On the other hand, it might be said that, if *you take there to be a valid argument* from P_1, \dots, P_n to not- Q , then you should bring your beliefs about P_1, \dots, P_n and your belief about not- Q into what you take to be a coherent relationship. Rationally, you are bound to structure your web of beliefs in accordance with the entailment relations that you take to obtain.

Suppose that you fail to appreciate that there is a valid argument from P_1, \dots, P_n to Q . You are convinced that you have detected an error at an early point in the argument and that conviction leads you to think that the argument with Q as conclusion is invalid and, in fact, that an argument with not- Q as conclusion is valid instead. Suppose that, given your view about the validity of the latter argument, and given your beliefs P_1, \dots, P_n , you believe not- Q . Then you have not met the first of the two standards to which belief management is answerable. Your conviction that you have detected an error in the argument does not make it any less the case that there is an entailment from P_1, \dots, P_n to Q . So, in believing P_1, \dots, P_n and not- Q , you have failed to measure up to the ideal of conformity to the accessible structure of the logical space of entailments.

You have, however, at least structured your web of beliefs in accordance with the entailment relation that you take to obtain. *Modulo* your initial mistaken conviction, your beliefs have been formed quite rationally; given your conviction, believing Q instead of not- Q would seem irrational. Furthermore, you might be blameless in thinking that there

¹⁶ When I speak, here, of deciding what to believe, I have in mind the everyday processes of adopting or revising beliefs. In at least some cases, this might be described as 'going forward in judgement', and it might be said that this is a mental act. But I do not commit myself to doxastic voluntarism and I certainly do not envisage that, having decided what to believe, I need to devise a cunning plan in order to bring it about that I do end up believing that thing.

is an error in the argument with Q as conclusion. In that case, there is a good sense in which you have not departed from the norms of rationality. You have met the second standard to which belief management is answerable.

In the case just described, you measure up well to the second standard while falling short of the first standard. It is also possible to describe cases in which you measure up to the first standard while falling short of the second. Suppose, once again, that you think that the argument with Q as conclusion is invalid and that an argument with not-Q as conclusion is valid instead. But this time suppose that you fail to structure your web of beliefs in accordance with the entailment relations that you take to obtain. You believe that there is a valid argument from P_1, \dots, P_n to not-Q but, while you believe P_1, \dots, P_n , you also believe Q. In arriving at your belief about Q, you depart far from the norms of rationality. Yet you end up with a web of beliefs that is, at least in respect of P_1, \dots, P_n and Q, happens to be structured in conformity to the entailment relations that really obtain.

The evaluation of management your web of beliefs once errors creep in is clearly not a straightforward matter. There is a clear analogy here with the case of individual beliefs (section 1.1) where there is something to be said for believing the thing that is the thing to think and also something to be said for believing the thing that one takes to be the thing to think. In the case of individual beliefs, there is a notion of warranted belief that requires more than believing something that happens to be the thing to think. Now, in the case of management of your web of beliefs there is a standard that requires more than mere conformity to the structure of the logical space of entailments or, more generally, of the abstract space of warrants. I suggest that, in the project of deciding what to believe, the overarching epistemic norm is that the structure of one's network of beliefs should conform to the structure of the abstract space of warrants as a result of one's responsiveness (in a sense that needs to be made clear) to that very structure.

8.2 The proper use of arguments in the project of deciding what to believe

Suppose, as the sceptic insists and as Wright (1985) allows, that in Moore's argument the visual experience as of hands provides a warrant for believing MOORE(1) only given an antecedent warrant for believing or assuming MOORE(3). And suppose, implausibly according to the sceptic, that there is such an antecedent warrant – perhaps the kind of warrant that Wright (2004) calls entitlement. Then the direction of the inference in Moore's argument is the opposite of the direction in the abstract space of warrants. For inferentially, MOORE(3) depends on MOORE(1), whereas in the abstract space of warrants the warrant for MOORE(1) depends on the warrant for MOORE(3).

On Wright's view of the structure of the dependence relation in the space of warrants, if I believe MOORE(1) simply on the basis of the visual experience as of hands then I am epistemically irresponsible, even if (as Wright, but not the sceptic, maintains) I believe

something for which there is a warrant. If I believe MOORE(3) because it follows from MOORE(1) and MOORE(2) then again I believe something for which there is a warrant. In believing MOORE(3) I may be said to do well doxastically *modulo* my earlier irresponsibility. But I do not measure up to the overarching epistemic norm that governs the project of deciding what to believe.

In the epistemic project of deciding what to believe, there is something amiss if I argue from premises to conclusion when the warrant for believing the premises depends on an antecedent warrant for believing the conclusion. A diagnostic sign that there is something amiss in this way is that I cannot, by performing the inference, properly arrive for the *first* time at an appreciation that there is a warrant for believing the conclusion. In the case of Moore's argument it may be that, because I am irresponsible or negligent in believing MOORE(1) without giving thought to sceptical possibilities, following through Moore's argument is in fact my route to first believing MOORE(3) – a proposition for which there is a warrant. But if I were fully responsive to the structure of the space of warrants, and particularly to the dependence relations amongst warrants, then I would already appreciate the warrant for MOORE(3) in believing MOORE(1).

Thus, if the structure in the space of warrants is as Wright and the sceptic say that it is, then the use of Moore's argument in deciding what to believe fails to measure up to the overarching epistemic norm on that project. But, while Wright allows the sceptic's claim that a perceptual warrant for believing MOORE(1) requires an antecedent warrant for MOORE(3), James Pryor disputes the sceptic's claim (2000, p. 532):

According to the dogmatist [about perceptual justification], when you have an experience as of *p*'s being the case, you have a kind of justification for believing *p* that does not presuppose or rest on any other evidence or justification you may have. [T]o be justified in believing *p*, you do *not* need to have the antecedent justification the skeptic demands.

If the structure in the space of warrants is as Pryor's dogmatist says that it is then there need be no failure to measure up to the overarching epistemic norm if I use Moore's argument in deciding what to believe.

9. The Epistemic Project of Settling a Question

As the epistemic project of deciding what to believe is the analogue of the dialectical phenomenon of propounding an argument with the teasing-out purpose, so the epistemic project of settling a question is the analogue of the dialectical phenomenon of propounding an argument with the purpose of convincing a doubter. The project of settling the question whether or not a proposition is true begins with my regarding that question as open *pro tem*. In this respect, the project of settling a question is more ambitious than the project of deciding what to believe about the answer to the question.

When I say that I regard the question as open *pro tem*, this does not mean that I work myself into a state of really doubting that the proposition is true. Rather, I suppose, for the purposes of the project, that the proposition is, or may well be, false. This initial supposition then conditions my conduct of the project. In particular, it conditions my rational deployment of epistemic warrants as I try to answer – to settle – the question that I have begun by regarding as open. If I try to settle the question whether or not some proposition Q is true then I begin by suppositionally doubting that Q is true and my conduct of the question-settling project is conditioned by that suppositional doubt.

9.1 The proper use of arguments in the project of settling a question

To see how a supposition can condition the conduct of a question-settling project, imagine that I undertake the project of settling the question whether or not there is an external world as ordinarily conceived – whether instead, perhaps, I am the envatted victim of a powerful but deceptive scientist. In particular, I attempt to settle that question by deploying the warrants that I have for believing the premises of Moore's argument. I begin by regarding the question of the truth of the conclusion of Moore's argument as open *pro tem*. So my conduct of the question-settling project is conditioned by the supposition that it may well be that there is no external world as ordinarily conceived.

As the sceptic points out, if I were really to believe that there may well be no external world as ordinarily conceived then I could not rationally regard my visual experience as constituting a warrant for believing MOORE(1). Just so, within the context of a project whose conduct is conditioned by the supposition that there may well be no external world as ordinarily conceived, I cannot rationally avail myself of the warrant for believing MOORE(1).

This is not to say that suppositional doubt somehow destroys epistemic warrant. For there is a difference between there being a warrant for believing a proposition and one's being able rationally to avail oneself of that warrant. Even if in reality there are epistemic warrants for believing the premises of Moore's argument, I cannot settle the question whether or not the conclusion of the argument is true by deploying those warrants. And this is so whether the structure of warrants is as Wright says – with an antecedent warrant for MOORE(3) being essential – or as Pryor's dogmatist says – with the warrant for believing MOORE(1) being furnished simply by the visual experience as of hands. Whether Moore's argument can be properly used in the epistemic project of deciding what to believe depends on whether Wright or Pryor gives the correct description of the structure in the abstract space of warrants. But, quite independently of whether Wright or Pryor is correct, Moore's argument cannot be properly used in the epistemic project of settling the question whether or not Moore's conclusion is true.

10. Two Notions of Transmission Failure

I have now indicated how, corresponding to the two purposes of arguing that Jackson distinguished, there are two kinds of epistemic project. And I have indicated how, corresponding to the two notions of begging the question there are principled limitations on the arguments that can properly be used in the respective projects. I said that, in the end, there would be two notions of transmission of epistemic warrant from the premises to the conclusion of a valid argument and so two notions of failure of warrant transmission. That is the business for this final section.

10.1 Wright's notion of transmission failure

Wright says (2003, p. 57):

[A *cogent* argument] is an argument, roughly, whereby someone could/should be moved to rational conviction of the truth of its conclusion – a case where it is possible to *learn* of the truth of the conclusion by getting warrant for the premises and then reasoning to it by the steps involved in the argument in question. Thus a valid argument with warranted premises cannot be cogent if the route to warrant for its premises goes – of necessity, or under the particular constraints of a given epistemic context – via a prior warrant for its conclusion. Such arguments, as we like to say, ‘beg the question’.

Say that a particular warrant, *w*, *transmits* across a valid argument just in case the argument is cogent when *w* is the warrant for its premises.

Wright's account of cogency and of warrant transmission here is close to the account that I have given of the proper use of arguments in the project of deciding what to believe (section 8.2). Wright connects failure of warrant transmission with begging the question and it seems clear that the notion of begging the question that is relevant is not Jackson's notion, but something more like Copi's notion. Thus, we can say that Wright's notion of transmission failure is the analogue in the epistemological domain of the notion, in the dialectical domain, of an argument that begs the question because it is ill-suited to the teasing-out purpose of arguing. Such an argument does not offer the hearer a route to any new appreciation of the support (or what the hearer is bound to regard as support) for the conclusion that is provided by the considerations that the hearer regards as supporting the premises. Just so, in a case of transmission failure as Wright conceives it, a thinker cannot, by following through the argument, properly arrive for the first time at an appreciation that there is a warrant for believing the conclusion.

Whether, according to Wright's notion, Moore's argument is an example of transmission failure is something that we should expect to be disputed between Wright and Pryor. And, as expected, Wright says that Moore's argument is an example of transmission failure while Pryor (2004) says that it is not.

10.2 A second notion of transmission failure

There is a second notion of transmission failure that is the analogue in the epistemological domain of Jackson's notion of an argument that begs the question because it is ill-suited to the convincing purpose of arguing. This is not the place for a fully general account of that analogy. But recall, from section 3, the basic condition for begging the question:

Begging the question (basic condition)

For one of the premises, P_i , that is supported (according to the speaker) by the consideration C_i , a hearer who antecedently doubted the conclusion would be directly rationally required to adopt assumptions against the background of which C_i would provide no support for P_i .

Now suppose that a thinker has warrants for believing the premises, P_1, \dots, P_n , of a palpably valid argument with conclusion Q , and that these warrants are constituted by putatively warranting elements w_1, \dots, w_n . We can readily formulate an epistemic condition that is analogous to this dialectical condition:

Someone who warrantably doubted the conclusion, Q , of the argument would be directly rationally committed to a warranted belief that would *defeat* the warrant for some premise P_i that is constituted by w_i .

If a warranted belief would defeat a warrant then even an unwarranted belief with the same content makes it impossible for a thinker rationally to avail himself or herself of that warrant. In such a case, we can say that the belief *R-defeats* the warrant. So, given the epistemic condition just described:

Someone who doubted the conclusion, Q , of the argument would be directly rationally committed to a belief that would *R-defeat* the warrant for some premise P_i that is constituted by w_i .

If a belief would *R-defeat* a warrant then within the context of a project whose conduct is conditioned by a supposition with the same content one cannot rationally avail oneself of that warrant. Here, we can say that the supposition *S-defeats* the warrant. So:

Someone who suppositionally doubted the conclusion, Q , of the argument would be directly rationally committed to a supposition that would *S-defeat* the warrant for some premise P_i that is constituted by w_i .

If this last condition is met then a thinker cannot rationally deploy the warrants for the premises of the argument in order to settle the question whether the conclusion is true. This is the second notion of failure of transmission of epistemic warrant.

10.3 The relationship between the two notions of transmission failure

From what we have already said about the proper use of arguments in the project of settling a question (section 9.1) it follows that, according to this second notion, Moore's argument is an example of transmission failure independently of whether Wright or Pryor is correct about the structure of the abstract space of warrants. But, as we have observed, if Pryor is correct then Moore's argument is not an example of the first notion of transmission failure. So, provided that dogmatism is a coherent option in the epistemology of perception, cases of transmission failure according to the second notion will not necessarily be cases of transmission failure according to Wright's notion.

Conversely, there are cases that are examples of transmission failure in the sense that is related to the epistemic project of deciding what to believe but not examples of transmission failure in the sense that is related to the epistemic project of settling the question. Following through the CIRCULAR argument clearly cannot serve as a proper route to a first appreciation that there is a warrant for believing that I have hands. But the CIRCULAR argument is not an example of transmission failure according to the second notion, just as it is not an example of begging the question in Jackson's sense (section 4.2).

Nevertheless, arguments that are cases of transmission failure according to the first notion, and are so because of circularity or indirectness involving a background assumption for which antecedent warrant is required, will also be cases of transmission failure according to the second notion.

I said near the beginning that three features make an epistemological landscape including transmission failure difficult to appreciate. First there are differences of formulation and focus between Wright and me. Second, there is an outright disagreement between Wright and Pryor. Third, there is an apparent disagreement between Pryor and me, and Pryor says that the phenomenon that I call 'transmission failure' is 'only dialectical' rather than genuinely epistemological. I believe that the distinction between two notions of transmission failure corresponding to Copi's and Jackson's accounts of begging the question accounts for some of the differences of formulation between Wright and me. For the notion of transmission failure that corresponds to Copi's notion of begging the question, whether Moore's argument is an example of transmission failure is sensitive to the disagreement between Wright and Pryor over dependence relations in the abstract space of warrants. For the notion of transmission failure that corresponds to Jackson's notion of begging the question, Moore's argument is an example of transmission failure independently of whether Wright or Pryor is right. So, I agree with Pryor that, if dogmatism is the correct account of the epistemology of perception, then Moore's argument is not an example of transmission failure – on one notion of transmission

failure. But I claim that it is an example of transmission failure on the other notion and I claim that both notions are genuinely epistemological.