

# Rationality and Truth

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Stewart Cohen  
Juan Comesaña

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## 1. Introduction

The traditional view in epistemology is that we must distinguish between being rational and being right (that is also, by the way, the traditional view about practical rationality). In his paper in this volume, Williamson proposes an alternative view according to which only beliefs that amount to knowledge are rational (and, thus, no false belief is rational). It is healthy to challenge tradition, in philosophy as much as elsewhere. But, in this instance, we think that tradition has it right. In this paper we defend our version of the traditional view and argue against Williamson's alternative.

We start by laying our cards on the table with respect to a crucial issue. Some attackers of the tradition would concede that rational beliefs can be false, but insist that *justified* beliefs cannot be false. Anyone who introduces this distinction between rationality and justification when it comes to belief owes us an explanation of the distinction. Williamson himself is not as clear as one would hope on this issue. In Williamson (2013a), he characterizes the notion he is theorizing about as “strongly externalist justification”. In Cohen and Comesaña (2013a), our reply to that paper, we noted that “strongly externalist” is technical vocabulary and, absent clarification from Williamson, we do not know what it means. In response, rather than clarifying his technical terminology, he abandons it, although it reappears in the paper in this volume not as a characterization of the kind of justification he is talking about, but rather as a description of the kind of *account* of justification he is proposing. This in itself is unobjectionable, but we still do not know what notion Williamson is theorizing about. Unfortunately, after abandoning his characterization of his target as “strongly externalist justification,” Williamson goes on to characterize his target simply as ‘justification’.

In Cohen and Comesaña (2013a), we explained the problem with distinguishing between justification and rationality—“justification is relative to a domain of normativity, e.g., rational justification, moral justification, prudential justification.” So rational belief is itself a kind of justified belief. Just as a moral action is a morally justified action, so a rational belief is a rationally justified belief. So it makes no sense to distinguish between rational belief and justified belief. Anyone who distinguishes between rationality and justification must be talking about a different kind of justification from rational justification.

Some might here respond that Williamson is talking about *epistemic* justification with the relevant domain being epistemic normativity. But as we pointed out in our first paper, “‘epistemic’ is another technical expression whose meaning in this context would be quite unclear.”<sup>1</sup> In his paper in this volume, Williamson echoes this thought:

Indeed, epistemologists usually explain that they are speaking of *epistemic* rather than *pragmatic* justification...‘Epistemic justification’ is manifestly technical terminology: we should be correspondingly suspicious of claims to make pre-theoretic judgments about its application...‘epistemic justification’ itself can be understood in a variety of ways.<sup>2</sup>

We take this to show to show that one cannot adequately characterize the target of one’s theory using the expression ‘epistemic justification’. If all we know about a theory is that it concerns epistemic justification, we do not yet know what the theory is about. Thus we find it puzzling that Williamson proceeds to classify the sort of norm he’s theorizing about as ‘epistemic’:

The Gettier problem is most significant when formulated with the word ‘justified’ understood in something close to its usual normative sense...To clarify the issues, we must identify the relevant norm(s): in this case, *epistemic* norm(s), by the setup of the problem.<sup>3</sup>

By Williamson’s own lights, ‘epistemic’ is a technical term, understandable in a variety of ways. Unfortunately, Williamson studiously avoids telling us what he means by it. As we cannot discuss a theory if we do not know what it is about, we will interpret Williamson as following us in identifying justification with rationality, i.e. rational justification.

Our view is that a subject *S* is rational in believing a proposition *p* just in case *S*’s evidence sufficiently supports *p*. We also think that a body of evidence can sufficiently support a proposition without entailing it. Williamson’s view, by contrast, is that a belief is rational if and only if it amounts to knowledge—a view which can be summarized with the equation  $R = K$ .

It is tempting to make the case for the possibility of false rational beliefs by appeal to radical skeptical scenarios: evil demons, brains in vats, disembodied Cartesian souls—take your pick. We agree that victims of radical skeptical scenarios have rational beliefs even when they are false.<sup>4</sup> But it is important to realize that denying that there are false rational beliefs is an extremely radical position: it also

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<sup>1</sup> Cohen and Comesaña (2013), p. 21. For more discussion, see Cohen (forthcoming)

<sup>2</sup> Williamson, this volume, p. ?

<sup>3</sup> Williamson, this volume, p. ? (our emphases).

<sup>4</sup> Cohen (1984) presents what has come to be called “the new evil demon problem” for reliabilism, the topic of this volume, one of whose main premises is that victims of skeptical scenarios are rational. Comesaña (2002) responds on behalf of reliabilism, but agrees with Cohen on the rationality of victims of skeptical scenarios.

commits one to denying not only that victims of skeptical scenarios are rational, but also to claiming that everyone is irrational multiple times a day. For we have false beliefs multiple times a day, about trivial as well as about important matters: where the keys are, whose turn it is to do the dishes, what time it is, which student deserves a prize, whom we should hire, whether the death penalty is just... A philosopher who denies the possibility of false rational beliefs is therefore not just taking a position about a fanciful thought experiment—he is claiming that, for instance, when your kid took your car keys while you were showering, you thereby had an irrational belief about where they were. As we noted, this result is strikingly at odds with our traditional thinking about rationality, including Williamson's own thinking about rationality in previous work.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. From $E = K$ to $R = K$ ?

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<sup>5</sup> In Cohen and Comesaña (2013b), we gave several examples of non-factive uses of 'rational' in Williamson (2000). Despite the examples, Williamson denies that he ever thought of rationality in that way:

In the passages they quote from Williamson 2000, I am using the word 'rationally' for complying with something like an ODN norm of doing what someone with good general cognitive dispositions would do. (Williamson, this volume, p. ?, n. 23).

As we shall see, for Williamson, ODN is *not* a norm governing rational belief. Rather it is a derivative norm governing blame. In effect, Williamson is saying that by 'rationally' he meant 'blamelessly'. But it's hard to square this with two of the three examples we cited:

If I rationally believe today, that tomorrow, I will rationally believe  $p$ , I cannot deduce  $p$  today; for all I rationally believe today, tomorrow's rational belief will be based on misleading evidence. (Williamson (2000), p. 235).

In more difficult contexts, believing truly become an aim and we fall back on the method of believing rationally. Rationality becomes a sub-goal on the way to truth. (Williamson (2000), p. 179).

It is difficult to interpret these remarks on the supposition that by 'rationally' he meant 'blamelessly'. In the first comment, he would be saying in effect that if I blamelessly believe today that tomorrow I will blamelessly believe  $p$ , I cannot deduce  $p$  today. This is surely true, but hardly worth noting. With respect to the second cited statement, since as Williamson notes, blamelessness arises only when one violates (in this case) the norm of rationality, he would be making the absurd claim that violating the norms of rationality is a sub-goal on the way to truth. We think the most plausible explanation for why Williamson talked about rationality in a way inconsistent with his current view, is that Williamson was talking about rationality in a way that is very natural—in a way consistent with our view. Of course, the fact that viewing rationality in the way we do is natural does not mean that Williamson's new view is incorrect. But clearly the burden is on Williamson to say why we should take his new view seriously.

In Cohen and Comesaña (2013a) we argued for the view outlined in the previous section. Williamson (2013b) contains an enigmatic argument that his equation of evidence with knowledge favors his own view over ours:

I defend the equation  $E = K$ , on which one's evidence is simply what one knows... In their discussion, they [i.e, us] do not mention the equation, let alone try to argue against it. Given  $E = K$ , the requirement to conform one's beliefs to one's evidence is the requirement to conform one's beliefs to one's knowledge. Believing only what one knows is then a natural understanding of that requirement. (Williamson 2013b, p. 92).

In Cohen and Comesaña (2013b) we in turn replied that we did not see the relevance of  $E = K$  to our view:

Why is it that if one's evidence is knowledge, only knowledge conforms to that evidence? Williamson says that this is a natural understanding of what rationality requires given that one's evidence is knowledge. We confess that the naturalness eludes us. Perhaps this would be the natural understanding if one's believing conforms to the evidence only if the evidence entails one's belief. But, again, that's just the point for which Williamson has no argument. (Cohen and Comesaña 2013b, p. 410)

In the paper in this volume Williamson explains why he takes  $E = K$  to favor his view of rationality (Williamson is talking about an example where a subject is facing a red table):

For the sake of argument, Cohen and Comesaña explicitly leave such externalist views of evidence open. On those views, one has less evidence in the bad case than in the corresponding good case. Thus conforming one's belief to one's evidence in the bad case will generally involve something different from conforming one's beliefs to one's evidence in the good case, such as a difference in one's degree of confidence in a given proposition. Consequently, rationality in Cohen and Comesaña's sense will also require something different in the bad case from what it requires in the good case. Even granted that in the good case it is irrational for you not to believe that there is a red table before you (at least, if the question arises), it does not follow that in the bad case too it is irrational for you not to believe that there is a red table before you. One of the differences between the two cases in what rationality requires might be that in the good case, but not in the bad case, rationality requires you to believe that there is a red table before you.

$E = K$  entails that the subjects in the good and bad case have different evidence. But even assuming (as we are willing to grant) that rationality is a matter of conforming one's beliefs to one's evidence, that gives us little reason to suppose that rationality

requires different beliefs in the good and the bad case. The claim that rationality is a matter of conforming one's belief to one's evidence is most plausibly interpreted as a *supervenience* thesis: there cannot be a difference in what rationality requires without a difference in one's evidence (not all philosophers will agree with this kind of evidentialism, but we are again happy to accept it here). That leaves it open, of course, whether differing bodies of evidence can rationally require the same belief. Any view that doesn't require maximal evidential support for rational belief (such as our own), will allow that one subject can be rational in believing  $p$  even though another subject has better evidence for  $p$ .<sup>6</sup> If I believe it is raining on the basis of reliable testimony and you believe it's raining because you are standing in the rain, I can rationally believe it is raining even though you have better evidence than I do. In the same way, the evidence in the bad case can be sufficient for rational belief, even though the evidence in the good case is better. Assuming  $E = K$  does not constrain what degree of evidential support is required for a belief to be rational. Of course, it is also *compatible* with  $E = K$  that rationality requires different beliefs in the good and the bad case. But we see no argument in the passage above from Williamson that this is so.

It may be, as Williamson suggests, that  $E=K$  yields the result that one should have a higher *degree of confidence* in the good case than in the bad case. This would follow on the plausible assumption that degrees of confidence should be proportional to degrees of evidential support.<sup>7</sup> We take this result as reason to be suspicious of  $E = K$ , which we here assume only for the sake of argument.<sup>8</sup> But even if we grant that different degrees of confidence are rationally required in the good and the bad case, it doesn't follow that different beliefs are rationally required.

### 3. Justifications, excuses and $R = K$

Williamson distinguishes between justification and excuses as follows: A belief is justified just in case it satisfies the relevant norm. For concreteness, let us adopt a norm that both Williamson and we would accept (although we would, of course, differ in our respective accounts of when certain evidence sufficiently supports  $p$ ):

(E): If your total evidence  $E$  sufficiently supports  $p$ , then (you ought to) believe  $p$ .

This norm of justification for belief gives rise to a secondary norm:

DE: You ought to have a general disposition to comply with E.

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<sup>6</sup> We are assuming here, following Williamson, that entailment is the upper bound of the support relation, but this is controversial. The notion of entailment is a logical one, and its relationship with normative notions such as that of evidential support is not straightforward.

<sup>7</sup> This also assumes that degrees of confidence are at least as fine-grained as degrees of belief.

<sup>8</sup> See Silins (2005).

E also gives rise to a tertiary norm:

ODE: You ought to do what someone who complied with DE would do in your situation.

For Williamson, only E is genuinely and fully normative (with respect to the rationality of belief). For if you do not comply with E, then your belief is not *justified* even if you comply with both DE and ODE. However, complying with DE or ODE gives you *an excuse* for not complying with E. Someone who has a false belief, according to Williamson, may be complying with DE and ODE, but not with E.

What role does this distinction between justification and excuses play in Williamson's theory? One relatively clear role is that it might help defuse an objection. Distinguish between a good bad case and a bad bad case. In a good bad case, someone has a false belief arrived at through impeccable reasoning or an unimpeachable experience-to-belief transition. In a bad bad case, the subject has a false belief arrived at through bad reasoning or objectionable experience-to-belief transition. Neither of them complies with the norm to believe only what they know, and so they are both unjustified. But, the objection goes, the subject in the good bad case is rationally better than the subject in the bad bad case. Williamson's view does not have the conceptual resources to distinguish between them, however, and so it is to that extent unacceptable. Distinguishing between justification and excuses is a way of making conceptual room for distinguishing between the good bad case and the bad bad case. He can say that although both subjects fail to comply with the primary norm to believe only what they know, the subject in the good bad case complies with the corresponding secondary and tertiary norms, whereas the subject in the bad bad case does not.

There is room for resisting this reply. What good victims have in common with rational subjects, according to Williamson, is that they satisfy their secondary and tertiary obligations—but satisfying secondary and tertiary obligations, by Williamson's own lights, has nothing to do with rationality. Williamson sees no rational difference between subjects who believe on the basis of good reasoning and subjects whose brains have been scrambled and so believe on the basis of fallacious reasoning: "The brain scrambler case is just one more sceptical scenario, in which the data for computation are interfered with at a slightly different point." But having your brain scrambled interferes with your rationality in a way in which undetectably changing your environment does not. We are aware that Williamson's judgment will differ from our own here, but we see no argument for his.

Let us nevertheless suppose that the distinction between justification and excuses does give Williamson a defense from the objection that his view has no conceptual resources to distinguish between the bad bad case and the good bad case. Does it do anything else? In particular, does that distinction give Williamson an argument *for*  $R = K$ ? He seems to think that it does. The passage quoted earlier continues as follows:

One of the differences between the two cases in what rationality requires might be that in the good case, but not the bad case, rationality requires you to believe that there is a red table before you. We must take such possibilities seriously, not dismiss them without argument, with respect to a norm of rationality such as Cohen and Comesaña's, since it is *not* of type [ODE]. They fail to register this point, because they take no account of normative distinctions like those explained in section 1.

We do indeed dismiss those possibilities, but certainly not without argument. A cursory glance at Cohen and Comesaña (2013b) will reveal such an argument (which we rehearse below). And contrary to Williamson's claim that we take no account of the distinction between justification and excuse, we say in that paper:

Excusability and justification are very different notions. One's  $\phi$ -ing is justified just in case one's  $\phi$ -ing meets the relevant normative standard. One's  $\phi$ -ing is excusable only if one's  $\phi$ -ing fails to meet the normative standard, but in a blameless manner.

While we do in fact distinguish between justification and excusability, we disagree with Williamson about their application. He thinks the subject in the good bad case believes irrationally but blamelessly. We think the subject in the good bad case believes rationally, but some subjects who believe irrationally (e.g. due to extreme duress, or psychosis, or having had their brains scrambled) are blameless. To disagree with Williamson about how to apply the distinction between justification and excuse is not to fail to take account of the distinction.

Does Williamson have an argument supporting his way of applying the distinction over ours? He makes several related comments:

...once we realize how easily norms for belief which one violates in sceptical scenarios generate secondary and tertiary norms with which one complies in those scenarios, we should abandon the naïve idea that the normative status which the subject's beliefs share in the good and bad cases must be justification, as opposed to blamelessness

As already noted, a commoner view amongst analytic epistemologists is that the brain in the vat's belief that it has hands is every bit as justified as my belief that I have hands. If the only normative options on offer are being justified and being unjustified, one can see why kind-hearted epistemologists would take pity on the brain in the vat and assign its beliefs to the good category, since after all it is doing its best to comply with the norm for belief.

Here Williamson suggests that our view results from two things. First, our failure to distinguish between justification and excusability leads us to think naively. And second, our kind-heartedness interferes with our intellectual rigor resulting in our classifying a case of blamelessness as a case of justification. We have already

demonstrated that Williamson's first claim is false. We are not naive in the way he suggests. The second claim also does not bear scrutiny. Consider the case of a self-aware schizophrenic who struggles to think clearly, but despite his efforts, cannot resist the intrusion of psychotic thoughts. Our sympathy for him is much stronger than our sympathy for the subject in the bad case. But, despite our naive kind-heartedness, we are not in the least bit inclined to classify the schizophrenic as rational. Consider one of Williamson's brain scrambler cases:

... the scrambler causes the subject's reasoning to reach, quite fallaciously, a contingently false conclusion which her evidence tells strongly against — say, that most non-Westerners are stupid, or that this candidate deserves the job more than that one does — but which she thereby comes to believe without further reflection. In having that belief, she complies with the norms [DE] and [ODE], for the same reasons as before.

According to Williamson's explanation for how we go wrong, our naïveté and kind-heartedness should incline us to think the subject in this case *rationally* believes that most non-westerners are stupid. After all, the subject complies with ODE and such compliance is supposed to be what leads us, in our kind-hearted naïveté, to “fallaciously” conclude that the subject in the bad case is rational. But we have no temptation to view the brain-scrambled subject as rational. After all, the subject reasons fallaciously and contrary to her evidence. We conclude, then, that Williamson's appeal to the distinction between justification and excuse does little to motivate his view over the traditional view we endorse.

#### 4. Unification or confusion?

Williamson proposes that his view has an advantage over ours in that it can unify what he calls “objective and subjective” norms for belief:

[An] advantage of the present framework is that it offers the prospect of unifying ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ norms for belief. As most epistemologists accept, a false belief is somehow defective. In particular, the brain in the vat's false beliefs are defective. Their defect is not that they violate a norm with respect to which the good and bad cases are equal, for the subject's beliefs in the good case are by hypothesis not defective. If the brain in the vat's false beliefs are justified, then a second norm is needed to explain why their falsity is a defect. By contrast, if one starts with a truth-entailing standard J for justified belief, one can explain directly what is wrong with false beliefs, as violations of that norm, while still having the resources to explain a corresponding derivative norm ODJ, which the subject's beliefs comply with equally in the good and bad cases.

On the assumption that there is a truth norm for belief, Williamson claims that on his view we get a unified account of the normative status of the subjects in the good and bad case. The subject in the good case satisfies the norm for rationality. The subject in the bad case fails to satisfy the primary norm for rationality, but instead satisfies the derivative ODE norm. So Williamson can, with his single truth-entailing norm, explain both why false beliefs are defective, and what's good about the subject's beliefs in the bad case. Our non-truth-entailing norm explains why the subject is rational in the bad case—he is believing what his evidence supports. But we require an additional norm to explain what's defective about false beliefs, i.e. what's good about the good case.

But a unifying account of distinct phenomena is desirable only if the phenomena are related in the right way. Consider the racist belief that white people are superior to people of other races. One might plausibly think this belief is also defective, and not simply because it is false, or irrational. As Williamson allows, such a belief is morally defective. Should we expect an account of rational belief to give a unifying account of defective in the bad case and the defect in the case of the racist? Because morality is a distinct normative domain from rationality (of belief), any such “unifying” would be misguided. Far from counting in favor of the theory, this kind of unifying would count against it.

With this in mind, we can ask whether the unification yielded by Williamson's theory counts in favor of the theory or against it. It will count in favor of the theory only if falsity is a *rational* defect in a belief. But this is (again) just the point at issue between Williamson and us. On our view, rather than providing a unified account of related phenomena, Williamson has misguidedly conflated distinct normative domains. One person's unification is another person's confusion.

Additionally, there is reason to be suspicious of Williamson's claim that there is a truth norm for believing. It is uncontroversial that the *correctness* condition for believing is truth. To believe falsely is to believe incorrectly. Is correctness normative? While 'normative' is not used univocally among philosophers, in Williamson's sense, “a norm... is anything that can yield some sort of 'ought' or 'should'”. But as Judith Thomson (2008) has noted, correctness conditions do not by themselves yield 'ought's or 'should's. There is a correct way to play Mozart's piano sonata No 16. Suppose a pianist decides to play this sonata incorrectly—she leaves out or adds certain notes because she is trying to achieve a certain artistic effect. It doesn't follow that there is any sense in which she ought not to or should not play the sonata that way. Moreover, this is not just because the reasons derived from her trying to achieve the artistic effect outweigh the reasons derived from the correctness conditions—there are no such reasons. Even if the pianist incorrectly plays the sonata without a reason for doing so, it might well be false that she ought to have played it correctly. One can be permitted to do things incorrectly. Of course, there may be other considerations that militate against her playing the sonata incorrectly. Perhaps it will upset or offend people. But in that case, it isn't the mere incorrectness of the performance that generates the 'ought'.<sup>9</sup> Analogously, it is not

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<sup>9</sup> Similarly, we would argue against Williamson and others, there are no “ludic oughts”—‘oughts’ generated by the rules of a game. If I castle while in check, even in the absence of reasons for doing

obvious to us that believing incorrectly is normatively significant. When one has very strong, but misleading evidence for  $p$ , one is permitted (indeed, sometimes required) to believe  $p$ , even though so believing is incorrect.

## 5. $R = K$ and entailing evidence

In Cohen and Comesaña (2013a) we noted that  $R = K$  conflicts with the truism that one can rationally believe a false proposition. In Williamson (2013b), Williamson defends his view by appeal to  $E = K$  and the surprising claim that one rationally believes  $p$  only if one's evidence fully supports (entails)  $p$ :

...since truths [ $E = K$  requires evidence to consist only of truths] never entail a falsehood, they never *fully* support a falsehood (support in the strongest way); they support it, if at all, only partially. Rationally sometimes requires one to adopt a false belief only if it sometimes requires one to adopt a belief not fully supported by one's evidence. Cohen and Comesaña give no argument that rationality ever requires that. Nor is the equation  $E = K$  the only view of evidence to yield the point that one's evidence never fully supports a falsehood; any view of evidence on which only truths are evidence has the same consequence. For one's evidence fully to support a falsehood, the evidence must contain falsehoods, in which case some truths are *inconsistent* with one's evidence: hardly an attractive view.

In Cohen and Comesaña (2013b) we showed that these remarks commit Williamson to the view that one is not rationally permitted to believe  $p$  unless one's evidence entails  $p$ . Exactly how having entailing evidence relates to believing rationally is far from clear on Williamson's view. The standard view is that whether one believes  $p$  rationally is *explained* by how well one's evidence supports  $p$ . This explanation hinges on the role the basing relation plays in rational belief. The thought is that, for familiar reasons, evidence  $E$  can explain why one rationally believes  $p$  only if one believes  $p$  on the basis of  $E$ . Surely Williamson does not think that rationality requires that when  $p$  is inferentially based on  $E$ ,  $E$  must entail  $p$ . Put that way, the view sounds insane. It reminds one of Popper's "solution" to the problem of induction, which amounts to saying that induction never yields justified beliefs.

We can perhaps discover what Williamson has in mind by seeing how  $R = K$  satisfies the requirement. Given  $E = K$ , the entailing evidence requirement follows trivially from  $R = K$ . If one rationally believes  $p$ , then one knows  $p$ . If one knows  $p$ , then one has  $p$  as evidence. Since  $p$  entails  $p$ , whenever one is rational, one has entailing evidence. Construed this way, the entailing evidence requirement offers no support for  $R = K$  against our objection that it conflicts with a truism. Williamson's

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so, it might well be false that I ought not have castled. The rules of chess do not give us reasons to play chess, and in the absence of a reason for playing chess there is no reason to refrain from castling while in check.

point is that the entailing evidence requirement rules out the possibility of false rational belief. But we already knew from the factivity of knowledge that  $R = K$  rules out false rational belief. If the entailing evidence requirement is simply a consequence of  $R = K$ , then Williamson is merely pointing out (in a less direct way) that  $R = K$  has the objectionable consequence we already knew it to have.<sup>10</sup>

## 6. Against $R = K$

### 6.1 $R = K$ and Inductive Inference

Consider good and bad inductive cases. Suppose Alan wakes up one morning and notices that the ground is wet. On that basis, Alan infers that it rained the night before.<sup>11</sup> Bernard wakes up far away from Alan, also to find that the ground is wet, and makes the same inference. Alan is right: it rained last night, and he comes to know this on the basis of his inference. Bernard is wrong, though: the ground is wet only because children have been playing with hoses. On the standard view, both Alan's and Bernard's beliefs are rational because they have the same sufficiently strong basing evidence. According to  $R = K$ , however, Alan is rational but Bernard is not. How does Williamson explain the difference?

Williamson could argue that only Alan has entailing evidence. Given  $R = K$ , if Alan rationally believes it rained, then he knows it rained. And if he knows it rained, it is part of his evidence that it rained. Fair enough. But as we noted, on this way of arguing, the entailing evidence requirement is a trivial consequence of  $R = K$ . It would be simpler for Williamson to simply appeal to  $R = K$  directly and argue that Bernard cannot rationally believe it rained because in the bad case it is false that it rained. In the end Williamson must account for the difference between the inductive good and bad cases by noting that only in good case does the subject know. Of course, this way of proceeding is no more cogent than the antecedent plausibility of  $R = K$  itself.

A more difficult problem arises for Williamson when we consider that in addition to beliefs, inferences can be rational. Standardly, the rationality of inferring  $p$  is determined by how well the evidential basis for the inference supports  $p$ .<sup>12</sup> But the inferences in the good and bad inductive cases have the same evidential basis. How does Williamson explain why the *inference* in the good case is rational, but the inference in the bad case is irrational? Why is the subject in the good case, who does not yet know  $p$ , rationally permitted to infer  $p$  while the subject in the bad case is not? Williamson could say that one can rationally infer  $p$  only in the good case,

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<sup>10</sup> By the way: for defenses of the view that Williamson considers "hardly attractive", see Comesaña and McGrath (2014), Comesaña and McGrath (forthcoming), Fantl and McGrath (2009) and Fantl (2015).

<sup>11</sup> Feel free to substitute your favorite example of inductive knowledge.

<sup>12</sup> Here we ignore the complication that there may be defeaters elsewhere in the subjects evidence

because only in the good case will one thereby come to know. But what, besides a commitment to knowledge-first ideology, could motivate this view?

Williamson cannot argue that he is giving a theory of rational *belief*, not a theory of rational inference. This helps  $R = K$  only if he can allow that despite the fact that both Alan and Bernard make rational inferences, only Alan thereby acquires a rational belief. But if rational inference doesn't guarantee rational belief, one could be rationally permitted to infer an irrational belief. It is hard to make sense of that. It follows that if Alan is rational in the good case, then so is Bernard in the bad case.

Moreover, Williamson's claim that Bernard is not rational to believe raises an important question, one which Williamson, to our knowledge, has never answered: which attitude, if any, is it rational for Bernard to take with respect to the proposition in question? The options for an answer are limited: Williamson can say that Bernard is rational in disbelieving it, that Bernard is rational in suspending judgment with respect to it, or that there is no attitude that Bernard is rational in taking towards it. All three options are problematic.

It is easy to see that it won't do for Williamson to say that it would be rational for Bernard to disbelieve that it rained. Bernard doesn't know it rained, because that proposition is false, but neither does he know it didn't rain, because he has no evidence for that proposition. Therefore, it goes as much against Williamson's theory to say that Bernard is rational in disbelieving the proposition as it does to say that Bernard is rational in believing it.

Saying that Bernard would be rational to suspend judgment in the proposition that it rained is also problematic. Suspension of judgment is a *bona fide* doxastic attitude, to be distinguished from not having any attitude at all towards a proposition. As such, it can be rationally or irrationally held, and it is rationally held just in case it is the attitude that conforms to one's evidence. But Bernard's case looks nothing like paradigmatic cases of suspension of judgment: his evidence all tells in favor of the proposition that it rained, and not at all against it. We favor a conception of suspension of judgment as the attitude which is rational when the evidence doesn't sufficiently support either belief or disbelief.<sup>13</sup> If this conception is correct, then Williamson is committed to saying that Bernard ought to suspend judgment—because Williamson is committed to saying that Bernard's evidence doesn't support either belief or disbelief. But insofar as Bernard's case is not at all like paradigmatic cases where suspension of judgment is rational, this is a high cost that Williamson must pay.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps saying that Bernard is rational to suspend judgment will not strike Williamson as a bullet that is harder to bite than saying that Bernard is not rational in believing. It should so strike him, however. Suppose that Bernard is a Williamsonian hero—he believes exactly what Williamson's theory says he should believe. So, in our case, Bernard suspends judgment. But, in order to be justified in

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<sup>13</sup> See Comesaña (2013).

<sup>14</sup> Williamson makes somewhat cryptic remarks in his paper in this volume about "Pyrrhic skepticism", but they seem to point in the direction of justifying the claim that Bernard is not rational in suspending judgment.

suspending judgment, Bernard must suspend judgment on an adequate basis. What is the evidential basis that makes it rational for Bernard to suspend? Could Williamson say that it is the proposition that the ground is wet? Notice what saying this entails. When the evidence provides strong inductive support for a true proposition, the rational attitude to take towards that true proposition is belief, whereas where the evidence provides the same degree of inductive support for a false proposition, the rational attitude to take towards that proposition is suspension of judgment. But, remember, this is an *inferential* case: the subject's only basis for taking an attitude is the inductive evidence itself. The Williamsonian hero, then, would have to guess whether the evidence is misleading or not, and adopt an attitude on the basis of that guess.<sup>15</sup> Needless to say, that is no paragon of rational activity.

Notice that our objection to saying that the rational attitude for Bernard is to suspend does not at all depend on luminosity considerations. On our view, as much as on Williamson's, it is possible for a subject to lack justification for belief and not know it—because, for instance, she is mistaken about what her evidence is. But this is not Bernard's case: his evidence is the same as Alan's, and we may even stipulate that he knows what his evidence is. When Bernard suspends, then, he does it blindly—he knows what evidence he has, and he knows that it would justify belief where the belief to be true.

Finally, then, Williamson might claim that there is no attitude that Bernard is rational in taking towards *p*. It is not rational for Bernard to believe, disbelieve or suspend judgment. Bernard's position is so bad that not only does he have no clue about how bad it is: it puts him in an epistemic dilemma. Whatever attitude Bernard adopts towards the proposition in question, it is an irrational attitude.

But it is implausible that there are any epistemic dilemmas at all. Even if there are, it is implausible that they are as pervasive as this position would have it. For remember that Williamson has to face this problem *for every false belief*: for victims of skeptical scenarios, of course, but also for people whose keys are surreptitiously taken. We collectively face epistemic dilemmas multiple times an hour. (A similar implausibility, by the way, attaches to the second possibility: that of suspending judgment.)

Williamson might combine either of these two last views with the claim that it is rational for Bernard to adopt some fine-grained attitude. Thus, Bernard may be rational in suspending judgment, or maybe there is no rational coarse-grained attitude Bernard is rational in taking, but, at the same time, Bernard is rational in taking some fine-grained attitude (credence) towards the proposition in question. Of course, Alan's rational credence will be different than Bernard's, for Alan has more evidence for the proposition. This, again, strikes us as a non-starter. Whatever it is rational for Alan to (intend to) do, it is rational for Bernard to (intend to) do, and what they are rational to do is in part a function of which attitudes it is rational for them to hold in a way on which a difference in rational attitude gives rise to a possible case of a difference in rational action.

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<sup>15</sup> But notice that, for Williamson, there is no such thing as misleading evidence: evidence that rationalizes belief in a false proposition.

## 6.2 R = K and practical rationality

In addition to beliefs and inferences, actions can be rational. Suppose that both Alan and Bernard face a choice that is *p-dependent*: which option is rational depends on the evidential probability, for the subject, of *p*. The choice may, of course, depend on more things—for instance, on the subject's preferences. But a prime role for evidential probability is to encapsulate the subject's "epistemic perspective" on a choice. Given that the choice for Alan and Bernard is *p-dependent*, and given that their evidential probability for *p* is different, it will of course be possible to ascribe to them a preference structure such that taking one of the options is rational for Alan but not for Bernard. But suppose Alan and Bernard have the same preferences and base their belief that *p* on the same evidence. R = K entails that a *p-dependent* choice will be rational for one of them but not the other.

Williamson will probably bite the bullet here. In Williamson (2005) he expresses sympathy for the following principle:

(KPR+) One knows *p* iff *p* is an appropriate premise for one's practical reasoning.<sup>16</sup>

It follows from KPR+ that *p* is not an appropriate premise for Bernard to use in practical reasoning.

But Bernard is just as rational as Alan in taking *p* as an appropriate premise in practical reasoning. Williamson would have it that this claim can only be the consequence of some previous allegiance to a dubious internalist stance in epistemology, fueled by a failure to appreciate the consequences of content externalism in the philosophy of mind. But, if anything, it is the other way around. Judgments about rational action and belief are where the rubber meets the road in epistemology and the theory of action. We take it as a datum to be explained that Alan and Bernard are equally rational in their beliefs and actions. That datum may be evidence for a theory of rational belief and action that is internalist in some sense (although we suspect that the terminology of "internalism" and "externalism" is beginning to outlive its usefulness). We do not share Williamson's optimism about philosophical progress enough to be convinced that content externalism has won the day in philosophy of mind and language, but (as with E = K and the distinction between justification and excuses) we fail to see an incompatibility between it and the claim that Bernard is rational in believing. For the sake of content externalism, it had better be that way.

## 7. Conclusion

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<sup>16</sup> See also Hawthorne and Stanley (2008)

We have argued that neither  $E = K$  nor the distinction between justification and excuses provides Williamson with a good argument against the claim that being rational and being right can come apart from each other. We also argued against Williamson's entailing requirement and his claim that his view provides the right kind of unification of different norms. Finally, we also argued directly against Williamson's view: it has unacceptable consequences for inductive inferential justification as well as for practical rationality.

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