Chapter 6
Evidence

Abstract This chapter explores two central issues when it comes to the concept of evidence. The first issue concerns the nature of evidence itself as it pertains to justification and knowledge. There are two primary theories of the nature of evidence. The first claims that evidence consists of non-factive mental states, and the second claims that evidence consists of propositions. This chapter explains both of these theories and considers some of the major challenges facing each. The second issue this chapter explores is that of what it takes for someone to have an item of information as evidence. After all, one cannot have knowledge on the basis of evidence that one does not possess. The extreme views of evidence possession each have serious problems, however, moderate views face challenges too. After elucidating some of the challenges facing the various views, this chapter demonstrates that there are some promising ways of providing a moderate account of what it takes to have evidence.

In the previous chapter we examined the issue of the nature of justification. Despite the various disagreements about justification, even the disagreement about whether the justification of all beliefs requires one to have evidence, all sides of these disagreements accept that scientific knowledge is grounded in evidence. So, in order for a scientific claim to be justified for us we have to have evidence in support of that claim. This prompts us to ask two very important questions. What exactly *is* evidence? When do we *have* something as evidence? We will explore answers to both of these questions in this chapter.

6.1 What Is Evidence?

At times we might cite things like United Nations reports as evidence that a particular country possesses chemical weapons. We might say that Dorothy's recent study habits are evidence that she has gotten serious about her education. We might say of a weapon with the defendant's fingerprints on it presented at a trial that it is evidence of his guilt. We might say that the darkening sky and the increased wind are evidence that it will rain soon. We might claim that the perihelion precession of Mercury is evidence that supports General Relativity over Newtonian mechanics.

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Although each of the senses of "evidence" is important, none of them are evidence that pertains directly to the justification of our beliefs. The reason for this is that all of these things might exist, but you may fail to have them as evidence. In fact, some of them might exist without anyone having them as evidence. For example, it could be that Dorothy's study habits are a sign that she is serious about her education, but if you are not aware that she has those habits, *you* do not have evidence that she is serious about her education. In order for any of these items to be evidence in the sense relevant for justification you have to be aware of them in some way. The mere fact that Mercury has a perihelion precession does not provide you with evidence in support of General Relativity over Newtonian mechanics. If you are completely unaware of this fact about Mercury or of how this fact supports General Relativity and not Newtonian mechanics, then you do not have this evidence in support of General Relativity. In order to be evidence for you to accept some claim as true the item in question must be something that you can use in forming your doxastic attitudes (your beliefs, disbeliefs, suspensions of judgment, and perhaps degrees of belief). The sorts of things mentioned above are not themselves something that you can use in forming doxastic attitudes.

But, what is it that you can use when forming your doxastic attitudes? *Reasons*—the very thing we noted in the previous chapter as required for your beliefs to be justified. These reasons can be good or bad. For example, consider two situations in which you believe that there is a bush in your yard. In the first situation, you have a visual experience as of a bush in your yard in normal viewing conditions. However, in the second situation you have no such visual experience. In this second situation you believe there is a bush in your yard simply because you really want one to be there. You have *a reason* for your belief that there is a bush in your yard in both situations, but you only have a *good reason* in the first situation. It is only in the first situation that you have a reason for your belief that is indicative of the truth of the claim that there is a bush in your yard. In terms of evidence, we would say that you only have evidence in the sense relevant for justification in the first situation. So, we now have an approximate answer to our question for this section: *evidence is good reasons that are indicative of the truth concerning the proposition that is the object of your doxastic attitude.*[1] In other words, you have evidence for believing that p when you have good reasons that indicate that p is true. This is some progress, but it is not enough because it is not yet clear what good reasons are.

[1]See Conee (2004), Conee and Feldman (2008), and Kim (1988) for expressions of this view of evidence. As we noted in chapter five, the reason we need to restrict evidence to good reasons that are indicative of truth is that it is possible to have good reasons for adopting a particular doxastic attitude toward a proposition that are not related to the truth of the proposition. For example, in cases of dismal medical prognosis it might be that believing that one will recover can help ease one's suffering. In such a case it may be that the person has good reason to believe that she will recover—after all, doing so eases her suffering. However, the prognosis indicates that it is very unlikely that this person will recover. As a result, the good reason that she has for thinking that she will recover has nothing to do with the actual likelihood of recovery. Such reasons are not evidence. One's evidence in such a case consists of the prognosis, which gives good reason to think that recovery is unlikely.

There are two main categories of views of the nature of the kind of good reasons that constitute evidence: *psychologism* and *propositionalism*. Psychologism is the view that evidence consists solely of non-factive mental states or events.[2] Non-factive mental states are mental states that you can be in even if those states are misleading. For instance, seeing that there is a bush in your yard is a factive mental state because you can only be in the mental state of *seeing* that there is a bush in your yard when there actually is a bush in your yard. However, *seeming to see* that there is a bush in your yard is a non-factive mental state. You can seem to see that there is a bush in your yard even though you are mistaken. Even if you were only hallucinating and there were no bush, you could still be in the non-factive mental state of seeming to see a bush in your yard.

Of course, psychologism does not entail that every non-factive mental state you have is part of your evidence. Imagining a bush in your yard and desiring a bush in your yard are both non-factive mental states directed toward there being a bush in your yard, but they are not evidence that there is such a bush. The non-factive mental states that count as evidence are those that represent the world as actually being a certain way—things like beliefs, introspective experiences, perceptual experiences, memorial experiences, and perhaps intuitions and rational insights are evidence. One way to understand the distinction between non-factive mental states that are evidence and non-factive mental states that are not is that only those that are evidence have what James Pryor (2000, p. 547) calls "phenomenal force". That is, these mental states represent certain content to us in such a way that it "feels as if" the content is actually true. For instance, Diane's imagining that there is a pink elephant in the room is not the sort of non-factive mental state that is evidence because it lacks this kind of phenomenal force. Diane's visual experience of a tree is the sort of non-factive mental state that is evidence though.

Propositionalism is the view that evidence consists of propositions, not mental states.[3] Although propositionalism holds that mental states are not themselves evidence, they accept that the way we have evidence is by having certain mental states. Very roughly, according to propositionalism, propositions are evidence, and we have that evidence by having various mental states which have those propositions as part of their representational content. In terms of what it takes for us to have evidence, psychologism and propositionalism agree that we have to have particular mental states in order to have evidence. Hence, the disagreement between these two views comes down to a disagreement about what evidence is, not what it takes to have evidence. We will compare these views below.

[2]Littlejohn (2012) provides this name for the view. Turri (2009) refers to this as "statism", while Kelly (2008) and Williamson (2000) both refer to it as the "phenomenal conception of evidence". Brueckner (2009), Chisholm (1977), Cohen (1984), Conee and Feldman (1985, 2004, 2008, 2011), McCain (2014), Pollock (1974), and Turri (2009) all endorse psychologism.

[3]Propositionalists are not a unified group. Some, such as Dancy (2000), Hyman (1999), Kvanvig (2007), Littlejohn (2011, 2012, 2013), Schroeder (2008), and Williamson (2000), think that only true propositions can be evidence. Others, such as Arnold (2011), Comesaña and McGrath (2014), and Rizzieri (2011), argue that false propositions can be evidence too.

6.1.1 Psychologism Versus Propositionalism

It will be helpful for us to begin by considering why we might be inclined to accept psychologism. One reason is that the view seems intuitively plausible. It seems that our experiences provide us with evidence. Your experience of being tired is evidence for you that you are tired. Your experience of feeling sad is evidence for you that you are sad. Your experience of a bush's looking green is evidence for you that the bush is green.[4] And so on. Earl Conee and Richard Feldman (2008, p. 87) put the general point this way, "Experience is our point of interaction with the world—conscious awareness is how we gain whatever evidence we have". Now, this is not to say that psychologism entails that *only* experiences are evidence. Psychologism allows that other non-factive mental states such as beliefs are evidence too. Nonetheless, consideration of the role that experiences play in providing us with evidence provides some reason in support of psychologism.

Another reason that we might be inclined to accept psychologism is because of John Turri's (2009, p. 504) "master argument". According to the master argument, when we want to understand your evidence for believing that *p*, it is necessary to be aware of both the particular mental states that you have and how these mental states are related to one another. Turri claims that this information is also sufficient for understanding your evidence for believing that *p*. To clarify, Turri says, "Consider Barry. Barry has an ordinary visual experience as of a bear in his yard, which in conjunction with his habit of taking experience at face value causes him to believe that there's a bear out there. That description allows you to understand Barry's reasons" (2009, p. 504). Psychologism offers us a very good explanation of why being aware of your having certain mental states related in particular ways is necessary and sufficient for understanding your evidence. Your evidence just is your non-factive mental states. Turri maintains that propositionalism unduly complicates things. Propositionalism introduces something beyond what is necessary and sufficient for explaining your reasons for believing that *p*—namely, it introduces the propositions that are the content of your mental states. Turri claims that since all we need is information about your mental states, adding propositions to the story makes for an unnecessarily complicated explanation. Thus, psychologism provides the superior explanation of your reasons for believing that *p*.

Given these considerations in favor of psychologism, we might question why anyone would prefer propositionalism as a theory of the nature of evidence. There are two main reasons that might make one inclined to accept propositionalism over psychologism. The first of these reasons is that some worry psychologism will commit us to a thoroughgoing skepticism. According to Thomas Kelly (2008, p. 945), "if our evidence consists exclusively of non-factive mental states, it is far from clear that it provides us with an epistemic foothold in the world sufficient to

[4]See Conee and Feldman (2008) and Dougherty and Rysiew (2013) for additional examples of this sort.

underwrite the knowledge that we ordinarily take ourselves to have." Kelly goes on to point out that historically psychologism "has consistently aroused suspicions that it ultimately leads to skepticism" (2008, p. 945). The reason for these suspicions is that some question whether a connection strong enough for us to have justification for believing propositions about the external world can be established between our non-factive mental states and the state of the external world.

Although the threat of skepticism is a real issue for psychologism, supporters of this view of evidence are not without plausible responses. First, they may point out that skepticism about the external world is a significant philosophical problem. They may reasonably claim that it would in fact be a mark against a theory of evidence's plausibility if that theory simply did away with this problem by defining evidence in a particular manner. As we saw in chapter five, it is exactly this sort of dismissal of the skeptical problem that leads some internalists to argue that externalist theories of justification are unacceptable.

Second, it is far from clear that psychologism makes responding to external world skepticism impossible. For example, the response to external world skepticism that we will consider in chapter eleven, the *Explanationist Response*, is consistent with psychologism. As we will see in that chapter, this response to external world skepticism is very plausible. Furthermore, there are additional ways of responding to external world skepticism that are consistent with psychologism as well. One such way would be to adopt Reliabilism about justification and argue that our non-factive mental states are reliably connected to the external world. It is consistent with psychologism to claim that when you have the sort of visual experience you typically associate with seeing a bush in your yard, the belief that there is a bush in your yard will be true more often than not. Hence, one could plausibly accept psychologism and claim that the cognitive process that takes your visual experience of a bush as an input and yields your belief that there is a bush as an output is a reliable process. In light of these various responses, it does not seem that the worry that psychologism inevitably leads to external world skepticism is well founded.

The second reason that some might be inclined to accept propositionalism instead of psychologism is that they find Timothy Williamson's (2000) arguments concerning these views persuasive. Williamson offers three arguments in favor of propositionalism over psychologism. Although the arguments are distinct, they have the same basic form:

1. All evidence has property X.
2. Only propositions can have property X.
3. Therefore, all evidence is propositions.[5]

Williamson's first argument appeals to the nature of explanations. Specifically, Williamson says, "evidence is the kind of thing which hypotheses explain. But

[5]This presentation of the general structure of Williamson's arguments is similar to Dougherty's (2011).

the kind of thing which hypotheses explain is propositional" (2000, p. 195). So, "property X" in our skeleton of Williamson's argument above should be understood as "the property of being explained by hypotheses". In support of his argument Williamson maintains, "we may seek to explain why Kosovo rather than Bosnia was peaceful in 1995. The evidence in question would be the propositions that Kosovo was peaceful in 1995 and that Bosnia was not" (2000, p. 195). He goes on to claim that when we explain a particular event we "explain why it occurred, or had some distinctive feature", not the event itself (2000, p. 195).

In his second argument, Williamson appeals to probabilistic reasoning. He asserts, "what has probability is a proposition; the probability is the probability that" (2000, p. 196). Here "property X" should be understood as "the property of having probability". Williamson elaborates that "what gives probability must also receive it", so he claims that evidence is the sort of thing that can give and receive probability (2000, p. 196). And, of course, according to Williamson, what makes something probable and what is made probable by other things must be a proposition.

Williamson relies on the notion of logical consistency in his third argument. He correctly notes, "our evidence sometimes rules out some hypotheses by being inconsistent with them . . . But only propositions can be inconsistent in the relevant sense" (2000, p. 196). Thus, in this final argument "property X" should be understood as "the property of being inconsistent with some hypotheses".

Although each of these arguments might initially seem promising, there are plausible responses on behalf of psychologism. Concerning the first argument, Williamson is correct that typically when we seek to explain an event we are seeking answers as to why the event occurred or why it had the features that it did. He is also correct when he claims that the answers to these questions will be expressed with propositions. Yet, it does not follow from these facts that it is a proposition that is explained rather than the event itself. As Earl Conee and Richard Feldman (2011, p. 322) point out, when explaining WWI one does not explain a proposition, "but the occurrence of the war that the proposition asserts to have occurred". Although our explanatory reasoning is represented by propositions, we are not explaining propositions—we are explaining events. Consider a similar practice that we have, the practice of describing events. When Dana describes a touchdown that occurred in Saturday's game to Randy, she will do so by using sentences that express propositions. She will say things like "the offense ran a pass play", "the receiver was all alone in the end zone", and so on. The fact that Dana describes the touchdown using propositions does not mean that she is actually describing a proposition. Clearly, Dana is describing the event of a particular touchdown occurring, not a proposition. Similarly, simply because an explanation is put in terms of propositions does not entail that what is explained must be a proposition. Thus, the second premise in Williamson's first argument is dubious.

In order for Williamson's argument to be convincing he needs to provide strong reasons to think that we only explain propositions, but he has not done this. In fact, it seems that the most reasonable view is that we use propositions to explain events/phenomena, but we do not explain propositions. Thus, Williamson's

argument does not seem to provide a convincing case against psychologism. In light of this, we do not seem to have good reason to think that evidence construed as mental states rather than propositions cannot be the sort of thing that hypotheses explain.

Now, if it is plausible that we explain events by way of propositions, one might argue that something similar holds in cases of probabilistic and deductive reasoning. So, supporters of psychologism can reasonably maintain that even if our evidence consists of only non-factive mental states, we can still make sense of evidence standing in various probabilistic and logical relations to propositions. Probability relations can be understood in terms of the probability that one's evidence occurs or that it has a particular feature. Thus, it seems that psychologism can allow for all of the same probabilistic relations that propositionalism can. Plausibly, similar considerations apply in the case of deductive reasoning. When our evidence is inconsistent with a particular hypothesis it is because the proposition that our evidence exists or that it has a particular feature is inconsistent with the hypothesis. Consequently, the fact that evidence can be inconsistent with hypotheses does not seem to entail that evidence cannot be non-factive mental states. Therefore, supporters of psychologism seem to have solid responses to Williamson's second and third arguments too.[6]

At this point we have seen some of the considerations for and against both psychologism and propositionalism. Obviously, we have not seen enough here to settle the issue between these two theories of the nature of evidence.[7] Nonetheless, we have gained an understanding of the debate over these theories and some of the important considerations on both sides. For our purposes it is enough that we understand that evidence should be understood in the way that one or the other of these theories maintain. This is enough for us to recognize that the sense of evidence that is relevant for knowledge must be something mental—either mental states or propositions that are the content of mental states. With this understanding of the nature of evidence in hand we can now turn to our second question.

6.2 When Do We Have Evidence?

It will be helpful to start our discussion of having evidence by introducing some terminology. We can distinguish between "total possible evidence" and "total evidence".[8] Your total possible evidence at any give time is all and only the information that you have stored in your mind at that time. Hence, any information, conscious or unconscious, retrievable or irretrievable, that is in your mind at a time is part of your total possible evidence at that time. Although this includes quite a lot

[6]Conee and Feldman (2008) make similar points in response to Williamson's arguments.

[7]For more extensive discussion of these theories see McCain (2014).

[8]This distinction comes from Feldman (2004).

of information, it does rule out some things from being part of your total possible evidence. For instance, things that you used to remember, but now have completely forgotten, are not part of your total possible evidence now. Of course, things that you have never been made aware of are not part of your total possible evidence either. Even if other people are aware of these things, if you have not been made aware of them, they are not part of *your*total possible evidence. After all, the mere fact that some evidence exists for p, in the sense that it is evidence that someone has, does not entail that it is evidence that *you* have.[9]

Your total evidence is simply the portion of your total possible evidence that you possess in the sense that is relevant for justification. It is possible that you have something as part of your total possible evidence without having it as part of your total evidence. It seems plausible that information which is so deeply stored in your memory that you could only access it after years of intense therapy is not part of your total evidence before you have undergone the necessary therapy.[10]

Now that we have the terminology of total possible evidence and total evidence in hand, it is worth mentioning some plausible constraints on evidence possession. These constraints will help us to determine whether a given theory offers a plausible account of when an item of your total possible evidence is part of your total evidence.[11] The first constraint concerns psychological accessibility. According to this constraint, in order for x to be part of your total evidence you must have the right sort of psychological access to x.[12] This psychological access might require that you are currently conscious of x or that you are able to recall x in a suitable way—we will see more about these options as we consider accounts of evidence possession. Accordingly, any account of evidence possession that does not require you to have some psychological access to x in order for it to be part of your total evidence is unacceptable.

The second constraint concerns epistemic acceptability. According to this constraint, an acceptable account of evidence possession should not yield the result that we lack sufficient evidence for justification when it is clear that we are justified. Similarly, an acceptable account of evidence possession should not yield the result that we have sufficient evidence for justification when it is clear that we are unjustified. In other words, an acceptable account of evidence possession should yield the intuitively correct results concerning the evidence possessed in clear cases of justified/unjustified belief.

We can now employ this terminology and these constraints to evaluate various accounts of evidence possession.

[9] You may later learn of this evidence in which case it would become part of your total possible evidence. However, the point here is that at this time, before you have learned any of this information, this information is not part of your total possible evidence.

[10] See Feldman (2004) for more on this point.

[11] Feldman (2004) proposes these constraints.

[12] We should understand x to be neutral between psychologism and propositionalism. So, x might be a non-factive mental state, or x may be the propositional content of a mental state.

6.2.1 *Extreme Views of Having Evidence*

When it comes to accounts of evidence possession there are two extreme views that have been discussed in the literature. The first is extremely permissive, and the second is extremely restrictive. We will look at both of these and the challenges they face.

The extremely permissive view simply equates total evidence with total possible evidence. According to this view, any information that is stored in your mind is evidence that you have. Of course, this is too permissive, and it is not surprising that this view has no serious defenders. In order to see the problem with this account of evidence possession let us consider the following sort of example:

> Michael is a normal adult. He has many memories of his childhood. Some of these memories Michael can easily recall, and some he can only recall with very special prompting. He has a particularly painful memory—a memory of being forgotten and left at a store when he was a small child. The painful nature of this memory has made it so that it is very deeply stored in Michael's memory. It is possible that Michael could bring this memory to consciousness, but he could only do so after undergoing years of intense training and psychological therapy. Currently, Michael has not undergone any of this training or psychological therapy.[13]

It seems that in this case Michael's deeply stored memory of being left at the store is not evidence that he currently has. That is to say, Michael's memory is part of his total possible evidence, but not part of his total evidence at this time. After all, it would be implausible to think that if Michael suddenly believed he was left at the store when he was a small child, his belief would be justified. Alternatively, it seems that if Michael suddenly believed that he was not left at a store when he was a small child, that belief would not be justified either. It seems that Michael simply does not at the current time have evidence about this issue—at least not the sort of evidence that is relevant for justification (total evidence). This, however, means that the very permissive account of having evidence is mistaken. We cannot simply equate total evidence with total possible evidence. Total evidence requires more stringent constraints on psychological accessibility than simply being stored somewhere in one's memory.

Of course, the problems with the extremely permissive account of having evidence can be avoided by accepting an extremely restrictive account. One such extremely restrictive account, which at least at one time had a serious defender, claims that the only time x is part of your total evidence is when you are currently thinking of x.[14] On this view, no stored information at all is part of your total evidence. There are various problems with this view as well. It will be instructive to consider both an objection to this view and how one might try to respond to that objection.

[13] Feldman (2004) and McCain (2014) both use similar examples to argue against the extremely permissive account of having evidence.

[14] Feldman (2004) defended this account. However, it seems that he has since changed his view or at least become less sure of it (see Conee and Feldman (2008)).

One particularly strong objection to the extremely restrictive account comes from an example that Richard Feldman (2004, p. 221) describes:

> Suppose my friend Jones tells me that the hike up to Precarious Peak is not terribly strenuous or dangerous, that it is the sort of thing that I can do without undue difficulty. Assume that Jones knows my abilities with respect to these sorts of things and that he seems to be an honest person. On the basis of his testimony, I believe that the hike is something I can do. It seems that it is rational for me to believe this proposition. But suppose I've failed to think about the time Jones told me that I could paddle my canoe down Rapid River, something he knew to be far beyond my abilities. He just gets a kick out of sending people off on grueling expeditions. If you were to say to me, "Remember when Jones lied about the canoe trip?" I'd say "Yes! How could I have failed to think about that?"

We can all agree that after Feldman is reminded of Jones' past lie he should not trust Jones' testimony. Consequently, at that point it is clear that his total evidence does not justify him in thinking that he can hike up Precarious Peak. Feldman claims that before he is currently thinking of the fact that Jones has lied to him about this sort of thing in the past, he should believe that he can hike up Precarious Peak without much difficulty though. In other words, Feldman maintains that when he is not currently thinking of Jones' previous deceit he does not have evidence for doubting Jones' testimony. Of course, this is consistent with the extremely restrictive account of evidence possession that Feldman defends, but should we think this is correct?

It does not seem that we should accept Feldman's assessment of the case. In order to help see this let us take a look at a modified version of Feldman's example:

> Suppose that at 1pm Feldman recalls the time that Jones lied to him about the difficulty of canoeing down Rapid River, something Jones knew to be far beyond Feldman's abilities. Feldman also remembers that Jones just gets a kick out of sending people off on grueling expeditions. So, Feldman remembers that he should not trust Jones' testimony. At 1:01pm Feldman reads in his guidebook that the hike up to Precarious Peak is an extremely difficult hike. Feldman easily recognizes that this hike is something that would be nearly impossible for him to do. At 1:02pm Feldman is eating lunch and no longer thinking about the times Jones lied to him or about what he just read concerning the hike to Precarious Peak. Of course, Feldman could very easily recall this information—all he has to do is think about whether he can make the hike. While Feldman is having lunch Jones tells him that the hike up to Precarious Peak is not terribly strenuous or dangerous, that it is the sort of thing that Feldman can do without undue difficulty. Feldman is aware that Jones knows Feldman's abilities with respect to these sorts of things and Jones is not acting particularly suspicious.[15]

We might reasonably maintain that Feldman has evidence in this case for thinking that he should not trust Jones' testimony about this hike. The reason we might think this is that it seems Feldman's total evidence does include things he is not currently thinking of. In particular, it seems that Feldman's total evidence includes the information that he just read in the guidebook a minute ago and his memory of Jones' past lies, which he recalled only two minutes ago. If this is

[15]This example is similar to one presented in McCain (2014).

correct, then the extremely restrictive view of evidence possession is mistaken. Thus, it seems that both extreme views of evidence possession face some serious challenges.[16]

6.2.2 Moderate Views of Having Evidence

As we have seen, both extreme accounts of evidence possession face some serious problems. In light of this, we might be well advised to seek out some more moderate view of what it takes to have evidence. Moderate views of having evidence hold that your total evidence is not simply all of your total possible evidence, but your total evidence is not restricted to only the things that you are currently thinking either. Instead, moderate views of evidence possession hold that both the things you are currently thinking of and some of the information that you have stored in memory constitute your total evidence at any given time.

Of course, there is a challenge here. Moderate views need some principled way of distinguishing between the memories that are accessible enough to count as part of your total evidence and those that are not. Feldman (2004, p. 232) challenges moderate views by pointing out "whether a person will think of some fact depends largely upon how the person is prompted or stimulated." According to Feldman, almost any memory can be recalled given suitable prompting. This would seem to make it very difficult to draw a principled distinction between memories that count as part of your total evidence now and those that do not.

At this point there has not been a lot of effort to give a precise moderate account of evidence possession. For the most part, epistemologists have seemed content to handle the issue of evidence possession on a case-by-case basis. Although this approach may be able to do the work that we need, it is not as intellectually satisfying as having a precise account of evidence possession. Fortunately, there is at least one promising moderate approach to settling when a memory is part of your total evidence and when it is not.[17]

This promising moderate account of evidence possession suggests that we should first rethink a basic assumption that is often taken for granted in discussions of what it takes to have evidence. Throughout our own discussion we have made this assumption by taking it for granted that having evidence is a two-place relation. We have simply been considering whether you have x as part of your total evidence. We might make important strides toward giving a successful moderate account of evidence possession by doing away with this assumption. Instead, we would understand your total evidence as relative to a topic of inquiry. This idea would

[16]For further discussion of the challenges facing these extreme views of having evidence see McCain (2014).

[17]For further elaboration and defense of this moderate account of evidence possession see McCain (2014).

make having evidence a three-place relation. In other words, when trying to figure out what total evidence you have at a particular time we would be asking whether *x* is part of your total evidence with respect to the truth of *p*.

This change in the way we approach the topic of evidence possession has some initial plausibility. It seems plausible that you might possess *x* as evidence for *p*, but not possess *x* as evidence for *q*. This is not simply to state the obvious—that *x* may be evidence in support of *p* while not supporting *q*. Instead, the idea here is that even if *x* supports *p*, and *x* also supports *q*, it could be that at a particular time you have *x* as evidence for *p*, but not for *q*. This might be the case because you have the appropriate sort of psychological access to *x* with respect to *p*, but not with respect to *q*. So, a first step toward providing an acceptable moderate account of evidence possession may be to change how we view evidence possession in general.

Now, simply understanding evidence possession as a three-place rather than a two-place relation is not enough to really get a moderate account of evidence possession off the ground. We still need some way of deciding when you have *x* available relative to a particular topic of inquiry. One plausible answer is that it comes down to what you can recall when reflecting on that topic. In other words, we might say that you have *x* as part of your total evidence with respect to *p* when you can recall *x* by merely thinking about the question of *p*'s truth.

We can see how such an account of evidence possession might work by considering another example of Feldman's. According to Feldman (2004, p. 232), "If I ask my childhood friend if he remembers the time we spray-painted my neighbor's dog, I may get an embarrassed 'Yes.' If I ask him if he remembers any of our childhood pranks, this one may fail to come to mind." Feldman goes on to claim that this case is a problem for moderate accounts of having evidence. He says, "Is the fact that we spray-painted the dog easily accessible? There seems to be no clear answer" (2004, p. 232). According to the moderate account of evidence possession we have been considering, Feldman's question is not an appropriate question to ask about evidence possession at all. We should instead ask things like: does Feldman's friend have his memory of spray-painting the dog available as evidence pertaining to the truth of whether he and Feldman spray-painted the dog? Does Feldman's friend have his memory of spray-painting the dog available as evidence pertaining to the truth of whether he and Feldman committed childhood pranks? In the first case, the answer seems to be "yes" because he does remember spray-painting the dog when reflecting on this topic. In the second instance the answer depends on whether or not this memory comes to mind when he reflects on the broader topic. If it does come to mind, then he has the memory as part of his total evidence with respect to whether he and Feldman committed childhood pranks. If it does not come to mind, then he does not have this memory as part of his total evidence with respect to that topic.

It is clear that more work is needed before this moderate account of evidence possession could be considered very precise. There are various questions that we still need answers to: Do you have to immediately think of *x* when you consider the topic, or is *x* part of your total evidence with respect to that topic even if it takes a while for you to recall *x*? How widely should we understand a topic of inquiry?

Is a topic of inquiry simply a proposition? Is it a general question? And so on. Importantly, for our purposes we do not need to develop an account with this level of precision. It is enough that we recognize that there is at least one promising way of developing a moderate account of what it takes to have evidence.

6.3 Conclusion

We have examined answers to two of the key questions about evidence—what it is and what it takes to have it. There are live debates concerning the correct answers to both of these questions. As we have seen, the two main approaches to the nature of evidence, psychologism and propositionalism, both face challenges. However, it is plausible that one or the other of these theories is correct. Also, we have seen that there are problems for extreme views of evidence possession, but moderate views face challenges of their own. Again, we have seen that there is hope in this debate. It seems that there is at least one initially promising way of developing a moderate account of evidence possession. Both of these questions are important for our understanding of the justification that evidence can provide for believing a proposition. Of course, this means that they are important for our understanding of scientific knowledge too. Fortunately, we do not need to settle the debates about the nature of evidence and its possession in order to understand how evidence can provide us with knowledge of scientific claims. It is enough that we understand the basics of these issues and some of the major moves in these debates.

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