

Introduction

This book is about the nature of evidence. Suppose you thought that the butler did it. What sorts of things constitute evidence that he did? At a crime scene, this question seems to have a straightforward answer: the evidence is stuff we can see, smell, touch, and hear – the butler’s fingerprints, the gunpowder residue, the gun, his death threat on a burner phone. In short, it is anything we can put in a bag, label ‘evidence’, give to forensics, and produce in court.

But closer philosophical attention to the concept of evidence suggests that this can’t be the whole story. For the evidence is something on the basis of which someone could – or should – form the *belief* that the butler did it (hence the title of this book). The evidence, that is, is a *reason* for belief, and this gives rise to several competing demands on the sorts of things that can be evidence. For a reason is a beast of many burdens, and the evidence must carry all of them. Let me just mention three such burdens arising from three roles epistemologists have traditionally envisaged for the evidence-concept. First, the evidence is something that *logically* supports your belief that the butler did it. But, second, it is also something that *objectively favours* believing as you do. Finally, the evidence is also something to which we can appeal in order to *explain* or *rationalise* your belief. Can there be such a wondrous beast that can carry all of these burdens? Yes, I argue in this book. True belief can carry all three and more. I call this view ‘truthy psychologism’.

Before I articulate the view more precisely and say how I will argue for it, let me answer a natural question. Why should anyone care about this more complicated notion of evidence in the first place, when we have a perfectly workable simple notion that seems to serve us just fine at crime scenes, in courts of law, and in scientific laboratories? Why, that is, do we need a philosophical account of the ontology of evidence? The short answer is that this putatively workable notion is much too simplistic. For starters, there are things that would ordinarily count as evidence that can’t, in fact, be put in a bag. (Think of the butler’s alibi, or of

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Cook's testimony from the witness stand.) Second, things that *can* be put in a bag – guns and burner phones – cannot enter logical or favouring relations, nor can they explain belief. They can't, that is, carry all the reasons-burdens. But they need to be able to: crime scenes, courts of law, and laboratories don't themselves churn out verdicts and hypotheses; detectives, judges, and scientists do. And they do so by forming *beliefs* about who did it, who should pay damages to whom, and which hypothesis best explains the data. In order to meaningfully evaluate their verdicts and hypotheses, moreover, we ourselves need to form beliefs. So, we want to know whether the evidence, in fact, supports the relevant beliefs. But we can't know *that* without knowing what sorts of things constitute evidence understood as a reason for belief. We can't know, in other words, without a philosophical account of evidence.

That is one reason for caring for such an account. There are others, more internal to epistemic theorising itself. Here is one. Most epistemologists think that our relationship to the evidence for a proposition partly determines whether we are rational and justified in believing that proposition, whether we believe it responsibly, whether the belief qualifies for knowledge, and so on. These are cardinal epistemic blessings and pet loci of debate in epistemology. But clearly, if we don't have an account of the nature of evidence, we don't have an account of the thing to which we are supposed to be appropriately related so as to enjoy these blessings. Moreover, the particular account we develop will influence our view on the nature of these blessings themselves. If it turned out, for instance, that only facts could be evidence, then it would be implausible to think, as internalists do, that the justificatory status of a belief is solely fixed by our mental states. So, an account of the ontology of evidence will advance much epistemic theorising. Although I won't use the account for this purpose here, having it in place will be useful to those engaged in these debates.

In the rest of this Introduction, I first spell out the central question of this book and existing answers to it (§ 0.1). I then introduce the book's main character (§ 0.2), its best friends (§ 0.3), and the plot (§ 0.4).

0.1 The Question and Existing Answers

The central question in the debate on the ontology of evidence is what sorts of things can be evidence for a proposition. Four answers are defended in the literature:

Propositionalism:	propositions (Dougherty 2011a; Neta 2008),
Factualism:	facts (Dancy 2000; Littlejohn 2012; Williamson 2000),

- Psychologism:** psychological states (Conee and Feldman 2004, 2008; Turri 2009),
Pluralism: all of the above (Kelly 2008; Rysiew 2011).

The arguments for each of the first three views are typically anchored in one of the aforementioned roles that philosophers have envisaged for the evidence-concept: the evidence is supposed to logically support, objectively favour, and explain our beliefs. Thus, some propositionalists appeal to the fact that the evidence stands in logical and probabilistic relations to the believed proposition; such relations obtain only amongst propositions, they say; so, only propositions can be evidence. Factualists, on the other hand, typically focus on the idea that the evidence is a good reason for belief; a good reason is something that speaks in favour of the belief; but since beliefs represent how things are, the thinking goes, only facts can favour belief. Finally, psychologists emphasise the idea that the evidence is something to which we appeal in order to make sense of why someone believes a particular proposition; since the belief to be explained is a psychological item, further psychological items seem in the best position to make sense of the belief.

Whatever one might think of the merits of these rationales, it is obvious that the roles to which they appeal are central roles the evidence plays in both our doxastic lives and epistemic theorising. It is equally obvious that each rationale privileges one of the three roles at the cost of occluding the others. What is not so obvious is why we need to go along with such favouritism. All three roles for evidence seem equally real and important. So, an account of evidence would be the better for reflecting all three. This is the thought that kindles the fourth view, pluralism. We needn't privilege any one role, the pluralist says; but since it is unlikely that a single thing can play all of these roles, all of these things constitute evidence.

But what if we could develop a *monist* account of evidence that accommodates all of these roles? Such an account would render pluralism superfluous, insofar as the main motivation for the view is the inability of any one thing to play all of these roles. A natural monist suggestion along these lines is to construe the evidence as propositional, psychological, and factive.¹ We would then honour all three roles for the evidence-concept. Interestingly, no one to my knowledge has defended such a view.² In this book I fill this lacuna.

¹ To use Timothy Williamson's definition, '[a] propositional attitude is factive if and only if, necessarily, one has it only to truths' (2000: 34).

² I used to think that Timothy Williamson's Knowledge-First is a view of this kind (Mitova 2015), since his $E = K$ 'equates the extensions of the concepts knowledge and evidence in

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0.2 Truthy Psychologism

Truthy psychologism is the view that the evidence consists of true beliefs which have explanatory and probabilistic relevance to the proposition they are evidence for. I argue that a true belief needs no further epistemic bells and whistles – justification, knowledge – in order to qualify as evidence. If I don't quite conclusively show that this thesis is true, I hope at the very least to establish it as a serious and respectable alternative to existing views.

I defend truthy psychologism by appeal to arguments from metaethics, epistemology, and metaepistemology. In Part I, I lay the metaethical foundations for the view: the evidence is a good reason for belief, and is therefore, I argue, psychological and veridical. In Part II, I support the view from epistemology: truthy psychologism accommodates all the roles envisaged for the evidence-concept with fewer costs than the rival accounts. Parts I and II, thus, show truthy psychologism to enjoy solid metaethical foundations and a sound epistemological structure. In Part III, I argue that the soil on which this marvellous edifice stands is, likewise, fertile. In particular, the view yields a natural answer to the central metaepistemological question of what gives evidence considerations their normative authority over us.

0.3 The Assumptions

The motivation for going to metaethics as a first port of call is that the current dialectic on the ontology of evidence is rather muddled. One might ask at least three questions about this ontology, each of which polarises the positions' allegiances differently.

If we start with the question of whether the evidence consists of psychological items, factualism and propositionalism end up in the same camp – anti-psychologism (since facts and propositions are not psychological items). But if we ask whether the evidence is propositional, the troops get re-deployed: factualism and propositionalism end up in opposing camps (since facts, on the most common view, are not propositions³), while psychologists can flit between camps depending on whether

any possible situation' (2000: 186), and he insists that knowledge is a mental state (2000: chap. 1). But he has vehemently disavowed any allegiance to psychologism (The Factive Turn in Epistemology Workshop, Vienna, 7–8 May 2015). According to him, the evidence consists of propositions (which are known), not the states of knowing these propositions. He can thus be described either as a propositionalist or as a factualist (since he thinks that facts are true propositions, 2000: 43). See §§ 2.2.2 and 6.2.1.

³ But see Littlejohn (2012: 95) and Williamson (2000: 43), who assume that facts are true propositions.

they think of the relevant psychological items as propositional states (Littlejohn 2012), or as perceptual experiences (Conee and Feldman 2004, 2008; Dougherty and Rysiew 2014). Finally, if we ask whether the evidence is factive, the factualist is clearly on one side, the psychologist on the opposite, while the propositionalist can switch sides depending on whether she thinks that only true propositions count as evidence (Littlejohn 2012; Williamson 2000), or whether she allows for false evidence (Fantl and McGrath 2009).

A natural way to make progress in this rather confusing dialectic is to look for an arbiter from outside of the debate on the ontology of evidence. I go to metaethics for such an arbiter. This will prove helpful, since the fight about the ontology of reasons has been going on there for much longer than it has in epistemology. The terms of the debate and costs of commitments are, thus, clearer there. For this to work I will need three assumptions:

- Assumption 1:** The evidence for a proposition is a *good* reason for believing that proposition.
- Assumption 2:** Hence, the evidence is of the same ontological kind as a good reason for belief.
- Assumption 3:** The relation in which a reason for a belief stands to the belief is analogous to the relation in which a reason for an action stands to the action.

As we will see, quite a lot will turn on these assumptions. So let me explain why they are fairly innocuous when heard in the right way.

The first assumption is rather modest. Most people think not only that the evidence is a good reason for belief, but that it is the best reason there is. Indeed, some ('evidentialists') go as far as to argue that the evidence is the *only* good reason for belief. Assumption 1 is entailed by both of these claims, but is much weaker than either. It just insists that the evidence is one kind of good reason for belief, where we understand a good reason as something that *pro tanto* favours believing the relevant proposition.⁴ (I defend this view of good reasons in § 1.2.1.) Thinking of the evidence as a good reason, hence, doesn't mean that the evidence *conclusively* favours the proposition in question. The butler's fingerprints on the murder weapon only *pro tanto* favour my believing that he is guilty. There may be other pieces of evidence for his guilt – say, his DNA on the victim. And there can be evidence against his guilt – he was out of the

⁴ Such reasons are more often called '*prima facie*'. As several people have pointed out, however, this label is misleading. *Prima facie* reasons only *apparently* favour an action (Kagan 1989). *Pro tanto* reasons, on the other hand, have actual (if partial) weight.

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country, his mortal enemy the footman was caught planting the fingerprints and DNA, and so on. (Parts II and III corroborate the assumption that the evidence is a good reason for belief by showing how it plays the role of such a reason, and telling us why we should care about the evidence.)

Assumption 2 is, likewise, fairly unexciting. If the evidence can be identical with a good reason, then the two had better be of the same ontological kind. We can then transpose claims about the ontology of good reasons to the evidence *qua* good reason.⁵ Thus, it can't turn out that good reasons for belief are, say, psychological states, but the evidence consists of facts.

Assumption 3 may grate a bit. Some philosophers think that our reasons for action are partly fixed by facts about our conative states. And such states make for pretty shabby reasons for belief. But all I mean here is that both kinds of reasons stand in a relevantly similar *relation* to the thing they are reasons for – they favour it, support it, rationalise it, and so on. The assumption is neutral on the nature of the *relata* in each case.

0.4 The Arguments

So much for the assumptions my arguments make. I now sketch the arguments themselves.⁶

Part I defends the following two theses concerning reasons:

- EXTREME: Both normative and motivating reasons for action are psychological states.
 TRUTHY: Normative reasons for belief are factive; they are veridical psychological states.

Chapters 1 and 2 pave the way for EXTREME. Chapter 3 defends it. Chapter 4 defends EXTREME for reasons for *belief*, and argues for TRUTHY.

In Chapter 1, I introduce the Standard Story about reasons for action. The Story involves a conceptual and an ontological claim. The conceptual claim is that normative reasons for an action are considerations that favour the action, while motivating reasons are the considerations that the

⁵ I make this qualification because, as an anonymous Cambridge University Press reader has pointed out, the move from the claim that the evidence is *one kind* of good reason to the automatic transposition of ontological claims about good reasons to evidence is too quick. What is undeniable, though, is that such claims will be transposable to the evidence *qua* good reason.

⁶ The frame for these arguments is to be found in Mitova (2015). Many thanks to *Philosophical Studies* for letting me reuse some of this material.

agent took to favour the action. The ontological claim is that normative reasons are facts, while motivating reasons are psychological states. I argue that we should keep the Standard Story's concepts, but reject its ontology.

In Chapter 2, I confirm the latter verdict by defending what I call 'The Beast of Two Burdens Thesis' (BTB):

BTB: Normative and motivating reasons are of the same ontological kind.

I defend this thesis by appeal to three arguments. The first (inspired by Bernard Williams) shows that unless normative reasons could be motivating reasons, our actions would not enjoy the kind of justification that both epistemologists and action-theorists hanker after. The second (inspired by Jonathan Dancy) establishes the converse: if motivating reasons couldn't be normative, then no one could act or believe for a good reason. The third defends the assumption that both of these arguments make: that a normative reason must be capable of being identical with a motivating reason.

Once we accept BTB, I argue in Chapter 3, we need to think of both normative and motivating reasons either as mental states (EXTREME) or as facts (anti-psychologism). I first offer a negative argument for EXTREME: anti-psychologism comes with some ontological costs which are both distasteful and ill-motivated. I then develop a positive argument for EXTREME. Only psychological states can motivate on their own. Motivating reasons for action can motivate on their own. So, only psychological states can be motivating reasons for action. But, by BTB, that means that only psychological states can be normative and motivating reasons for action (EXTREME).

In Chapter 4, I show that once EXTREME has been transposed to reasons *for belief*, TRUTHY falls out of EXTREME. The argument is this. By the epistemic version of EXTREME, normative reasons for belief are psychological states. Such reasons speak in favour of the truth of the believed proposition. Non-veridical states, such as false beliefs, don't genuinely speak in favour of the truth of propositions. So, only veridical states can be normative reasons for belief (TRUTHY), and hence evidence. This completes the arguments from metaethics.

The arguments of Part I get us to TRUTHY. But this is not yet truthy psychologism. TRUTHY entails that *only* veridical states count as evidence, not that *all* (and only) such states count as evidence. This thesis is compatible with two other views besides truthy psychologism: non-propositionalism and a view on which more heavyweight factive psychological states, such as knowledge, count as evidence. The task of Part II is to go all the way to truthy psychologism.

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Chapter 5 makes the view more precise. It can be captured in a biconditional.

Truthy psychologism: X is evidence for proposition *h* if and only if:
 (a) X is a true belief that *e*, and
 (b) *e* is positively relevant to the truth of *h*.

I argue that the relevance constraint on evidence, (b), involves two elements: *h*'s conditional probability on *e* must be higher than *h*'s prior; and there must be a plausible explanation either of *e* in terms of *h* or the other way around. I then show that given this conception of relevance, it is unlikely that non-propositional states will qualify for evidence. This is a partial argument against non-propositionalism. (I supplement it in Chapter 7.)

Chapter 6 defends truthy psychologism as an alternative to both pluralism and a possible view on which only heavyweight factive propositional states, such as knowledge, count as evidence. I show that if we think of the evidence as all and only relevant true beliefs, we get everything we want from the concept of evidence with fewer costs, so there is no need to go either pluralist or heavyweight. What we want from the concept are two groups of roles that pull in opposite directions. The first group pulls towards psychologism: the evidence explains, rationalises, and subjectively justifies belief. The second group pulls towards factualism: the evidence objectively justifies belief, indicates the truth of the proposition it is evidence for, and it is a final court of appeal in disagreement. I argue that truthy psychologism accommodates the first bunch of roles in virtue of its psychologism, and the second, in virtue of its truthiness.

In Chapters 7 and 8, I show that truthy psychologism holds its own against objections to each direction of the biconditional: if X is evidence, then it is a (relevant) true belief (Chapter 7); and if X is a (relevant) true belief, then it is evidence (Chapter 8).

The pressure on the left-to-right conditional comes from three quarters: anti-psychologists would urge that belief is altogether the wrong thing for evidence, non-propositionalists would insist that belief is not necessary for evidence, and plain psychologists would complain that truth is not necessary for evidence. I argue that the anti-psychologist's arguments only work against an implausible form of psychologism – the view that normative reasons are facts about our mental states. Once we have the right form of psychologism in place, and we make it truthy, the objections lose their sting. Against the non-propositionalist, I argue that the best argument for her objection – the justification regress problem – in fact fails to support the objection. Finally, I dismiss the plain psychologist's concern that factive

views of evidence can't make room for misleading evidence. I use Shakespeare's *Othello* to show that truthy psychologism, at all events, can.

In Chapter 8, I tackle three objections to the right-to-left conditional: if X is a true h -relevant belief, then X is evidence for h . The first two urge that true belief without any further epistemic kudos is epistemically too anaemic to constitute evidence: it doesn't hook us up appropriately to the world, and it can't justify further beliefs. The third objection insists that plain true belief is practically anaemic: it doesn't live up to the way the evidence helps rationalise and justify action. I argue that the first objection hinges on implausibly strong expectations of the concept of evidence, the second on an oversight about the relationship between evidence and justification, and the third on exaggerating the implications of the plausible thought that reasons for belief and reasons for action are intimately connected. Thus truthy psychologism weathers the most pressing objections.

In the last part of this book, I show off the fruitfulness of the view by arguing that it yields a natural answer to a central metaepistemic question: what is the source of the normative authority of evidential considerations?

In Chapter 9, I consider existing answers to this question, and show that a truthy psychologist could give any of them. But, I then argue, we shouldn't give any of them. An answer to the question of the normative authority of the evidence must meet two constraints: it must explain how we can be *motivated* by evidential considerations; and it must show how our concern for evidence is *appropriate*, rather than fetishist. I show that none of the existing answers meets both constraints. Pragmatic and moral answers meet neither, while answers that work from the aim of belief breach the second.

In Chapter 10, I argue that the normative authority of evidential considerations stems from the hallmark of agency – our drive for sense-making. I first defend David Velleman's (2000a, 2007) account of agency along these lines. I then show how the drive for sense-making is partly constituted by our concern for evidence, where evidence has the two central elements that truthy psychologism says it does – truth and relevance. I bolster this argument by appeal to W. G. Sebald's (2001) novel *Austerlitz*, which shows that genuine sense-making is a matter of both truth and relevance.