

## *Experience First*

In what way is experience first? It is first in the order of immediacy: i.e., experience is where we begin (which is not itself to say that it is what we know best). This has important implications we will discuss shortly, but first we are happy to acknowledge that knowledge might be first in some ways as well. For example, we appear to acquire the concept very early, before that of belief (much less justification) (Williamson 2000, 33, n. 7; Perner 1993, Bartsch and Wellman 1995). From this, though, nothing follows about the correct relative priority of the concepts in epistemological theory. (Still less does it tell us about the metaphysics of knowledge itself.) One might also think knowledge first in some teleological way. For instance, it may be that belief ‘aims at’ knowledge, or that knowledge is ‘the norm of belief’. But, if true, this doesn’t entail that belief must be understood in terms of knowledge in some more substantive sense. Alternately, one might think the main purpose of our cognitive system as a whole—or, at least, the portion(s) thereof in which epistemologists are traditionally interested—might be to acquire knowledge. This thesis faces opposition from either end. From a broadly naturalistic perspective, it might seem that mere true belief, or indeed just ‘getting by’, is the purpose of our cognitive architecture.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, there are familiar but understudied epistemic goods that, according to some (Kvanvig 1992, 2003; Zagzebski 1996; Greco 2010), are clearly more valuable than knowledge: understanding and wisdom. Indeed, one of the big shifts in epistemology toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a return to interest in epistemic virtues. So knowledge may turn out to be just a middling epistemic desideratum. More radically, some Bayesians find no need for the notion at all.

A teleological interpretation of the “knowledge first” slogan makes knowledge the first on the list of epistemological ends. Most of our lives, however, are occupied with securing means. An end having been set, the question is, What do I do now? *This* is where experience is first: in the quest for true belief, justification, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom we have no other starting point than experience. Our experiences (broadly construed to include what it’s like to have intuitions and rational insights, etc.) are our basic evidence, in the light of which all else that is evident is made evident. Experiences play well the roles that characterize evidence. We will consider four such roles (after Kelly 2006) and show how experiences are well suited to the task.

Let us be clear from the outset: it might be that no single thing can play all the roles typically ascribed to evidence (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, a good argument can be made that experiences can satisfy all adequately.<sup>2</sup> We do not claim that experiences are the *only* thing that can play these roles, but that they *can and do*, and that they do so, moreover, in a way that can reasonably be described as “basic” or “ultimate”. For any chain of reasons must ultimately be grounded in experience. On this view, experience is first in that it inhabits the ground floor of the intellectual edifice. The four roles we’ll consider are evidence as: (1) what justifies belief; (2) what rational thinkers judge by; (3) a guide to truth; and (4) neutral arbiter.

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<sup>1</sup> For more deflationary views, see e.g. Churchland (1987) and Stich (1990).

<sup>2</sup> For a treatment of evidence that unifies the roles without assuming that any one thing can fulfill them all, see Rysiew 2011.

1. *Experience is what ultimately justifies belief.* It is ultimately to our experience that our beliefs must be called to account. Its very ultimacy sometimes conceals this fact, for we rarely need to dig that deep. Our “derived evidence,” evidence that is based on immediate experience, is rarely called into question in ordinary life. So, for example, you say you saw a bear and are challenged to provide evidence. You reply “Well, I saw a very large mammal with thick black fur foraging for berries.” That will usually suffice, for it is rare that we doubt that one is able to accurately describe their experiences. But however socially awkward it might be, asking for further evidence for *that* claim is perfectly coherent and, in special cases, appropriate. When pushed to this deeper level, one has nothing else to appeal to besides one’s experiences. And note this as well. Once one *has* appealed to one’s experiences—construed here as the way things appear to them to be—there is no question of further evidence. Once you have said, “I had an experience with these properties (blackness, certain geometric patterns)” – or, if you prefer, “there seemed to be something large-ish and black-ish (etc.)” -- calls for further evidence defending the claim that you had such an experience are wrong-headed (this feature makes them attractive to foundationalists as regress-stoppers). We have reached epistemic rock bottom. And of course sometimes citing one’s experiences as evidence is the most natural thing in the world. I assert that the temperature has fallen. You ask me why I think this. I say that I feel cold. I do not have in mind the *fact that* I feel cold, but, rather, *my feeling* cold.

2. *Rational thinkers judge by their experience.* Given that our ultimate evidence consists in experiences, it is platitudinous that rational thinkers judge by their experiences. To continue the example introduced just above: given that you feel cold but didn’t before, it will other things equal be rational for you to judge that the temperature has dropped. Or, consider another example: in your large back yard, you see a bird and can’t tell whether it is a female cardinal or a juvenile male. The female will be slightly more grey with slightly more orange beak and a slightly rounder body. You strain your eyes to get a better view and attend more closely to the bird and(!) to the experiences you are having. (And note that the experience of the self-same bird will change as you squint or put on your glasses, etc). To come to a judgment that it is, say, a juvenile male, you will, if you are rational, judge by your experience. Note that the claim that one is attending to and being guided by features of one’s experience does *not* imply that experiences are the primary objects of knowledge (see Crane 2011 for more on this) or that one is not *at the same time*<sup>3</sup> aware of the objects in the world—assuming that one is not hallucinating—which give rise to those experiences. Also note that being aware of a feature is not obviously itself a form of knowledge.

3. *Experience is a guide to truth: Evidence as Sign, Symptom, or Mark.* The idea that, say, smoke is a sign of fire, is common enough. So seeing smoke gives one evidence that there is fire. It’s tempting to say that this is because smoke is a reliable indicator of fire. But what if it turned out that your experience was very atypical and that, in fact, most of the time smoke was not correlated with fire? You might say, “Well, it was a reliable indicator *in my experience*.” Thus it seems that it is not *mere* objective correlation which makes something evidence. With this we are close to the notion of experience as evidence, but not all the way there. There is a notion that we might call “scientific evidence”, where we are adopting an idealized third-person perspective; here, we say that something is evidence when we are already aware that Fs are positively correlated with Gs (see §1.1 of Conee and Feldman 2008). But the notion epistemologists are

<sup>3</sup> Aquinas did not think this possible. See Adler 1985, 14ff.

interested in is such that all evidence is *someone's* evidence. If your background experiences are different from mine, the same observation can be evidence that  $p$  for you and that  $\sim p$  for me.

In its basic sense, evidence is what *makes evident* some proposition. It is that in the light of which a proposition seems true. But this light is cast, fundamentally, by experience. So experience is our ultimate evidence. For example, we have all had, when considering some theorem of logic, that 'aha' experience, the moment at and in virtue of which the theorem is made evident. It is most in evidence in self-evident propositions. It could be that self-evidence is factive, but it seems that as in all other areas, evidence can be misleading. The obviousness of, say, the naïve axiom of comprehension seemed just as clear as the obviousness of some true axioms.<sup>4</sup> Experience reveals the world to us in perception. The features of a certain experience *make evident* to me that there is an elm before me, for example. Chisholm (who combined experience-first epistemology with direct realism) puts it this way: "In the case of being appeared to, there is something, one's being appeared to in a certain way, that one interprets as being a *sign* of some external fact."<sup>5</sup> Experiences are not the *objects* of knowledge, but they are the *medium* for knowledge.<sup>6</sup> For every state of knowledge, there is some experience that makes the fact in question evident. This is a central way in which experience is prior to knowledge. One's *feeling* cold is different from one's *being* cold, in the sense that one's core body temperature has dropped. But one's experience of coldness typically makes evident that one's core body temperature has dropped. In this way experience is the sign of what the world is like.

4. *Experience is a neutral arbiter among disputants.* How could private experiences play such a seemingly public role? Aren't they too "subjective"? It's not hard, actually. The way in which experience plays an inter-subjective role is familiar to all. You are sailing with friends off the Gulf Coast, and in your periphery you think you see a dolphin jump. You turn to your friends and say "Did you see that?! I think I just saw a dolphin jump!" The friend standing closest says "I saw something in that direction too, but it seemed too small to be a dolphin." Another says, "I thought I saw a white cap on the top of that shape." Another: "Me too." Your experience is over-ruled by their experiences. When the collective experiences are taken together, the evidence suggests that, though dolphin sightings are not infrequent here, what you saw was a stray wave rather than a dolphin. This is inter-subjective in a way sufficient to satisfy all the constraints of scientific, legal, and medical inquiry.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

As we mentioned above, it could well be that there is such a thing as derived evidence and that beliefs or propositions can play the roles too. Basic knowledge might be near the evidential

<sup>4</sup> Saying such things is, of course, fully compatible with a broadly reliabilist, or otherwise externalist (e.g., proper functionalist, etiological functionalist, etc.), approach to evidence and/or other epistemic goods. See Rysiew 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Chisholm 1989, 67.

<sup>6</sup> In the language of the medieval Aristotelian epistemologists, ideas are the *qua* of knowledge, not the *quod*. See, for example, Aquinas's "Treatise on the Powers of Man" in the *Summa Theologica*.

<sup>7</sup> Of course, when we talk about evidence the way we do in a court of law—where physical objects in the room are referred to as "evidence"—we are, as always, speaking in a way that reflects what's mutually obvious: here, the fact that no one has any doubt that everyone is having the same kind of experience. That we in this way take for granted ultimate evidence speaks to its very ultimacy.

foundations, but we reject both that all knowledge is evidence and that only knowledge is evidence. In fact, maybe we should all, like Thomas Reid, be *pluralists* about evidence. Reid says that “[w]e give the name of evidence to whatever is the ground of belief” (*IP* II 20, *W* 328a); and, he thinks, there are different types or sources of evidence: there is the evidence of sense, of memory, of consciousness, of axioms, of reasoning, and so on (*IP* IV 20, *W* 328a). Various kinds of experiences (perceptual, memorial, introspective), arguments, testimony, the judgment of recognized authorities, the marks or signs by which we distinguish between kinds of things, a person’s past actions, various ‘signs’ of another’s mind and/or character (gestures, facial expression, etc.), observed connections in the world – these are all things which Reid seems to count as evidence.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps all these usages can be reduced to a single experiential notion, such as in phenomenal conservatism (see Huemer 2001), or perhaps not. At any rate, there is no reason to think all and only knowledge is evidence, and there is ample reason to consider experiences a legitimate, and even the most basic, form of evidence.

Of course, we’ve left many questions open – for instance, just *why* experience confers justification. That it does can be combined with any number of epistemological theories, internalist and externalist. Even arch-externalist Alvin Plantinga recognizes that “My perceptual beliefs are not ordinarily formed on the basis of *propositions about* my experience; nonetheless they are formed on the basis of my experience. You look out of the window: you are appeared to in a certain characteristic way; you find yourself with the belief that what you see is an expanse of green grass. You have *evidence* for this belief: the evidence of your senses. Your evidence is just this way of being appeared to; and you form the belief in question *on the basis of* this phenomenal imagery, in this way of being appeared to” (1998, 98).<sup>9</sup> The limitation of evidence to propositions (of any kind),<sup>10</sup> however, seems to us to reflect an over-intellectualization of inference and epistemic support.<sup>11</sup> To some extent, the focus on propositions is perfectly natural. As noted above, our everyday epistemic practices seldom oblige us to descend to the level of what we’ve talked about here as ‘ultimate evidence’ (non-propositional experiences). And, when we do, the fact that we’re thinking and talking about such matters itself renders them into propositional form. Still, commitment to principles like “what gives probability must also receive it” (Williamson 2000, 196) seems to lay evidence upon a Procrustean bed (not to mention the circularity or regress worries they might raise). We’ll say a bit more about this in our rejoinder.

## References

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<sup>8</sup> The discussion is not always explicit and systematic. E.g., in comparing ‘the evidence of sense’ with that of reasoning and consciousness, Reid doesn’t come right out and say just what the evidence of sense *is*. Some of the relevant passages include: *IP* II 20, *W* 328aff.; VII 3, *W* 481bff; VI 5, *W* 441aff.

<sup>9</sup> Based on the way Plantinga has defined “direct awareness” on p. 53, it follows that we are not directly aware of the grass. But on p. 189, he says that “in another and perfectly good sense of ‘directly aware of,’ I *am* directly aware of [the object.]”

<sup>10</sup> Tim defends this move in §9.5 of Williamson 2000. Conee and Feldman 2008 respond, then Dougherty 2011 pressed Williamson’s case further, but re-converted after reading Conee and Feldman’s 2011 reply.

<sup>11</sup> It would be an instance of the ‘argumentational’ view of evidence discussed by Rysiew 2011.

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### ***What is Knowledge First Epistemology?***

What is knowledge first epistemology? It is not yet clear to us how to answer that question. One key assertion seems to be that knowledge is "unanalysable" -- i.e., not neatly factorizable into component parts. As evidence for this claim, Timothy Williamson cites the facts that A. The Gettier problem hasn't been solved in four decades, and that B. Attempts to solve it have lead to clumsy analyses of knowledge. He also mentions there is no reason to think it's factorizable in the first place. He notes that its entailing belief and entailing justification does not entail that those things are constituents of knowledge. We agree, but note that their being constituents provides a pretty natural explanation for the relevant entailments. It's unclear what Williamson's alternative explanation of the latter are, but, before we comment briefly on A. and B., his explanation seems to go like this. Knowledge is a kind of success, and mere true beliefs are failures to achieve this success, even when justified. So we can think of (mere) belief, (mere) true belief, and (mere) justified belief as 'botched knowledge' (Williamson 2000, 47). But of course Williamson doesn't think they are really a kind of knowledge. "Former president" doesn't pick out a special kind of president. The same goes for knowledge and "botched knowledge". It is not as though there is the genus *knowledge* one species of which is *botched*. Clearly, this is not at all what Williamson has in mind. But then it's hard to see how thinking of the relation between knowing and certain other states and goods on the model of the relation between doing and trying explains the data in question -- viz., that knowledge entails belief and justification. Traditional epistemologists (and they might be knowledge-first in some sense (Conee 1992) "Truth Connection," Ch. 10 of Conee and Feldman 2004)) have a simple explanation for this. For entailment is modeled in formal semantics as set inclusion. *Cat* entails *mammal* because the cats are a subset of the mammals. On the traditional view, *knowledge* entails *belief* because knowledge is kind of belief, the kind that meets the conditions for knowledge. *Knowledge* entails *justified belief* for the same reason, it is a kind of justified belief, the kind that meets further conditions for being knowledge. Truth is one such further condition. Being based on one's evidence in such a way to avoid a deviant causal chain is another. The latter kind of condition is hard to spell out, since there are ever so many ways a causal chain can go wrong between takeoff and landing, even if one gets to the right destination in the end.

There is another analogy available, akin to the one Williamson himself favors, which also incorporates teleological thinking into our conception of knowledge. Perhaps belief (e.g.) is akin to *intention*, (rather than to Williamson's *trying*) and knowing to action. Just as intentions are

intentions to perform some action, believings ‘aim at’ knowledge; and just as there are failed intentions, there are failed attempts at knowing (merely true beliefs, say). *This* allows that there’s some good sense in which it might be proper to think of belief in terms of its relation to knowledge; so too, it might explain why knowing entails believing. But it also undercuts the motivation for an approach that puts ‘knowledge first’ in some more interesting sense. For it’s very natural to think of actions as individuated in part by the intentions involved – to think, that is, that actions (vs. mere movements, etc.) ‘include’ intentions. Likewise, it’s natural to think of knowings as including believings – indeed, to think that what’s known (when it is) is identified in part by the belief(s) involved. But all this merely rehearses the traditional idea that belief enters into our understanding of knowledge, and that knowing is a species of belief.

### (UN)ANALYSABILITY

Williamson thinks considerations pertaining to the Gettier literature show that the JTB approach to knowledge is moribund at best. And he seems to think that this spells trouble for the value of justification relative to knowledge. But this is far from clear. On the contrary, in the olden JTB days, one might have thought that justification was important only because it was part of an analysis of knowledge. But the unanalyzability of knowledge--if unanalyzable it is--could in fact be seen as a liberation of justification to assume importance in its own right. Kvanvig (1992; 2003, 192) and Greco (2011, 9ff.), theorize that the intuitions of epistemic justification internalists might be about, not knowledge, but understanding, where understanding stands between knowledge and wisdom in value.

Suppose knowledge is unanalysable. Either understanding entails knowledge or not. If it doesn't (Kvanvig 2003) then knowledge doesn't help us understand understanding, whereas justification might. If it does (Grimm 2006), then it appears to be a special subset of knowledge where (at a minimum) certain internalist goods are added (seeing connections, etc.), which might make it a particularly prized kind of knowledge. It then remains an open question whether these goods apart from knowledge are more valuable than knowledge apart from these goods.

Other examples in the same vein are available. There is, for instance, Sosa’s well-known distinction between ‘animal’ and ‘reflective’ knowledge (1991) – though it’s perhaps not clear in what sense these are different *kinds* of knowledge, as opposed to a single kind with some ‘extra goods’ sometimes being added, it being an open question what if anything accounts for the value of the latter (Kornblith, 2004). (The same goes for Lehrer’s distinction between ‘discursive’ and ‘primitive’ knowledge (2000).) And there is Foley’s argument (2004) that epistemologists have for too long thought that egocentrically rational and reliable belief – roughly, internalistically and externalistically justified belief, respectively -- must converge, as opposed to each calling for its own theory and having its own distinctive value.

Much of Williamson’s discussion of ‘traditional epistemology’, it seems to us, equates it with a particular strain of internalistic theorizing; and much of Williamson’s dissatisfaction, we think, is with the presumption that a certain form of internalistic justification *must* be a component of knowledge. This strikes us as a good worry to have. But the examples just mentioned serve to illustrate that abandoning that presumption doesn’t commit one to any specifically ‘knowledge first’ ideas.

So too, all the relevant parties can reject the idea that knowledge admits of any neat analysis. “Maybe,” as Plantinga says, “there isn’t any neat formula, any short and snappy list of conditions (at once informative and precise) that are severally necessary and jointly sufficient for warrant; if so, we won’t make much progress by grimly pursuing them” (1993, 20). Perhaps “the program of analysis”, as Williamson calls it (Williamson 2000, 31), is a hang-over from the heyday of logical atomism (*ibid.*); perhaps it’s rooted in a faulty theory of concepts;<sup>12</sup> perhaps the best we can reasonably hope for is “reflective understanding” (Williamson 2000, 33). Still, it’s an open question whether, within such an understanding, knowledge will have to be taken as unanalyzable, and justification (e.g.) understood as an entirely derivative notion.

## JUSTIFICATION AND EXCUSES

Suppose you unwittingly receive a perfect forgery of an authorization granting you permission to explore a protected piece of land. Note in hand, you proceed past the many “No Trespassing” signs. After about half an hour, you encounter a patrol officer who inspects your alleged permit, detects the forgery, and escorts you off the premises but does not prosecute you. Here are two competing descriptions of the event. First comes the one we take to be the natural interpretation: You were justified in crossing the “No Trespassing” signs *because* you had the misleading signification of the note. Not only are you not to blame, your behavior is not subject to any legitimate criticism. The bare fact of being at odds with a law is irrelevant from a normative point of view, and knowledge is a normative notion. Next comes Williamson’s interpretation. He seems to imply that your behavior was simply unjustified. Your ignorance excuses you from any punishment for this unjustified behavior, but the behavior was unjustified from start to finish. Saying that one was justified in believing they were justified does not change this result.

Suppose the latter interpretation is right. Suppose, that is, that your behavior was unjustified *full-stop*, and that you are merely blameless. Taking the epistemic case: suppose, as Williamson holds, that in “the bad case” one is not justified but merely blameless. Doesn’t this go along with thinking that justification, understood apart from knowledge, just doesn’t have much real work to do? Not at all. Kent Bach (1985), e.g., has argued that much theorizing about justification conflates issues of justified belief with issues of justified (/blameless) believers. The result, Bach thinks, isn’t that justification is of no great theoretical interest, but that theorists are freed up to pursue externalist theories thereof, including ones whereby those in the bad case don’t have any justified beliefs. Similarly, Rysiew (2011) considers as a live option the view that those in the bad case lack any real (as opposed to apparent) evidence – “contrary,” as Williamson says, “to what sceptics and many other epistemologists assume”. He does so, however, without endorsing

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Kornblith (Naturalism and Intuitions), who notes trouble for the traditional philosophical project of conceptual analysis: “Knowledge, for example, may be analyzed, on certain views, as justified, true belief meeting some additional, and difficult to specify, condition. It is taken for granted that the form of a proper analysis is just some such set of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions. The idea that our concepts are mentally represented in this form is what psychologists refer to as the Classical View of concepts. Since the early to mid-1970’s, it has become increasingly clear that the Classical View is not correct.” The moral Kornblith draws from this, however, isn’t Williamson’s. Rather, it is that standard philosophical method, which includes liberal appeal to intuitions, is not a reliable method of understanding our concepts – and, he thinks, our concepts are not plausibly viewed as the target of philosophical understanding anyway.



‘E=K’ (and in fact, while allowing for the sort of view of evidence we outlined in our opening statement). Once again, then, there are various extant theories that preserve the result Williamson ultimately recommends, but without going the knowledge first route.

## THE GOOD AND BAD CASES

Williamson insists that what is common to perceiving and misperceiving is not more basic than perceiving. Fortunately, we do not need any basicity claim. All we need is that there *is* something in common. What the veridical and illusory cases have in common, clearly enough, is what it’s like to be in those states. In addition to shared qualitative character, they have the same representational contents. Both experiences assert, as it were, the same thing. And, of course, this phenomenology is *in a way* more direct to us than the external world, since it is in virtue of our experience that we are aware of the world. (Note that this only makes experience the medium, and not the object, of awareness.) Williamson has strong words indeed for the view that narrow content is the “real core” of experience. We are quite glad, then, that ‘experience first’ epistemology is committed to no such thesis. Again, all we need is that there is something *shared* between them. And this shared thing—what it’s like to have the world look that way—is where we need to begin in finding out how the world is. Whether or not the terminology or theoretical machinery of ‘narrow content’ is the best way of getting at it, *what it’s like* to see a red mug is exactly *what it’s like* to see a perfect hologram of a red mug; no cognitive science can reveal *that* to be false. In the good case, *as a matter of fact* what it’s like is causally hooked up to the world in the right kind of way, such that the experiential signs are not misleading and so we have not only justified belief but knowledge. In the bad case, we lack knowledge, but there is some credit in heeding misleading evidence.

Of course, once again, maybe the latter such credit should not be identified with justification of the sort required for knowing. Even so, it should be clear that resisting putting knowledge first doesn’t require – and in our case, doesn’t involve – throwing ourselves behind ‘the veil of ideas’, seeing subjects as being acquainted only with ‘appearances’, and suchlike. We take our view to be perfectly compatible with direct realism about the external world and not to be a version of sense-datum theory (Chisholm adopts the adverbial view to defend direct realism, but is an “experience first” epistemologist (Chisholm 1989, esp. 66ff.). See also Huemer 2001, Chapter IV, esp. sect. 5). So too, it should be clear that ours is not a view that’s born out of an obsession with the problem of scepticism. That experience comes first in the indicated sense is simply a fact of our everyday epistemic lives.

## REGARDING INDISCRIMINABILITY

Williamson offers a sorites argument against the principle that “justification is exactly the same in cases indiscriminable to the subject.” Indiscriminability, he hypothesizes, is the link between appearances and justification. (We are a bit worried about the shift in that discussion from talk of *beliefs* being justified to *persons* being justified, for it suggests a possible running together of the idea of epistemic justification and epistemic responsibility). What he may have in mind is this: It seems that our unfortunate envatted counterparts are just as justified as we are in believing in an

external world, for that is *all we have to go on*. We've already indicated how our own central claims don't require that result. But suppose it's right. What is the problem? Williamson claims that this picture falls prey to a sorites argument. One problem with his argument is that it assumes experiences are fully determinate rather than vague. Yet fairly early on in the development of contemporary empiricism—in response to the Problem of the Speckled Hen—both Ayer (1940) and Chisholm (1942)<sup>13</sup> noted that experiences or the characters of sensing are in fact not fully determinate. (See Tye 2009 for a representationalist perspective on this problem and Dougherty 2011 for more context). We do not have  $RED_{i=.72744}$  experiences and  $RED_{i=.72745}$  experiences. Rather, we have “reddish” or even “somewhat reddish” experiences. All basic evidence is necessarily vague. But even if higher-order anti-luminosity prevents this, nothing important follows, for, as Jeffrey showed, we can get along perfectly well with uncertain evidence.

## REGARDING FORMAL METHODS

We agree that formal models can be illuminating. And it is hard to disagree that “shaky reasoning” isn't the way to go. However, we suggest that traditional epistemologists sometimes exercise the same kind of careful, skilled inquiry as do formal epistemologists, even when they are not working with numbers or special symbols. Williamson mentions several of the many risks of using formal models, and it seems to us that the cost-to-benefit ratio is about the same in formal and non-formal modes of inquiry, when pursued conscientiously by capable parties.

It is unclear how any kind of Bayesianism is an *alternative* to (almost) any epistemic logic, for it is unclear whether they are designed to do the same thing. For example, if we let the weak epistemic modality be “it is permissible for the agent to believe that” there are forms of Bayesianism perfectly compatible with the theorems such an epistemic logic would include. Likely this is so also if the strong operator reads “It is certain that.” Also, we don't know in advance whether the simplifications and idealizations of the respective theories would “hook up” in a direct enough way to constitute a rivalry. And if there were rivalry, we would perceive no threat to experience first epistemology, because it is not at all clear that the success of epistemic logic in being illuminating furnishes any reason to adopt the knowledge first approach.

Williamson says Bayesianism fails to integrate probabilities with an epistemology of evidence. Like all philosophers, Bayesians start out with a set of problems to solve. Most Bayesians are concerned with ways of characterizing coherence properties, which are generally agreed to be good-making features of one's noetic structure. We doubt Williamson disagrees. Other Bayesians are interested in formal learning theory and are not concerned with where the evidence comes from, but rather with what one ought to do with it when one gets it. So a theory of evidence is simply outside the scope of standard Bayesian pursuits. But of course many Bayesians have a favoured view of evidence (Swinburne 2001, e.g.). Many probabilists don't commit to any formal learning theory and simply see probability logic as exactly parallel to first-order logic. Its job is to tell you what choices you face given your current commitments

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<sup>13</sup> In fact, Chisholm explicitly considers the non-transitivity of indistinguishability, 1942, 371. He notes that Russell was dealing with this problem as early as 1921. He claims that this allows basic evidence to be certain, though we are not committed to that. For a more recent refutation of the sorites argument, see Graff 2001.

(Howson and Urbach 1993). In Jeffrey's case, the assigning of probabilities to basic propositions is a *techné* -- it requires an art of judgment that is generally acquired by practicing in the appropriate community (Jeffrey 1992). Williamson says, "When we ask how probable a theory is on our evidence, we want something less dependent on our doxastic state than a credence but more dependent on our epistemic state than a chance". This is just what we get on an experiential theory of evidence wedded to a Chisholm-like theory of evidence that states objective, material epistemic principles. We end up with a form of epistemic probability that strikes the appropriate balance between subjectivity and objectivity.

Williamson says that traditional epistemology, since it has been going on much longer than knowledge-first epistemology, should be ahead when "judged by their capacity to generate epistemologically illuminating formal models". It's not at all clear why it should have been expected to generate *any* such models. Nor is it clear that what he calls "traditional" epistemology *has* been around longer. Indeed, it is sometimes criticized as having started essentially with Descartes, whereas some kind of "knowledge first" view seems to go back to Aristotle, and to have been expounded by Scholastic philosophers.<sup>14</sup> Mathematical philosophy germinated in the 19th Century, budded in the 1920s, and began to blossom in the mid- to late-70s. So we doubt we should expect any kind of theory to bear heavy formal fruit yet. (And it is worth noting that it has been only a little more than four decades since Gettier's paper, and that some people are satisfied that they've solved the problem, and in a very non-Grue-like fashion (Feldman 2003, 125), and interesting work continues to be done on the topic (Bernecker forthcoming). Furthermore, it has now been a fourth of that time since publication of *Knowledge and Its Limits*, and there remain many, many details to work out. It would be unreasonable to expect of any view, however, that a project worth doing could be done in the lifetime of one philosopher. However, Bayesianisms and more general probabilisms are alive and well, indeed flourishing across the globe today, and most of them are compatible with most theories of evidence, including the common sense empiricist theory that our fundamental evidence—at the base or frame of our noetic structure—consists in the experiences by which the world is revealed to us but which sometimes lead us astray.

Finally, Williamson notes that some rivals to knowledge-first epistemology take evidence to be non-propositional. For example, my warm feeling can be evidence that it is hot in here. But then he says that it is hard to explain how non-propositional evidence contributes to updating probabilities. This issue has been discussed quite a bit elsewhere,<sup>15</sup> including in our opening remarks, so there is no need to add to them here.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle/>: "Whereas Descartes seeks to place philosophy and science on firm foundations by subjecting all knowledge claims to a searing methodological doubt, Aristotle begins with the conviction that our perceptual and cognitive faculties are basically dependable, that they for the most part put us into direct contact with the features and divisions of our world, and that we need not dally with sceptical postures before engaging in substantive philosophy." Yet Aristotle held that knowledge of the external world was by means of "sensible species." Reid has an interesting discussion of Aristotle's epistemology (*IP* IV 2, *W* 372a-b).

<sup>15</sup> See note 10 from "Experience First."

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### ***Still No Where Else to Start***

Unlike climbing Toubkal, something's looking tall or seeming upon reflection to be true aren't typically things to write home about. Often, such experiences aren't noticed (as such) at all. For well-functioning humans in normal environments, however, they too are ways of being engaged with the world. That some facts about that world are obvious (evident), and that we sometimes start there, is perfectly compatible with our view, as is the fact that such beliefs as we have about our experiences can be mistaken.

Williamson mentions that in our framework pooling evidence requires the use of testimony as if that's a problem. But "a serious theory of shared scientific evidence" will surely be an endeavor in social epistemology involving trust and an acknowledgment of the epistemic significance of (seeming) comprehension of others' presentations-as-true.

Williamson tends to associate experience-first epistemology with some pretty radical forms of internalism (e.g., Descartes's, Carnap's). But, as it was for Reid (hardly a Cartesian!), it is for us the "*belief-evoking experiences* characteristic of [our] faculties" (Wolterstorff 2004, 80; emphasis added), and of evidence generally, that is epistemically central. 'The evidence of sense', for instance, "is neither the proposition itself nor some other proposition but the sensory experience one is having" (83; See Plantinga 1998, 98 for a contemporary externalist avowal of experience as evidence).

Regarding the phenomenal sorites argument, as we've stressed, the 'experience first' approach doesn't stand or fall with the idea that argument targets. Even so, we ask that the reader consult the footnotes and decide for themselves whether the argument succeeds, and to consider as well whether it doesn't require the dubious thesis that there can be indiscernible non-identical qualia. We also invite the reader to see for him or herself what happens when they look at a transitional color spectrum: it is hardly a stable experience.

We remain confident that we have described a viable and vital research project, formal and informal.

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