

Reply to Pryor

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The meat of Pryor's reply is what he takes to be a counterexample to Entailment. My main objective in this reply is to show that Entailment survives a proper account of Pryor's case. Before doing that, however, I briefly address some other points.

Pryor thinks that Entailment is related to other principles. He draws our attention to his discussion of principle NFI in Pryor (forthcoming), and also considers a version of Entailment not restricted to contingent propositions. Interesting as they are, I will set those other principles aside, for I do not see how they are related to my argument. Entailment is not obviously related to Pryor's NFI, which states that if E is compatible with H' , which is an alternative to H , then E cannot justify believe in H . NFI is a direct rejection of Inductivism, Entailment is not. At the end of my essay, I urged on the reader the possibility of rejecting Inductivism as a solution to the puzzle I presented. But this, of course, doesn't mean that Entailment itself entails a rejection of Inductivism—it does so only in conjunction with Closure and No Lemmas. Pryor shows also, towards the end of his reply, that if Entailment is not restricted to contingent propositions then puzzles arise regarding cases where our (justified) lack of logical omniscience shows up. Indeed, that is precisely why I restricted Entailment to contingent propositions. I do not think, therefore, that the kind of case with which Pryor ends represents an objection to the argument of my essay.

Now onto what Pryor takes to be a counterexample to Entailment. This is the case of Sandra the conspiracy theorist, who, when faced with evidence against her theory, simply incorporates that evidence as a conjunct of her new theory. Her revised conspiracy theory now entails the evidence that went against her original conspiracy theory. Therefore, according to Entailment, we cannot use that evidence to reject the revised conspiracy theory. But surely we are justified in rejecting even her revised conspiracy theory. Therefore, Pryor argues, we should reject Entailment.

But there is a gap in that argument (Pryor is perfectly aware of this gap). We can all agree that we are justified in rejecting Sandra's revised conspiracy theory. Entailment is consistent with this claim. What we cannot do, if Entailment is true, is reject Sandra's revised conspiracy theory *on the basis of evidence which the theory itself entails*. Still, Pryor may now ask a fair question: if it is not on the basis of the evidence which the theory entails, on *which* basis do we reject

Sandra's revised conspiracy theory? In what follows, I first offer arguments for thinking that Entailment gives the correct verdict in Pryor's case, and then answer that fair question.¹

What were your opinions about Sandra's different conspiracy theories *before* you encountered them and the evidence that allegedly tells against them? Now, perhaps you never thought about those conspiracy theories before Sandra told you about them, so the answer to my question is "Nothing." But I do not really mean "before" in a chronological sense, but rather in a logical sense. I want you to think about your opinions about Sandra's conspiracy theories *bracketing* the relevant evidence that you now have. To illustrate the point, consider the fact that you now have evidence that Pryor thinks that Entailment is false. Even if, before reading Pryor's reply, you had never considered whether Pryor liked Entailment or not, you can now reflect on how credible it was that Pryor would reject Entailment bracketing the evidence that his reply gives you. I want you to do the same with Sandra's conspiracy theories. Because it simplifies exposition, I will talk as if the chronological interpretation of "before" were correct, but nothing hangs on this.

Sandra has two conspiracy theories.² Let's call her first conspiracy theory *not-H*, because it denies some widely accepted hypothesis *H*. The revised one is the conjunction of *not-H* with evidence that overwhelmingly tells in favor of *H*. Let's summarize that evidence as saying that everything tells in favor of *H* (short of entailing *H*, something which I take for granted in what follows). So, Sandra's original theory is *not-H* and her revised theory is *not-H but everything tells in favor of H*. You still don't know whether *everything tells in favor of H* is true or not, but you start wondering about possible conspiracy theories. You first consider *not-H*, and rationally have a very low opinion of it (it is a conspiracy theory, after all).³ But what should your opinion of *not-H but everything tells in favor of H* be? I take it that it is obvious that it should also be very low (but I examine Pryor's alternative take on this later on). After all, if *everything tells in favor of H* is true, then most likely *H* is true. Now, *everything tells in favor of H* doesn't entail that *H*, so you may want to leave some room for the possibility that the evidence is massively misleading and *not-H* is true but *everything tells in favor of H* is also true—but that room can be very, very small. So, even before knowing that *everything tells in favor of H* is true, your opinion of *not-H and everything tells in favor of H* should be very

¹In line with the proposal at the end of my paper to take a closer look at life without Inductivism, I would urge the reader to consider the possibility that we have evidence that entails that Sandra's theories are false. In that case, Entailment no longer applies (for Sandra's theories can entail our evidence only at the cost of being inconsistent) and we are free to reject Sandra's theories on the basis of that evidence. In what follows, however, I ignore this line of thought and consider what a more traditional answer would look like.

²Pryor has Sandra build ever more revisions in the face of new evidence. I don't think that going beyond two theories matters.

³In what follows I talk in terms of degreed doxastic notions, such as low or high opinions and levels of confidence. This makes exposition easier, but I believe that the points I'm making survive translation to a coarse-grained approach to the doxastic attitudes.

low. Now consider what should happen when you do learn that *everything tells in favor of H* is true. According to Pryor, what happens is that your confidence in *not-H but everything tells in favor of H* goes down enough for you to reject it on the basis of *everything tells in favor of H*. However, several interrelated considerations suggest that, if anything, your confidence in *not-H but everything tells in favor of H* should go up—although maybe just a tiny bit up. Now, if those considerations are convincing, then of course you cannot rationally reject Sandra’s revised conspiracy theory on the basis of that evidence, and so the verdict of Entailment for that case is vindicated.

I offer here three of those considerations. First, probabilistic construals of evidence have it that your confidence in a conjunction should go up when you learn that a conjunct is true. Like Pryor, however, I don’t want to put too much stock on probabilistic construals of evidence. But there are non-probabilistic considerations that point in the same direction.

Second, consider the fact that, when you learn that *everything tells in favor of H* is true, you have eliminated one way in which *not-H but everything tells in favor of H* could have been false. How could eliminating one way in which a proposition can be false not give you more confidence in that proposition? True, you have also eliminated one way in which *H and everything tells in favor of H* could have been false, and so your confidence in this proposition also goes up. Indeed, your confidence in this latter proposition should rise much more than your confidence in the previous one (that is why you end up justified in believing *H*, after all). But still, your confidence in a conjunction cannot but be raised (if only a tiny bit) when you find out that a conjunct is true.

Finally, here is what I take to be a decisive argument for the claim that learning that *everything tells in favor of H* is true should make your confidence in Sandra’s revised conspiracy theory go up. Everyone should accept that *it is not the case that everything tells in favor of H* is good evidence for rejecting Sandra’s revised conspiracy theory. After all, *it is not the case that everything tells in favor of H* entails that *not-H but everything tells in favor of H* is false (and I am supposing here that you know this to be so). But Pryor wants to claim that *everything tells in favor of H* also constitutes good grounds for rejecting *not-H but everything tells in favor of H*. That is, Pryor is committed to saying that a proposition and its negation can both be evidence for the same hypothesis (in this case, that Sandra’s revised theory is false). This cannot be right. To illustrate the implausibility of saying that both *E* and *not-E* can provide evidence for the same proposition, suppose that you are wondering whether a hypothesis is true, and know that you are facing one of those situations where both *E* and *not-E* provide evidence for the hypothesis in question. It seems that, absurdly, you should increase your confidence in the hypothesis even before acquiring any evidence. Indeed, if both *E* and *not-E* are evidence for the hypothesis, then why isn’t your confidence in the hypothesis higher to begin with? You know that, no matter which of *E* or *not-E* you learn, you will rationally increase your confidence in *H* (and not for tricky reasons, such as

because you will forget relevant information). So why not increase it right now and not go to the trouble of inquiring into E ?

Those considerations can be further generalized. Carolina Sartorio and I have argued, on independent grounds, for the following principle (Comesaña and Sartorio (forthcoming)):

Epistemic Difference-Making (EDM): If E is evidence for H , then $not-E$ is not evidence for H .

Notice that an obvious instance of EDM is that if $not-E$ is evidence for H , then E is not evidence for H . EDM entails Entailment (and, therefore, obviously entails that Entailment gives the right verdict in Pryor's case). For suppose that H entails E . In that case, of course, $not-E$ is evidence for $not-H$. Given EDM, E cannot therefore be evidence for $not-H$ as well. I assume that to reject a hypothesis on the basis of some evidence the evidence must count against the hypothesis. Therefore, if H entails E , E cannot be used to reject H —that is to say, Entailment is true.

Having defended Entailment and the verdict that it gives in Pryor's case, let me go back to the fair question: if it is not the information that *everything tells in favor of H* is true that allows us to reject Sandra's revised conspiracy theory, what exactly does allow us to reject it? Well, it is simply the fact that it is so unlikely to be true. I said that the truth of *everything tells in favor of H* is *some* evidence for $not-H$ but *everything tells in favor of H*, but that leaves it open that it can be extremely flimsy evidence. So, given that your previous confidence in Sandra's revised conspiracy theory was extremely low, and given that it has increased only by a very tiny margin, your confidence in that theory is still extremely low—low enough to justify you in continuing to reject it. As Pryor puts it, it is the “intrinsic incredibility” of Sandra's revised conspiracy theory that allows us to reject it.

Pryor anticipates this reply, and complains as follows:

Even if Sandra's theories were intrinsically incredible from the beginning—and even if they were inconsistent with our background evidence—I'm supposing that this wasn't initially obvious to you. Nor *should* it have been obvious to you. Instead, there was some evidence X that, together with your background evidence, brought you to the point of being able to justifiably reject one of her theories.

I will ignore, as I said at the beginning, Pryor's flirtations with cases where the hypothesis in question are inconsistent with what you know. So, what Pryor is claiming is that even if *not-H but everything tells in favor of H* is initially incredible, this shouldn't have been obvious to you, but rather something that

you come to realize with the help of *everything tells in favor of H*.⁴ I take it that this means that you start out rationally having some high-ish confidence in *not-H but everything tells in favor of H*. One immediate puzzle is then the following: what is Pryor admitting when he admits that *not-H but everything tells in favor of H* might nevertheless be initially incredible? Incredible to whom? More importantly: if you do rationally have some high-ish confidence in *not-H but everything tells in favor of H*, how can *everything tells in favor of H* justify you in believing *H*?

But let us grant for the sake of argument that it is indeed the case that you rationally have some high-ish confidence in *not-H but everything tells in favor of H* (remember that *everything tells in favor of H* is just my name for the mass of evidence that you present in favor of *H*). How could this confidence be rationally shaken by acquiring the information that *everything tells in favor of H* is true? There are two possibilities here. One possibility is that when you learn that *everything tells in favor of H* is true you realize that your confidence in *not-H but everything tells in favor of H* should have been low all along, even before acquiring the evidence. If so, this is more akin to a conversion than to a rational accommodation of evidence. More importantly, it doesn't go against Entailment. What you would be doing is to retroactively lower your previous confidence in *not-H but everything tells in favor of H*, and then raise it a tiny bit, leaving it low enough to justifiedly reject that hypothesis.

The second possibility, which must be what Pryor has in mind, is that learning that *everything tells in favor of H* is true rationally lowers your confidence in *not-H but everything tells in favor of H*. This position, however, clashes head-to-head with the arguments for Entailment that I presented above. If Pryor's verdict about his case were *obvious*, that would constitute a good argument against Entailment nevertheless (we would then have to scramble to see what to say about the previous arguments for Entailment). Alas, I do not find Pryor's verdict obvious.

I conclude, therefore, that Pryor's case does not after all constitute a counterexample to Entailment.

References

- Comesaña, J. and Sartorio, C. (forthcoming), "Difference-Making in Epistemology," *Noûs* .
- Pryor, J. (forthcoming), "When Warrant Transmits," in A. Coliva (ed.), *Wittgenstein, Epistemology and Mind: Themes from the Philosophy of Crispin Wright*, Oxford University Press.

⁴Again, Pryor seems to think that something hangs on further iterating the process, but I don't see that it does.