

Aftermath of Today's Seminar Concerning Chapter 8

11/03/06 (B.F.)

Today's discussion was really useful (for me, anyway). I want to get a bit clearer on the line I was pushing today. This will involve (among other things) a better formulation of the sceptical worry.

The key, it seems to me, in reconstructing the debate between Williamson and the sceptic (in a non-silly way) involves coming up with an explication of "E is evidence for H for S in case C" that does not give either side an immediate victory in the debate concerning either of the following propositions:

(\mathcal{A}) There is an evidential *asymmetry* in between the good case and the bad case. Specifically, E is evidence for H for S in the good case G, but it is not the case that E is evidence for H for S in the bad case B (for suitably chosen E, H, S, G, and B).

(\mathcal{S}) As far as one knows there is an evidential *symmetry* in between the good case and the bad case. Specifically, S's *actual* evidence E* does not favor (H_1) S is actually in the good case over (H_2) S is actually in the bad case (for S, in her *actual* case A).¹

Williamson believes that (\mathcal{A}) is true, and I was suggesting today that the sceptic is worried (*inter alia*) that (\mathcal{S}) is true. Of course, the sceptic is *also* worried that S doesn't know H (or E) in either the bad case or the good case, but I want to focus on (\mathcal{S}) for now, since I think the worry is more gripping with respect to (\mathcal{S}).

In setting the stage for a non-silly debate about (\mathcal{A}), I think we must take the following as a starting point:

(1) E is evidence for H for S in the good case G.

If we allow the sceptic to reject (1) at the outset, then he wins in a *silly* way, since TW *already* believes

(2) It is not the case that E is evidence for H for S in the bad case G.

So, we must take (1) as a presupposition, on pain of preventing (from the outset) Williamson from being able to accept (\mathcal{A}). Hence, I will take (1) as a starting point. Thus, the (\mathcal{A})-debate hinges on the following:

(\mathcal{A}') Is E evidence for H for S in the bad case B?

Concerning this question, if the debate about it is going to be *non-silly*, we must *not* presuppose

(TE) If E is evidence for H for S in case C, then E is true in C.

Presupposing (TE) here gives Williamson a *silly* victory, since the sceptic *already* believes that

(5) E is false in the bad case B.

So, we must not take (TE) as a presupposition, on pain of dialectically conceding a negative answer to (\mathcal{A}') — and therefore (\mathcal{A}), since we're presupposing (1) — to Williamson from the outset. So, whatever (non-silly) argument Williamson is going to give for a negative answer to (\mathcal{A}'), it cannot trade essentially on (5). As I see it, this already shifts the onus regarding (\mathcal{A}) back to TW, since he has given no such argument (and it is unclear to me whether he *could* give such an argument in a way that coheres with everything he asserts).

What about (\mathcal{S})? Well, if the sceptic is going to give a non-silly argument for (\mathcal{S}), then they will need some way to pump our intuitions about what *our actual* evidence favors (and does not favor) in *our actual* case. At this stage in the dialectic, Williamson cannot fall back on (\mathcal{A}), because he has no non-question-begging argument for (\mathcal{A}). But, let's imagine Williamson were able to come up with a non-question-begging argument for (\mathcal{A}). Then, he could (at least) say that S's actual evidence does favor H_1 over H_2 if S's actual case is the good case ($A = G$). That is, if TW had a non-question-begging argument for (\mathcal{A}), he could argue from (\mathcal{A}) to

¹NOTE: this is a significantly different formulation from the one we were working with in class. But, I think it's closer to my understanding of the sceptical worry. I take it that if the sceptic is right about (\mathcal{S}), then (intuitively), it would not be rational for S to believe that they are not (actually) in the bad case. To my mind, this is enough to get the sceptical worries going. If you don't believe that you are not in the bad case, then this (alone) could undermine lots of your beliefs (*e.g.*, that you have hands, *etc*).

(6) If $A = G$, then E^* favors H_1 over H_2 for S in A . That is, if $A = G$, then (S) is false.

Is this getting traction on the skeptic's worries that are behind (S)? Here, conflicting intuitions about " E is evidence for H for S in case C " become crucial. It is at this point in the dialectic that I want to offer the sceptic my "cash value" analogy as an intuition pump. Here's my analogy again, now with a twist at the end.

Let's say you're someone who values money for its *instrumental* power. You like having money only to the extent that it will actually do things for you. If it's just sitting in the bank, never to be used, then (we shall say) it has no *cash value* for you. As it turns out, *unbeknownst to you*, you "possess" lots of money. Some benefactor has placed a large sum of money in an account that (legally) you own. But, the catch is that he didn't tell you anything about this, and you will never find out about it.² Are you rich? Well, there is a sense in which you are rich, but it's not a very interesting sense, especially by your own lights. *Legally*, you "have" lots of money. But, since — *as far as you know* — you're the same poor schmuck you were yesterday, this is a sense of "rich" that has no *cash value* for you. I suspect that something analogous may be happening in this discussion about what evidence you "have" (in the sense presupposed by Williamson). Here's the twist. Imagine a variation on this case where you know that the benefactor has left 10000 shares of *some* company that was on the NYSE in 1950 in a vault that you don't know the combination to (and you can't crack). You also don't know *which* company it is, and so you also don't know *how much cash value* this (already pretty useless) bequest has (if any). This will be analogous to having some awareness that you "*possess*" E , but not having any awareness about whether (and to what degree) E *supports* H in your *actual* case. [I added the twist because there are these two dimensions along which awareness may be an issue.]

I think that even if TW was able to give a good argument for (A), and another compelling argument from (A) to (6), the sceptic (S) could still question the significance or cash value of E^* as evidence for S regarding H_1 vs H_2 in S 's actual case. Richard Feldman (see his "Having Evidence"), who is an epistemic internalist, would require that E^* be among S 's actual occurrent beliefs and experiences in order to count as "being possessed" by S (in a way that has cash value for S). That's analogous to requiring *some awareness* on S 's part of the presence of *something* in an account/vault S owns (in the variants of my kind benefactor example). Interestingly, Feldman does not require any awareness that the favoring (support) relation obtains between E^* and H_1 vs H_2 .³ But, let's imagine that the sceptic also requires some awareness of (the obtaining of the) support relation. Williamson, on the other hand, does not require *any* awareness (on S 's part) of *either* the "possession" (by S) of E^* as evidence (for S) *or* the (obtaining of the) favoring relation (would having both require some awareness *that* $A = G$?). I think this is where the rubber meets the road in the debate between Williamson and the sceptic. The disagreement bottoms out in the following pair of questions

(7) How much *awareness* must S have (in C) of E 's *being evidence that they "possess"* (in C) in order for E to qualify as *evidence for* S (in C)?

(8) How much *awareness* must S have (in C) of E 's *favoring* H_1 over H_2 (in C) in order for E to qualify as *evidence favoring* H_1 over H_2 for S (in C)?

The evidential internalist (*e.g.*, Feldman, and, I presume, the sceptic Williamson is talking about) will require *some* awareness along at least the first dimension, whereas Williamson (and perhaps other evidential externalists) requires *no* awareness along either dimension. I think the sceptic (*e.g.*, Fumerton) will presuppose a "some" answer to *both* questions (7) and (8). Once we require *some* awareness along either dimension, Williamson's arguments in the chapter are no longer as compelling. Moreover, even if TW could address the "possession"-awareness issue, he would still have to address the "support"-awareness issue. In the examples Williamson discusses in chapter 8, E entails H , and so the (objective!) "support"-awareness issue is not very deep. But, in the more general case addressed in chs. 9 and 10, matters become much more subtle along the support dimension. OK, I think that's a good setup for my comments and our discussion next week.

²We can fill-in details here to make this more plausible: assume it's a joint Swiss bank account you forgot you had, and you were estranged from the benefactor for many years, who was a former business partner of yours with access to the account, *etc.*, *etc.*

³Fumerton — an internalist and a sceptic — criticizes Feldman on these grounds. I am sympathetic to Fumerton here. After all, if an internalist is swayed by awareness considerations, shouldn't these be in force for both the "possession" and the "support" components of "being supporting evidence for S "? Analogy: in my benefactor example, wouldn't it be nice (in a cash value sense) to have awareness not only that the vault *isn't empty*, but that what it contains is something *that has some positive monetary value*?