

WILLIAMSON AND THE “JUDGMENT SKEPTIC”

WILLIAMSON E O “JUÍZO CÉTICO”

Rodrigo Borges*

ABSTRACT: In his latest book, Timothy Williamson (*‘The Philosophy of Philosophy’*) discusses the role of intuitions in philosophical methodology. In this paper I reconstruct Williamson’s discussion and criticize his take on the subject. My criticism is twofold: first, contrary to what Williamson suggests, some version of the philosophical conception which underlies the way philosophers usually think about intuitions must be right and, secondly, the alternative approach to intuitions offered by Williamson is mistaken.

Key Words: Intuition. Knowledge. Skepticism. Belief. Judgments.

RESUMO: Em seu livro mais recente, Timothy Williamson (*‘The Philosophy of Philosophy’*) discute o papel da intuição na metodologia filosófica. Neste artigo eu reconstruo a discussão de Williamson e critico a sua maneira de tratar do assunto. A minha crítica tem duas partes: primeiro, contrário ao que Williamson sugere, alguma versão da concepção filosófica que tem por base a maneira com que filósofos usualmente pensam intuição deve estar certa e, em segundo lugar, a teoria alternativa sobre intuição oferecida por Williamson está errada.

Palavras-chave: Intuição. Conhecimento. Ceticismo. Crença. Juízos.

Introduction

Timothy Williamson (henceforth ‘W’)¹ devotes chapter 7 of *‘The Philosophy of Philosophy’* to the discussion of the use of intuitions as evidence in philosophy. In what follows, I will, first, present W’s views on the matter and, then, assess them critically. Section 1 discusses the conception of evidence shared by those who think intuitions play a pivotal evidential role in philosophical inquiry, according to W. Section 2 presents W’s criticism of this conception of evidence and his positive account of what counts as evidence in philosophy. Finally, on section 3, I present a case against W’s positive account.

* Doutorando em Filosofia – Rutgers University, New Jersey -USA. Contato: epistemen@gmail.com.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all page references are to WILLIAMSON, T. *The Philosophy of Philosophy*. New York: Blackwell, 2007.

1. The Principle of Evidence Neutrality and the Judgment Skeptic

Both scientific and philosophical claims are usually backed up by evidence: where ‘x’ is a philosophical or scientific predicate, scientific or philosophical claims of the form ‘A is x’ are usually backed up by reasons for us to accept it. The nature of scientific and philosophical inquiry seems similar, at least to this extent. In this sense, pending any reason for thinking otherwise, it seems plausible to think that scientific and philosophical inquiries are on a par in this methodological dimension. However, if W is right, philosophers in the analytical tradition are likely to distance philosophical methodology from scientific methodology by adding some constraints on what counts as evidence in philosophy. Let’s look at these constraints and at how, according to W, they distance philosophical methodology from scientific methodology.

Philosophers usually provide deductive arguments in support of their claims, and, when they don’t do that, they usually make an explicit effort to produce strong non-deductive arguments in their support. All too often, the evidence offered in favor of a philosophical claim is contested. If another party is not convinced that the premises the philosopher is offering support her conclusion, it won’t be dialectically effective to simply restate the original argument: you can’t convince someone of the plausibility of a conclusion, if she disputes one of the premises that is being used in its support. In this context, if the philosopher still wanted to persuade her opponent of the plausibility of the conclusion, her best shot would be to substitute the contested premise for an uncontested one. So, if someone contests the plausibility of the claim that x is F because she doesn’t think premise (1) is true

- (1) All As are Bs
- (2) All Bs are Fs
- (3) x is A
- ∴ Therefore, x is F

the natural move is to substitute (1) for something undisputed. Maybe we can get our doubtful friend to agree that x is F by getting her to agree that all Cs are Bs and that x is a C:

- (1*) All Cs are Bs
- (2) All Bs are Fs
- (3*) x is C
- ∴ Therefore, x is F

Of course, if the person challenging this argument is not willing to accept either (1*) or (3*), we haven’t found a common ground on which we can unproblematic base the conclusion. If this is the case, then we should keep looking for a set containing only premises upon which we and our doubtful friend agree. The thought behind the argumentative move the philosopher makes is that of trying to find common evidential ground on the basis of which the acceptance of a particular claim is uncontroversial².

The pursuit of uncontroversial reasons for believing a philosophical claim seems to be founded on a principle like the following one³.

Evidence Neutrality (EN): for every proposition P, whether P constitutes evidence is *in principle* uncontroversially decidable.

It seems that (EN) is presupposed by philosophers who proceed in the way described above. It would be pointless to look for common evidential ground while arguing for a philosophical claim if we can’t even in principle decide what counts as evidence for that claim.

If E is a piece of evidence only if all parties agree that E is a piece of evidence and we want to take into account the opinion of all the parties involved in the philosophical dispute, what counts as evidence? After all, philosophy can be pretty controversial and finding common evidential ground in philosophical contexts can be a complicated business. Before we go on, let’s us assume, for the sake of argument, that W is right and E is a piece of evidence only if E is a true proposition. Now, in the context of analytical philosophy, when some philosophical claim T is contested and, according to (EN), cannot be used as evidence, the philosopher pushing T might make the case that T is intuitive. Thus, instead of using T as evidence, the intuition that T is the case is used as such. For example, in the context of a debate with a philosophical skeptic, only propositions the skeptic doesn’t contest will count as evidence. While dealing with a skeptic about the external world, our argument to the conclusion that the skeptical hypothesis is false can’t have as premises propositions such as that there are tables and chairs, for the skeptic will contest the truth of those propositions. On the other hand, the skeptic won’t quibble over the proposition that S has the intuition that there are tables and chairs. He will grant that this proposition about S’s mental state is true and might be used as evidence for the philosophical claim S is pushing. The same thing will

² Moreover, the existence of an actual person who contests the philosophical argument is inessential to this procedure: philosophers usually stage the dialectic in soliloquy, from their armchair.

³ WILLIAMSON, 2007, p. 210.

hold for any proposition about the external world the philosopher tries to use as evidence against the skeptical hypothesis: the skeptic will contest the truth of each and every empirical propositions, but he will very likely grant the truth of the proposition that the empirical claim is intuitive. So, if the proposition that *x* is *F* is an empirical proposition, then the skeptic about the external world will contest its truth, but he won't contest the truth of the propositions that *S* intuits that *x* is *F*.

Another paradigmatic example of appeal to intuitions in analytical philosophy comes from epistemology. The vast majority of epistemologists think that the fact that people usually have the intuition that subjects in Gettier-like cases don't know is evidence for the claim that knowledge is not merely justified true belief⁴.

But what, exactly, does 'intuition' mean? *W* argues that 'intuition' and 'judgment' are synonyms and that identifying "the term 'intuitions' to states with some list of psychological or epistemological features [...] would not explain the more promiscuous role the term plays in the practice of philosophy"⁵. In fact, *W* goes as far as saying 'Philosophers might be better off not using the word "intuition" and its cognates'⁶.

However, if intuitions are judgments, then the use of intuitions as evidence for philosophical claims is open to a straightforward skeptical challenge: since to intuit that *P* is to judge that *P* and judging that *P* does not guarantee that *P* is the case, intuiting/judging that a philosophical claim is true does not guarantee that this claim is true. The skeptic will grant the truth of the proposition that *S* intuits that *P*, but will contest the truth of the proposition based on this true proposition, that *P*.

This point is pressed by the 'judgment skeptic', skeptics who "present themselves as identifying ways in which our conceptual practices need, or may need, revision"⁷. The judgment skeptic argues that having the intuition that the subject in the Gettier cases doesn't know even though he is justified in believing a true proposition is not evidence for the truth of the claim that, necessarily, knowledge is not mere justified true belief. This skeptic, just like

⁴ As we will see below, the epistemologist's assumption that the Gettier intuition is evidence for the claim that knowledge is not merely justified true belief is currently under severe fire.

⁵ WILLIAMSON, 2007, p. 218.

⁶ WILLIAMSON, 2007, p. 220. *W* offers almost no discussion of the view held by some (e.g., BEALER 1998, 2002) that intuitions are intellectual seemings and a source of foundational epistemic justification, though he claims to have refuted this view in a previous chapter on epistemological conceptions of analyticity. What is really surprising, though, is that *W* is completely silent about theories which distance themselves from the intellectual seemings framework (I have in mind the excellent work done by Ernest Sosa (2007, forthcoming) in elaborating an account of intuitions based on the notion of virtuous competence).

the traditional skeptic about the external world, will insist that judging that P is the case can't favor P over a skeptical hypothesis according to which \sim P is the case⁸.

According to W, once we accept (EN) and the psychologization of the notion of evidence it entails, it becomes virtually impossible to close the gap between the psychological and the non-psychological world. This gap created by (EN) is explored by the judgment skeptic. The next section will discuss W's case against (EN) and the psychologization of evidence in philosophy.

2. Against Evidence Neutrality: the skeptical worry

W points out that judgment skepticism is just an instance of a more general form of skepticism and that the reasons we have to object to the latter are reasons for us to object to the former.

Just like global skeptics, judgment skeptics present a skeptical hypothesis that seems to explain the relevant evidence just as well as our preferred non-skeptical hypothesis does: according to global skepticism, the reason why we judge that we have hands is not because we really have hands, but, instead, because we are being fooled by a mad scientist into thinking that we have hands even though we are bodyless brains-in-vats; analogously, according to the judgment skeptic the reason why someone judges that the subject in Gettier cases doesn't know is not because it isn't possible that knowledge is justified true belief, but, instead, because of contingent facts about cultural and economic status of the person assessing those cases. Both skeptics argue that, once we are presented with the skeptical hypothesis, we have no principled way to prefer the non-skeptical hypothesis over the skeptical one. Since

⁷ WILLIAMSON, 2007, p. 220.

⁸Even though W doesn't mention the seminal work of experimental philosophers, it is hard not to think that he has them in mind when he discusses judgment skepticism. The work of experimental philosophers (e.g., WEINBERG; NICHOLS; STICH, 2001) offers empirical evidence for the hypothesis that judgments ('intuitions') about the extension of concepts like knowledge is not as uniform as epistemologists would have thought. The result of their research suggests that the application of the concept of knowledge varies with cultural and economic background. If experimental philosophers are right, the judgment that the subject in Gettier-like cases does or doesn't know may be evidence for how the group to which the person making the judgment belongs employs the concept of knowledge, not for the non-relativized, objective nature of this concept. If this is so, the judgment that the subject in Gettier-like cases doesn't know does not favor the hypothesis that knowledge, necessarily, is not justified true belief over the hypothesis that, according to white, western, philosophy students, knowledge is not justified true belief. For a criticism of experimental philosopher's findings, see Sosa (forthcoming, forthcoming a).

our evidence is not good enough to favor any of those hypotheses, if we prefer the non-skeptical hypothesis over the skeptical one, we are just exercising good old dogmatism.

Once we accept (EN) and the psychologization of the notion of evidence it entails, it becomes virtually impossible to close the gap between the psychological and the non-psychological world: how can we convince the skeptic about the external world that I have hands on the basis of my psychological premise that I have the intuition that I have hands? Similarly, how can we convince the judgment skeptic that knowledge is not justified true belief on the basis of the psychological premise that I have the intuition that the subject in the Gettier case doesn't know?

W⁹ thinks that we can't satisfy these skeptical demands and close the gap created by (EN). If we accept (EN) and the psychological conception of evidence it entails, we will be at the mercy of radical skepticism and therefore paralyzed. If W is right, (EN) and what it entails are responsible for making the notion of evidence virtually useless for philosophical inquiry. For this reason, he claims that (EN) is false and that

Sometimes it is legitimate to assume that some proposition is a piece of evidence even if that implicates the falsity of one of the disagreeing parties in a philosophical dispute: Having good evidence for a belief does not require being able to persuade all comers, however strange their views, that you have such a good evidence. No human beliefs pass that test.

As this passage makes clear, W thinks that judgment skepticism and skepticism about the external world are both motivated by the idea that having good evidence for a belief requires 'being able to persuade all comers.' Since, according to (EN), we should use as evidence only propositions whose truth are undisputed, the philosophical position which embraces (EN) and a dialectical framework of evidence seem congenial: if E is evidence for P, then, if someone doubts E's evidential status in relation to P, then the subject employing E in favor of P should be able to dismiss those doubts. Given a dialectical framework of evidence of this sort, it's understandable that philosophers who accept (EN) appeal to judgments (intuitions), for the global skeptic won't doubt that the philosopher judges that he has hands. Neither will the judgment skeptic doubt that he judges that the subject in Gettier-like cases doesn't know. But, according to W¹⁰,

⁹ WILLIAMSON, 2007, p. 212.

¹⁰ WILLIAMSON, 2007, p. 238.

We should not assume too readily that a dialectical standard of evidence is always appropriate. It works well when both sides show moderation and restraint. But the adversarial system of inquiry has limits. By accepting the dialectical standard unconditionally, we lay ourselves open to exploitation by ruthless opponents – such as skeptics.

The worry is that, if we let the dialectical framework of evidence constraint what counts as evidence for what, we will have little chance to account for the empirical and conceptual knowledge we ordinarily take ourselves to have. It seems that; once we accept the dialectical model and let all our evidence consist only of psychological states, it will become very hard to maintain a non-skeptical view about philosophy. In particular, it will become virtually impossible to, at the same time, employ only premises and forms of argument the skeptic considers uncontroversial and establish the truth of familiar knowledge attributions.

What is more, the fact that philosophers are willing to abide by (EN) even in skeptical contexts brakes down the analogy between what counts as evidence in philosophical inquiry and what counts as evidence in scientific inquiry: scientists don’t usually think that they have to answer all doubts about a purported piece of evidence.

It seems clear that, if (EN) and the dialectical framework of evidence leave us at the mercy of skeptics, then we should either get rid of (EN) and the dialectical framework or try to find an interpretation of both that doesn’t have this consequence. W opts for the first horn of this dilemma. In what follows I will argue against the theory W puts in the place of (EN) and the dialectical framework. If I’m right, there are good reasons to think that W’s proposal is unsatisfactory. I particularly sympathize more with theories that take up the second horn of the dilemma than with theories that ditch (EN) and the dialectical framework. However, here I only criticize W’s take on the dilemma. The task of developing a view which takes on the first horn of the dilemma will have to be pursued some other day.

3. The Principle of Evidence Partiality and Dogmatism

Before I turn to W’s preferred view of what counts as evidence in philosophy, I’d like to call attention to an important omission in W’s case against (EN) and the dialectical framework of evidence. (EN) and the dialectical framework of evidence only make us an easy prey to skepticism if they are unrestrictedly conceived. But W has offered us no good reason to think that (EN) and the dialectical framework can be understood only unrestrictedly. Thus,

for all W has told us, it is not the case that a qualified interpretation of (EN) and the dialectical framework of evidence entail that we are at the mercy of skeptics.

In what follows I won't try to offer a qualified interpretation of (EN) or the dialectical framework. Rather, I'll try to motivate the claim that some version of the dialectical framework must be true, for it accounts for very important facts about evidence. If I manage to establish this point, we will have learned that giving (EN) and the dialectical framework an interpretation different from the one W does is something we should pursue. Moreover, if it turns out that the facts about evidence that the dialectical conception accounts for are facts W's account doesn't account for, then, I take it, this will be a considerable cost for W's account of evidence.

Let's take then a careful look at what motivates the acceptance of (EN) in particular, and the dialectical framework in general. I will call the view which accepts (EN) and the dialectical framework of evidence 'The dialectical model.' At the end of the discussion of this model we will see that what motivates the dialectical model is the recognition of an important fact about evidence, a fact that W's model can't account for.

As we saw above, part of what motivates the acceptance of (EN) is the thought that we should always find common evidential ground among disputing parties, if inquiry in philosophy and/or science is to move forward: we can't establish any philosophical or scientific claims if we offer contested premises in favor of it. Is there anything else we can say about the dialectical model behind this idea? We can plausibly say the following. The dialectical model is not only a constraint on what counts as evidence for what, but it also tells us why we care about evidence in the first place. The following couple of examples should help bring out this more fundamental aspect of the dialectical model.

(Ex1)

John and Mary are discussing whether Smith is a thief or not.

John – “Do you think Smith stole a book from the library?”

Mary – “Yes. I know he did it.”

John – “How can you be so sure?”

Mary – “I was at the library yesterday and Smith was there too. At some point, I was passing by an aisle and he was on his knees taking a book from the bookshelf and putting under his raincoat.”

John – “Oh, but that could have been Jack, Smith's twin brother. Do you think you can tell one from the other?”

Mary – “Yes, I can tell Jack from Smith when I see them close enough. I've known them for years now and I was very close to him yesterday. Besides, I'm pretty sure Jack is out of town.”

John – “Really? I talked to their mother yesterday and she told Jack was in town and that he is a kleptomaniac who steals mostly books.”

Mary – “You shouldn’t pay attention to what their mother says. She spent the last five years in a nut house. She went back home only because neither Jack nor Smith had the money to pay for a place for her.”

(Ex2)

Same situation as in (Ex1).

John – “Do you think Smith stole a book from the library?”

Mary – “Yes. I know he did it.”

John – “How can you be so sure?”

Mary – “I was at the library yesterday and Smith was there too. At some point, I was passing by an aisle and he was on his knees taking a book from the bookshelf and putting it under his raincoat.”

John – “Oh, but that could have been Jack, Smith’s twin brother. Do you think you can tell one from the other?”

Mary – “Yes, I can tell Jack from Smith when I see them close enough. I’ve known them for years now and I was very close to him yesterday. Besides, I’m pretty sure Jack is out of town.”

John – “Really? I talked to their mother yesterday and she told Jack was in town and that he is a kleptomaniac who steals mostly books.”

Mary – “She must be wrong. I know Smith stole a book!”

Suppose all relevant propositions in the examples are true: Smith really stole the book; Mary can tell Jack from Smith pretty reliably; their mother really told John about Jack being in town and she is really a mental patient. In both examples Mary gets, in one sense, things right: she justifiably believes something true. However, only in (Ex1) Mary is able to satisfy John’s request for reasons and this fact seems to make a difference. Even though Mary is right in both examples and Smith’s mother is a nut job, it seems that citing that she is a mental patient in (Ex1) not only puts Mary in dialectical advantage in comparison to Mary in (Ex2), but it also puts her in an epistemic advantage in comparison to Mary in (Ex2).

The upshot of the comparison of these two examples seems to be that being able to defend one’s belief against doubt has epistemic value over and above the non-epistemic, pragmatic value we may attribute to such defenses. In short, being able to defend one’s belief against doubt is an important epistemic desideratum. Being able to properly present one’s evidence for a belief is epistemically more valuable than simply having evidence in favor of one’s belief. As a matter of fact, being able to present one’s evidence for the belief one holds seems to be what partially explains why we value having evidence in the first place.

William Alston¹¹ makes this point quite neatly. Alston talks about ‘justification’ instead of ‘evidence’, but we can plausibly translate the justification-talk into evidence-talk in the following way: let ‘being justified’ mean ‘having evidence’ and ‘justifying one’s belief’ mean ‘presenting one’s evidence’.

But though the activity of responding to challenges is not the whole story, I do believe that in a way it is fundamental to the concept of *being justified*. Why is it that we have this concept of *being justified in holding a belief* and why is it important to us? I suggest that the concept was developed, and got its hold on us, because of the practice of critical reflection on our beliefs, of challenging their credentials and responding to such challenges – in short the practice of attempting to *justify* beliefs. Suppose there were no such practice; suppose that no one ever challenges the credentials of anyone’s beliefs; suppose that no one ever critically reflects on the grounds or basis of one’s own beliefs. In that case would we be interested in determining whether one or another belief *is* justified? I think not. It is only because we participate in such activities, only because we are alive to their importance, that the question of whether someone is in a state of *being justified* in holding a belief is of live interest to us [Alston’s emphasis]¹².

I think Alston makes a very strong case in favor of the dialectical model to the extent that he makes a strong case in favor of the idea that the activity of presenting one’s evidence and rebutting doubts about the beliefs one holds play a central role in the explanation of why we care about having evidence for one’s belief. Presenting one’s evidence while answering to doubts about our beliefs puts one in a better epistemic position than simply having evidence but not being able to use that evidence in favor of one’s belief. It also puts one’s epistemic community in a better epistemic position by either increasing the explanatory power of the beliefs held by the community or by showing that the community basis its beliefs on weak evidential grounds.¹³ The dialectical model is sensitive to these facts and it seems to flow naturally from their recognition. Thus, it seems true to say that some version of this model must be right. If this is correct, then any theory that intends to model what counts as evidence for what is not successful if it does not account for the facts about evidence which motivate the dialectical model.

¹¹ WILLIAM, A. *Epistemic Justification*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989, p.236.

¹² More recently, ALSTON (2005, p. 18) has made a similar point in the following passage: “There is the distinction between being justified as a property or status of a belief [...] and the *activity* of *justifying* a belief. The latter involves presenting an argument for the belief or exhibiting the reasons or evidence for it – what renders it justified. The two are obviously connected. By *justifying* a belief one shows that it *is justified*. But it is a confusion to identify the two. S can be justified in believing that p even if neither S nor anyone else has engaged in the activity of justifying that belief.”

¹³ Obviously, this claim needs to be backed up by argument. However, this is something that will be done only in another paper of mine, ‘Evidence and Intuitions: Two Constraints on These Notions’ (in preparation).

Now, can W’s alternative model account for the facts about evidence uncovered by our discussion of the dialectical model? As we saw above, according to W, philosophy should get rid of (EN) and the psychologization of evidence it entails – that’s the only way we can avoid the threat of general skepticism. Instead of arguing from the psychological premise

- a) S has the intuition that she has hands

to the empirical conclusion that

- b) S has hands

he urges us to flat out assert the fact that

- c) S has hands

Similarly, philosophers shouldn’t appeal to the premise that

- d) The Gettier Case has features that folk epistemology takes to constitute the subject’s lack of knowledge

to argue in favor of the conclusion that

- e) The subject in the Gettier case lacks knowledge.

Instead, we should simply assert the fact that the subject in the Gettier case lacks knowledge. Since, according to W, all and only facts (true propositions) should count as evidence, he seems to endorse the following principle analogous to (EN):

Evidence Partiality (EP): for every proposition P, if P is true, then, even if the truth of P is contested, P may be used as evidence.

It should be obvious that (EP) entails that the dialectical model of evidence is false and, therefore, it is also incompatible with (EN). (EP) is clearly what underlies the claim that,

despite being severely contested by global skepticism, the proposition that I have hands may be used as evidence.

What is deeply worrisome about (EP) is that it breeds extreme dogmatism. For all (EP) says, completely incompetent subjects (i.e., incompetents from the cognitive point of view) are epistemically in the clear if they stick to their beliefs despite overwhelming evidence that the subject’s belief is false. Of course, the evidence against one’s belief might be misleading. But, even if we are exposed to misleading evidence against our belief that P, how plausible is the suggestion that we are epistemically in the clear if we simply ignore all this (misleading) evidence and continue to believe that P? I think the plausibility of such a suggestion is very low¹⁴.

Furthermore, once we accept (EP), the idea that evidence should function as a neutral arbiter is lost: any theorist can say that the evidence best supports her theory by merely appealing to the claim that she bases her theory on ‘true’ propositions.

Since (EP) legitimizes the use of a true proposition P as evidence no matter how contested P is and (EP) is silent about how we identify which propositions are the true ones, there’s not much we can say, once we accept (EP), against theories like tea leaf reading, astrology and so on. For all W has said, astrologers, tea leaf readers and the like are permitted to stick to their guns even when heavily contested by physicists and other professionals we care about funding. It is hard to think of a more pernicious form of dogmatism than the one entailed by an unrestricted understanding of (EP)¹⁵.

It should be clear that W’s positive account of what should count as evidence in philosophy doesn’t make room for the relation between having evidence and presenting one’s evidence and rebutting doubts. We can’t account for the epistemological value of defending our beliefs against doubts if, according to (EP), the mere fact that P is true and the subject is aware that P is sufficient for him to use P as evidence, no matter how strongly P is contested.

¹⁴ Though I won’t be able to elaborate on that here, it is worth noticing that something similar to (EP) was first discussed by Kripke in an unpublished manuscript and which generates the ‘dogmatist paradox’ (Kripke’s name for a phenomenon similar to the one (EP) seems to commit us to: dismissing any piece of evidence against what we believe as misleading evidence on the base that one’s belief is true). Cf., among others, HARMAN (1973) and SORENSEM (1988) for a discussion of the problem raised by Kripke.

¹⁵ Here’s what W (p. 241) says about this consequence of (EP): ‘There is a persistent temptation to assume that a good account of methodology should *silence* astrologers and other cranks, by leaving them in a position where they can find nothing more to say. That assumption is naïve. They always find more to say.’ (W’s emphasis.) It is hard, at least to me, to see the relevance of this remark to the problem at hand. The problem with (EP) is not that it doesn’t ‘silence’ astrologers and other cranks. The problem with the methodology which employs (EP) unrestrictedly is that it can’t distinguish between astrologers and serious inquirers like scientists: both astrologers

There’s nothing in (EP) itself that allows us to account for the clear epistemic difference between someone who believes a true proposition and is completely helpless at defending his belief and someone who believes the same true proposition and is able to rebut all doubts as to whether that proposition is true by presenting her evidence. This view breaks down the connection between having evidence for believing that P and presenting one’s evidence in reply to doubts as to whether P is true or not. And, as we have seen, this connection is very likely to hold. For this reason and for the extreme dogmatism it entails, W’s positive conception of evidence presented in chapter 7 of ‘The Philosophy of Philosophy’ is likely to be mistaken.

Of course, nothing said here amounts to a knock-down argument against W’s views on the role of evidence in philosophy. Furthermore, it was granted in his favor that an unrestricted reading of (EN) is clearly problematic. On the other hand, since W’s views on the matter seem to be committed to an unrestricted reading of (EP) and this leads to extreme dogmatism and to insensibility to constitutive aspect of the notion of evidence, it seems plausible to conclude that W’s proposal is in no better shape than the position he criticizes.

The research which lead to this paper was funded by the CAPES/Fulbright Comission.

References

ALSTON, W. *Beyond “Justification”*: Dimensions of Epistemic Evaluation. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005.

_____. *Epistemic Justification*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

BEALER, G. “Modal Epistemology and the Rationalist Renaissance”. In: GENDLER, T.; HAWTHORNE, J. (Eds.). *Conceivability and Possibility*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2002.

_____. “Intuitions and the Autonomy of Philosophy”, In: DEPAUL, M; RAMSEY, W. (Eds.). *Rethinking Intuitions*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998.

HARMAN, G. *Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.

SOSA, E. “A defense of the Use of Intuitions in Philosophy”. In: BISHOP, M.; MURPHY, M. (Eds.). *Stich and His Critics*. (forthcoming).

_____. “Experimental Philosophy and Philosophical Intuitions”. *Philosophical Studies*. (forthcoming a)

_____. *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*. V.1. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

and scientists, according to (EP), are permitted to use a proposition P as evidence as long as P is true. But, who is to tell whether P is true or not?

SORENSEN, R. “Dogmatism, Junk Knowledge, and Conditionals”. In: *The Philosophical Quarterly*, V. 38, N. 153. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1988.

WEINBERG, J.; NICHOLS, S.; STICH, S. “Normativity and Epistemic Intuitions”. In: *Philosophical Topics* 29. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, 2001.

WILLIAMSON, T. *The Philosophy of Philosophy*. New York: Blackwell, 2007.