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Evidential Pluralism and accounts of establishing

Michael Wilde¹

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Abstract

In *Evidential Pluralism in the Social Sciences*, Yafeng Shan and Jon Williamson do a great job of clarifying, motivating, and defending the commitments of Evidential Pluralism. In this commentary, I will show that one of their clarifications commits Evidential Pluralism to a particular account of establishing. And I will argue that a non-committal account of establishing would better promote the main message of the book.

Keywords Evidential Pluralism · Evidentialism · Knowing as establishing

Shan and Williamson begin by giving a careful and detailed exposition of the commitments of Evidential Pluralism.¹ They give the following definition of Evidential Pluralism:

In order to establish a causal claim, one normally needs to establish two propositions: that the putative cause and effect are appropriately correlated, and that there is some mechanism complex involving the putative cause which is responsible for the putative effect and which can account for the extent of the correlation. So, in order to assess a causal claim, one normally needs to assess relevant association studies and mechanistic studies where available. (2023: 3).

This definition seems to me an improvement on previous definitions given in the context of medicine, where Evidential Pluralism is sometimes known as the Russo-Williamson thesis (Clarke et al., 2014; Illari, 2011; Russo & Williamson, 2007; Williamson, 2019). For example, there is now talk of a ‘mechanism complex’ to make explicit what until now has been mostly left implicit, namely, that ‘it is not enough to establish the existence of some mechanism of action: it is also essential to

¹ The present comments build upon previous papers of mine, which discuss accounts of establishing and Evidential Pluralism in the context of medicine (Wilde, 2021, 2024).

✉ Michael Wilde
m.e.wilde@kent.ac.uk

¹ Kent and Medway Medical School, Canterbury, UK

establish that the influence of this mechanism is not negated by that of counteracting mechanisms' (Shan & Williamson, 2023: 8). And the definition now clearly distinguishes two components, following work by Phyllis Illari (2011): (i) '*object pluralism*,' which 'specifies two objects of evidence—two claims that we [normally] need evidence for,' namely, the claim that there exists a relevant correlation, and the claim that there exists a relevant mechanism, that is, 'the correlation claim' and 'the general mechanistic claim,' respectively (Shan & Williamson, 2023: 4, 11); (ii) '*study pluralism*,' which says that 'we should pay attention to studies that act as association studies and to those that act as mechanistic studies' (Shan & Williamson, 2023: 10).²

Shan and Williamson also provide some further details on association studies and mechanistic studies. They claim that 'it is helpful to think of the distinction between an association study and a mechanistic study as a distinction between two possible *roles* that a study can play in the context of the particular causal claim' (2023: 11). And they provide something like a functional definition of an association study and a mechanistic study: if a given study plays a role in confirming a correlation between *A* and *B*, it thereby counts as an association study for *A* and *B*; if a given study plays a role in confirming the features of the mechanisms linking *A* and *B*, it thereby counts as a mechanistic study for *A* and *B* (2023: 10–11). Shan and Williamson also claim that a single study can in fact play both of these roles: 'It is in principle possible to design a study that is both an association study for *A* and *B* and a mechanistic study for *A* and *B*' (2023: p. 11).

In giving these extra details, the definition of Evidential Pluralism nevertheless judiciously retains its neutrality in certain respects. For instance, the definition 'says nothing explicitly about the metaphysics of causality' (2023: 28, 86–89).³ Shan and Williamson say that 'we do not commit to any particular account of the nature of causality—we leave this question open' (2023: 3). I take it that the strategy is to make Evidential Pluralism as non-committal as possible, in order for the fewest people to be put off from accepting the merits of Evidential Pluralism. No matter what your specific metaphysics of causality, you too can accept the merits of Evidential Pluralism. And I take it that this strategy is adopted as a good way to promote '[t]he main message' of the book, namely, 'that Evidential Pluralism can be fruitfully applied across the range of the social sciences' (2023: 149).

² Shan and Williamson are clear that 'Evidential Pluralism says that one "normally" needs to establish both correlation and mechanism' (2023: 9). They say that '[t]he use of "normally" is intended to leave open the possibility that in certain cases, such as overdetermination cases and causation between absences, one might not need to establish both correlation and mechanism' (2023: 9–10). Sometimes this 'normally' qualification is left tacit. For example, they make unqualified statements such as 'for you to establish a causal claim, you need to gather evidence in order to be in a position to establish both correlation and mechanism' (2023: 5). In this paper, I will follow their practice of sometimes making similar unqualified statements, where the 'normally' qualification is left tacit.

³ It might be objected that, although the definition of Evidential Pluralism may say nothing *explicitly* about the metaphysics of causality, it nevertheless says quite a bit *implicitly*. Perhaps 'explicitly' is doing some heavy-lifting here. Indeed, Shan and Williamson acknowledge that Evidential Pluralism 'can be viewed as imposing important constraints on metaphysical or conceptual theories of causality—constraints that standard or dualist theories may fail to satisfy' (2023: 28).

Shan and Williamson also intend to adopt a *non-committal account of establishing*: '[a] proposition is established just when standards are met for treating the proposition itself as evidence, to be used to help assess further propositions' (2023: 4). I take the idea to be that an agent has a body of *total evidence* consisting of propositions: if a proposition *p* is included in the agent's total evidence, then *p* is established for the agent; and if *p* is established for an agent, then *p* is included in their total evidence (cf. Williamson, 2000: 186–190). Shan and Williamson say that this account of establishing 'leaves open the question of what constitutes evidence' (2023: 4, fn. 1). And it seems to me correct that epistemologists of very different stripes could get on board with such a non-committal account of establishing. No matter what your specific theory of evidence, you too can accept the merits of this non-committal account of establishing.⁴ Appealing only to this non-committal account of establishing would be another way of carrying out the strategy of making Evidential Pluralism as non-committal as possible. However, Shan and Williamson go further by providing also a more committed account of establishing.

Shan and Williamson distinguish between being 'in a position to establish' a proposition and 'establishing' a proposition. On the one hand, '[a]n agent is "in a position" to establish a proposition if her evidence base establishes the proposition' in the sense that the '[p]rior evidence must warrant not only sufficiently high confidence in the truth of the proposition, but also high confidence that further evidence will not call the proposition into question' (2023: 5). Shan and Williamson call these the "threshold" and "stability" conditions for establishing,' respectively (2023: 5). In this case, we are thinking of establishing in terms of a mere 'evidential relation' that is 'impersonal' (2023: 5). On the other hand, 'an agent establishes a proposition when her evidence base establishes the proposition and she takes the proposition to be evident on those grounds' (2023: 5). In this case, we are thinking of establishing in terms of an agent's 'act' of rightly taking a proposition to be established by her evidence base. Shan and Williamson appeal to this distinction between the 'evidential relation' and the 'act' of establishing to disambiguate two ways of construing Evidential Pluralism. On the *evidential construal*, 'Evidential Pluralism is impersonal: it says that the evidence base establishes causation just when it establishes correlation and mechanism' (2023: 5). On the *practical construal*, 'Evidential Pluralism offers practical advice for someone intending to establish causation: for you to establish a causal claim, you need to gather evidence in order to be in a position to establish both correlation and mechanism' (2023: 5).

Shan and Williamson's more committed account of establishing is liable to put some people off. They say that:

Although establishing requires meeting a high epistemological standard, it is fallible. One's prior evidence can be systematically misleading, making a

⁴ Shan and Williamson mention a few such theories of evidence: '[a]n agent's evidence has variously been analysed as her knowledge, or her full beliefs, or those of her degrees of belief which are set by observation, or her information, or what she rationally grants (Williamson, 2015)' (2023: 4). They say that: 'Fortunately we do not need to settle this very controversial question [of what constitutes evidence] here' (Shan and Williamson, 2023: 4, fn. 1).

proposition very plausible and making it very plausible that confidence in the proposition will not significantly decrease in the light of new evidence, even though the proposition is in fact false. (2023: 5).

On this more committed account of establishing then, a false proposition could be established. An agent could then use a false proposition as evidence. However, some people have argued that evidence consists only of true propositions: propositions used as evidence must be true if they are to play their proper role, for example, in ruling out false hypotheses (Williamson, 2000: 184–208; Williamson, 2007: 209–210). For them, this more committed account of establishing will not be demanding enough. On the other hand, some people might object that the present account is too demanding. On this more committed account, ‘[w]hether a proposition is established depends on prior evidence’ (Shan & Williamson, 2023: 5). In other words, Shan and Williamson’s account is an *evidentialist* account of establishing, one that maintains that a proposition p is established for an agent only if the agent’s prior evidence meets the threshold and stability conditions with respect to p (Shan & Williamson, 2023: 5). However, some people might think that establishing a proposition need not depend upon prior evidence, as in the case where an agent establishes a proposition non-inferentially, say, by perception (cf. Littlejohn, 2018). For example, some people might think that p is established for an agent just when the agent believes p by way of a reliable belief-forming process, regardless of whether that process involves any prior evidence. Such people might therefore prefer a *non-evidentialist* account of establishing, one that accepts that a proposition p can be established for an agent even if the agent’s prior evidence fails to meet the threshold and stability conditions with respect to p . Shan and Williamson’s more committed account rules out such a non-evidentialist account of establishing.

A non-evidentialist account of establishing can be provided from within the framework of knowledge-first epistemology (Williamson, 2000). For example, with regard to the sense of establishing as an ‘evidential relation,’ the *knowledge theory of establishing* maintains that: a proposition p is established by an agent’s evidence just when p follows from their knowledge (cf. Wilde, 2024).⁵ And with regard to the sense of establishing as an ‘act,’ the knowledge theory of establishing maintains that: the act of establishing p is just the act of knowing p ; in other words, an agent rightly takes their evidence to establish p just when the agent knows p (cf. Williamson, 2000: 184–208). On this theory, whether a proposition is established for an agent need not depend upon the agent’s prior evidence, at least if the act of knowing need not depend upon the prior evidence, as some have maintained for cases of non-inferential knowledge, such as perceptual knowledge (cf. Williamson, 2009: 282–284). Nevertheless, it seems to me that a proponent of this knowledge theory

⁵ Note then that it is not quite right to say that a knowledge-first framework ‘deems it futile to attempt to provide specific standards for establishing a proposition’ (Shan and Williamson, 2023: 6, fn. 2). Indeed, the present knowledge theory of establishing does provide a specific standard: a proposition p is established for an agent only if p follows from the agent’s knowledge. But it is right that the knowledge-first framework deems it futile to attempt to provide non-circular necessary and sufficient conditions for such knowledge (Williamson, 2000: 27–33).

of establishing could still endorse each construal of Evidential Pluralism. They will just think that the *evidential construal* entails also that for a causal claim to follow from an agent's knowledge, both the correlation claim and the general mechanistic claim need to follow from the agent's knowledge (Wilde, 2024). And they will think that the *practical construal* entails that for an agent to know a causal claim, they need evidence that establishes both the correlation claim and the general mechanistic claim, in the sense that both of these claims must follow from the agent's knowledge.

Shan and Williamson do briefly provide some negative arguments against the knowledge theory of establishing. They say that this theory 'takes establishing to be infallible, however, and holds that one cannot in general determine what one's evidence is' (2023: 6, fn. 2). And they object that these commitments are 'quite a departure from the common usage of the terms "establishing" and "evidence" in scientific practice' (2023: 6, fn. 2). Of course, a departure from common usage of the terms "establishing" and "evidence" in scientific practice is not by itself a bad thing; perhaps common usage is incorrect. But a natural assumption is that common usage in scientific practice is a good proxy for the correct usage. The real worry then is that the knowledge theory of establishing might be a departure from the *correct* usage of the terms "establishing" and "evidence."

No argument is provided for the claim that the knowledge theory of establishing 'holds that one cannot in general determine what one's evidence is' (Shan & Williamson, 2023: 6, fn. 2). However, for some proposition p , the condition that p follows from an agent's knowledge will be a *non-trivial* condition: it will obtain in some but not all cases. The knowledge theory of establishing then entails, by the non-committal account of establishing, that it is a non-trivial condition that p is included in the agent's total evidence. Timothy Williamson's anti-luminosity argument concludes that non-trivial conditions are *non-luminous*: they can obtain without an agent being in a position to know that they obtain (2000: 93–113). If the anti-luminosity argument is sound, p can therefore be included in an agent's total evidence without the agent being in a position to know that p is included in their total evidence (Williamson, 2000: 164–183). In short, the anti-luminosity argument commits the knowledge theory of establishing to the claim that evidence is non-luminous. Shan and Williamson are perhaps therefore objecting that common usage has it that evidence is in fact *luminous*: if p is included in an agent's total evidence, the agent is in a position to know that p is included in their total evidence.

If the anti-luminosity argument is sound, it will commit many accounts of establishing to the claim that evidence is non-luminous. In particular, evidence will prove non-luminous for an account that maintains at least the non-committal account of establishing, as well as the claim that, for some proposition p , it is a non-trivial condition that p is established for an agent. For example, for some proposition p , the condition that an agent's prior evidence meets the threshold and stability conditions with respect to p will be a non-trivial condition. Shan and Williamson's more committed account of establishing would therefore also be committed to the claim that evidence is non-luminous, given that it also accepts at least the non-committal account of establishing (2023: 4). Of course, one might try to avoid this commitment by objecting to the anti-luminosity argument. However, Amia Srinivasan

(2015) has given a robust response to the best objections to the anti-luminosity argument. Regardless, even if there were good objections to the anti-luminosity argument, the proponent of the knowledge theory of establishing could likewise appeal to those objections to avoid commitment to the claim that evidence is non-luminous.

Personally, I do not think it goes against common usage to claim that evidence is non-luminous. Note that the claim is not that we do not have access to our evidence. Timothy Williamson clarifies that:

[O]ne *does* have access to one's evidence itself, in the most straightforward way: by knowing it. Without any sort of access constraint at all, evidence cannot play its distinctive role. What one may not be in a position to know, on my view, is something else: whether a given proposition is part of one's evidence—a higher-order truth *about* one's evidence. (2009: 311).

Note also that the claim is not that we are *mostly*, or even *regularly*, not in a position to know whether a proposition is included in our total evidence; it is simply the claim that it is *possible* for us not to be in a position to know that a proposition is included in our total evidence. Indeed, the claim that evidence is non-luminous in this sense would plausibly help to explain the common disagreements about the extent of the evidence within scientific practice.⁶ At the very least, it is not obvious that it goes against common usage to hold that evidence is non-luminous.

It might nevertheless still go against common usage to maintain that establishing is 'infallible' (Shan & Williamson, 2023: 5, fn. 2). Presumably, Shan and Williamson are assuming that knowledge is in some sense infallible, so that establishing too becomes infallible in this sense, given the knowledge theory of establishing. I take it that knowledge is infallible in the following *epistemic sense*: if an agent knows a proposition p , then not- p is epistemically impossible for that agent. I think that this follows trivially from an account of epistemic impossibility that is rightly common, on the grounds that it is quite natural, at least etymologically speaking (cf. Littlejohn, 2008: 681–682). According to this common account, p is epistemically impossible for an agent if and only if p is inconsistent with the agent's knowledge, that is, it follows from that agent's knowledge that not- p (Williamson, 2000: 224–228). The knowledge theory of establishing has the consequence that establishing is also infallible in this *epistemic sense*: if an agent establishes p , then not- p is epistemically impossible for that agent.

Why should we think it is a departure from common usage to maintain that establishing is infallible in this epistemic sense? Shan and Williamson do not provide an explicit argument. But one line of argument might appeal to the fact that common usage allows that there is, at least very often, a chance that an agent's method for establishing p will go wrong such that, in some cases, an agent can establish p , even

⁶ For further related discussion, see Williamson (2007: 208–246). For instance: '[W]e might hope that whether a proposition constitutes evidence is *in principle* uncontentionally decidable, in the sense that a community of inquirers can always in principle achieve common knowledge as to whether any given proposition constitutes evidence for the inquiry. Call that idea *Evidence Neutrality*' (2007: 210). Williamson argues that 'Evidence Neutrality is false' (2007: 212).

though there is a chance that not- p . For example, an agent might establish that p just by looking, even though there is a chance that their visual system can go wrong. And it might be thought that common usage maintains also that: if there is a chance that not- p , then not- p is epistemically possible for that agent. It would then follow that common usage allows that an agent can establish p even though not- p is epistemically possible for that agent. However, it is not an obvious departure from common usage to allow that not- p is epistemically impossible for an agent even though there is a chance that not- p . Indeed, common usage allows there is at least very often a chance that an agent's method for knowing p will go wrong such that, in some cases, an agent can know p even though there is a chance that not- p . For instance, an agent can know something by looking even though their visual system can go wrong, and an agent can know something about the future even though there can be quantum-mechanical blips (Williamson, 2009: 313–329). According to the common account of epistemic impossibility, common usage therefore allows that not- p can be epistemically impossible for an agent even though there is a chance that not- p . It therefore does not obviously follow that common usage allows that an agent can establish p even though not- p is epistemically possible for that agent.

Another line of argument is that common usage has it that what is epistemically possible for an agent is constrained by their total evidence in the following sense: p is epistemically possible for an agent if and only if p is consistent with the agent's total evidence (cf. Williamson, 2000: 224–225). It would then follow from the claim that establishing is infallible in the epistemic sense that establishing is also infallible in the following *evidential sense*: if an agent establishes p , then not- p is inconsistent with that agent's total evidence. Perhaps the idea is that it is a departure from common usage to maintain that establishing is infallible in this evidential sense. Take, for example, cases of underdetermination, where an agent establishes p despite p being underdetermined by their evidence; in such cases, it looks like an agent establishes p even though not- p is consistent with the agent's evidence (cf. Dodd, 2007). In turn, it seems a departure from common usage to maintain that establishing is infallible in the epistemic sense; common usage seems to allow for cases where an agent could establish p even though not- p is epistemically possible for that agent. However, Littlejohn (2008) gives a nice response to this line of argument. In particular, cases of underdetermination show only that common usage allows that an agent can establish p even though not- p is consistent with their *prior evidence*, that is, their evidence before establishing p . It would be an obvious departure from common usage to maintain that establishing is infallible in the following *prior evidential sense*: if an agent establishes p , then not- p is inconsistent with that agent's prior evidence. This is shown by the cases of underdetermination: p was established for an agent despite p being underdetermined by the agent's *prior evidence*. But such cases do not show that an agent can establish p even though not- p is consistent with their *total evidence*, which includes evidence gained by establishing p (cf. Littlejohn, 2008: 682–683). It is not an obvious departure from common usage to maintain that establishing a proposition is a way of generating further evidence. So it is not an obvious departure from common usage to maintain that establishing is infallible in the following *total evidential sense*: if an agent establishes p , then not- p is inconsistent with that agent's total evidence. Indeed, this much is entailed by the

non-committal account of establishing endorsed by Shan and Williamson (cf. 2023: 4). In turn, it is not an obvious departure from common usage to maintain that establishing is infallible in the epistemic sense.

Shan and Williamson's negative arguments against the knowledge theory of establishing therefore look unsuccessful.⁷ Is there instead a positive argument in favour of their evidentialist account of establishing? Shan and Williamson do not seem to provide such a positive argument, at least explicitly. But perhaps there is an implicit positive argument. Shan and Williamson provide some case studies of causal enquiry in the social sciences, in particular, in sociology, economics, political science, and law (2023: 79–148). They intend to show in part that 'Evidential Pluralism can explain and validate successful examples of causal enquiry' (2023: xii). Evidential Pluralism might then be confirmed by an Inference to the Best Explanation. In turn, the accompanying evidentialist account of establishing might also receive confirmation.

Shan and Williamson's case studies do not explicitly mention their previously introduced evidentialist account of establishing. In particular, in their discussion of successful examples of causal enquiry in the social sciences, there is no mention of their earlier threshold and stability conditions on establishing. This absence limits the amount of confirmation the case studies can provide for the evidentialist account of establishing. Indeed, a non-evidentialist account of establishing seems just as compatible with their case studies. A more detailed analysis would be needed for the case studies to confirm anything more than a non-committal account of establishing.⁸ However, Shan and Williamson do provide another, initial argument for Evidential Pluralism (2023: 12–15). They begin by appealing to the platitude that 'correlation is insufficient for causation' since there are 'a large number of possible explanations' of such a correlation; 'establishing the existence of a suitable mechanism is precisely what is needed to establish causation' because this serves to 'rule out the other possible explanations of the correlation' (2023: 12). And they say that 'establishing the existence of a mechanism is also not enough on its own to establish causation,' since this is not enough to establish the existence of the 'net effect' required for establishing causation (2023: 13).

It is not clear that the initial argument fares any better as a positive argument, because it also does not explicitly mention their evidentialist account of establishing, or its threshold and stability conditions (cf. Shan & Williamson, 2023: 12–15). But perhaps the initial argument could be extended to provide also a motivation for their evidentialist account of establishing. One idea is that, in order to rule out all alternative explanations of an established correlation, the agent's prior evidence must be such that the threshold and stability conditions have been met with respect to the general mechanistic claim. And in order to establish a net effect, the agent's prior

⁷ Williamson (2015) provides objections to Timothy Williamson's knowledge theory of evidence, $E=K$: a proposition p is included in an agent's evidence if and only if the agent knows that p (2000: 184–208). Some of these objections may carry over to become additional negative arguments against the knowledge theory of establishing.

⁸ In the context of medicine, I have had a go at supporting the knowledge theory of establishing by appealing to Gillies' (2016) case study on tobacco smoking and lung cancer (Wilde, 2024).

evidence must be such that the threshold and stability conditions have been met with respect to the correlation claim. However, in order to rule out all alternatives of an established correlation, it is enough that the general mechanistic claim is established in the non-committal sense, namely, that the claim follows from the agent's *total* evidence (Wilde, 2024). And in order to establish a net effect, it is enough that the correlation claim is established in the non-committal sense, namely, that the claim follows from the agent's *total* evidence. And it would beg the question at hand simply to maintain also the evidentialist assumption that a claim is established for an agent only if their prior evidence meets the threshold and stability conditions with respect to that claim.

Shan and Williamson might agree that other accounts of establishing are compatible with Evidential Pluralism. Perhaps they put forward their evidentialist account of establishing simply as an example of one of a number of ways of elaborating a thorough account of Evidential Pluralism. Indeed, Shan and Williamson, for similar reasons, introduce the *epistemic theory of causality*, despite their reluctance to 'commit to any particular account of the nature of causality' (2023: 3). In this case, they intend simply to 'provide a brief introduction to epistemic causality ... because it helps to shed some light on how Evidential Pluralism might cohere with an account of the nature of causality' (2023: 23). They are clear that this is just 'one particular philosophical theory of the nature of causality that coheres well with Evidential Pluralism' (2023: xii). Perhaps their more committed account of establishing was similarly intended simply to shed light on how Evidential Pluralism might cohere with a more detailed account of establishing (Williamson, 2022). But then it would be good to make clear that this is just one example of a number of accounts of establishing that cohere well with Evidential Pluralism.

Is the evidentialist account perhaps the best example of an account of establishing for the purposes of *Evidential Pluralism in the Social Sciences*? Among other things, the book aims to 'help us understand the structure of causal enquiry in the social sciences' and to 'inform practice in the social sciences' (Shan & Williamson, 2023: 29). Presumably, then, the intended audience consists of philosophers of science as well as practicing social scientists. Shan and Williamson perhaps just wanted to provide an example of the sort of account of establishing they had in mind, in order to aid the understanding of these audiences. In particular, they had in mind a fairly demanding account of establishing, for example, that a proposition p is established only if the prior evidence warrants a sufficiently high and stable confidence in p (Shan & Williamson, 2023: 5). In turn, the extra detail provided by the example could help to inform practice in the social sciences, by giving the social scientist a better idea of the conditions under which a proposition is established. The philosopher of science, more concerned than the social scientist with the underlying philosophical motivation, may be put off by the lack of argument in support of the extra details. But the social scientist, more concerned with practical applications than the underlying philosophical motivation, might appreciate the extra level of detail and regard any discussion of the philosophical motivation as an irrelevant distraction.

Elsewhere, Williamson (2022) has worked out the details of an evidentialist account of establishing. Shan and Williamson understandably appeal to this account in providing an example of their intended notion of establishing (2023: 4–6).

However, the knowledge theory of establishing may have better served the book's aims of aiding understanding and informing practice. Firstly, the knowledge theory provides an alternative example of a fairly demanding account of establishing. In particular, it is plausible that if a proposition p follows from an agent's knowledge, then the agent is warranted in having a sufficiently high and stable confidence in p .⁹ Secondly, Putnam once objected to the propensity theory of probability by remarking that "propensity" is at least as unclear as "probability" (1975: 218). Shan and Williamson's account of establishing is prone to a similar objection: plausibly, it is easier to grasp whether a proposition p is established than whether the prior evidence warrants a sufficiently high and stable confidence in p . In contrast, the knowledge theory explains establishing in terms of the much more familiar notion of knowledge. If all they were after was an example of a fairly demanding sort of account of establishing, in order to aid both understanding and practice, perhaps it would have been better to appeal to the knowledge theory of establishing.

To sum up, Shan and Williamson do a great job of clarifying the commitments of Evidential Pluralism. One of these commitments appears to be to an evidentialist account of establishing. However, Shan and Williamson provide no completely convincing argument in favour of this evidentialist account. And they provide only unsuccessful arguments against an alternative non-evidentialist account, namely, the knowledge theory of establishing. As a result, Shan and Williamson's clarification here is liable to put some people off from accepting the merits of Evidential Pluralism. I think this result could have been avoided by adopting only a non-committal account of establishing, thereby acknowledging that different accounts of establishing are compatible with Evidential Pluralism. A non-committal account of establishing would quite simply allow for more people to accept the merits of Evidential Pluralism. In slogan form: "Down with the Establishment! Up with Evidential Pluralism!" Moreover, a non-committal account of establishing opens up a wider range of resources from epistemology, which we can appeal to in order to motivate and defend Evidential Pluralism. For instance, some have appealed to a broadly reliabilist epistemological framework to motivate Evidential Pluralism (Auker-Howlett & Wilde, 2020). And some have appealed to the knowledge-first framework to respond to counterexamples to Evidential Pluralism (Wilde, 2024). Shan and Williamson perhaps only intended to aid understanding and practice by giving an example of the fairly demanding sort of account of establishing they had in mind for their definition of Evidential Pluralism. But a better example for these purposes might have been provided by the knowledge theory of establishing.

⁹ For instance, if an agent's confidence in a proposition p is warranted insofar as it lines up in the right way with the probability of p conditional on the agent's evidence, and if the agent's evidence is just their knowledge, then a proposition that follows from one's knowledge will trivially meet any threshold for sufficiently high warranted confidence (cf. Williamson, 2000: 184–237). And a proposition p that follows from an agent's knowledge is also often assumed to be stable in the sense that p is unlikely to be called into question by further evidence: '[a]lthough knowing is not invulnerable to destruction by later evidence, its nature is to be robust in that respect' (Williamson, 2000: 63).

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