

Williamson 2000, Ch. 4: Anti-Luminosity

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Knowledge and its Limits and its Limits

I. Cognitive Homes

Constant temptation to posit a realm in which nothing is hidden from us—although we're not omniscient, at least any mistakes are correctable.

"cognitive home"

Barrier to seeing knowledge as a mental state is that mental states are our cognitive home—we can always tell whether or not we're in a given mental state.

That's not right.

Being tired, having a deep-seated fear of mice, etc.

But maybe there's a 'central core' of mental states that satisfy a form of *access internalism*:

A condition C is **luminous** iff whenever you're in C , you're in a position to know you're in C .

Cases = centered worlds.
Conditions = sets of cases.
Don't worry about guises.

Access Internalism: The core mental states¹ are luminous.

¹ The ones that determine the rationality of actions, beliefs, assertions, etc.
Eg 'being awake'. Or 'Goldbach's conjecture is false'

Note: C can be luminous without $\neg C$ being luminous.

'In a position to know':

To deny that something is hidden is not to assert that we are infallible about it. Mistakes are always possible. There is no limit to the conclusions into which we can be lured by fallacious reasoning and wishful thinking, charismatic gurus and cheap paperbacks. The point is that, in our cognitive home, such mistakes are always rectifiable. Similarly, we are not omniscient about our cognitive home. We may not know the answer to a question simply because the question has never occurred to us. Even if something is open to view, we may not have glanced in that direction. Again, the point is that such ignorance is always removable (94)

We will also use the notion of being in a position to know. To be in a position to know p , it is neither necessary to know p nor sufficient to be physically and psychologically capable of knowing p . No obstacle must block one's path to knowing p . *If one is in a position to know p , and one has done what one is in a position to do to decide whether p is true, then one does know p .* The fact is open to one's view, unhidden, even if one does not yet see it. Thus being in a position to know, like knowing and unlike being physically and psychologically capable of knowing, is factive: if one is in a position to know p , then p is true. Although the notion of being in a position to know is obviously somewhat vague and context-dependent, it is clear enough for present purposes. The vagueness and context-dependence are in any case primarily the result of fudging in attempts to defend the views to be criticized below. (95, emphasis added)

Perhaps a normatively-inflected notion? If you can ('are in a position to') know p , you can be blamed for not doing so (if it was important).

TW: this notion is needed to make Access Internalism defensible, so it's okay to help ourselves to it in attacking it.

II. The Argument

Let's pick a paradigm core mental state: *feeling cold*.

The Boring Morning

t_0, \dots, t_n are 1-ms increments from 6am to noon in the seminar room.

'Degree of outright belief' is not the same as credence.

What is the difference between believing p outright and assigning p a high subjective probability? Intuitively, one believes p outright when one is willing to use p as a premise in practical reasoning. Thus one may assign p a high subjective probability without believing p outright, if the corresponding premise in one's practical reasoning is just that p is highly probable on one's evidence, not p itself. Outright belief still comes in degrees, for one may be willing to use p as a premise in practical reasoning only when the stakes are sufficiently low. Nevertheless, one's degree of outright belief in p is not in general to be equated with one's subjective probability for p; one's subjective probability can vary while one's degree of outright belief remains zero. Since using p as a premise in practical reasoning is relying on p, we can think of one's degree of outright belief in p as the degree to which one relies on p. Outright belief in a false proposition makes for unreliability because it is reliance on a falsehood. The degrees of confidence mentioned in the argument for [Margin] should therefore be understood as degrees of outright belief (99)

Examples: lottery ticket, fair coin, urn with 99 of 100 vs 100 of 100 red marbles.

'Reliable' is vague.

So is 'knowledge'. What we need is that the vagueness in 'reliable' *aligns* with the vagueness in 'knowledge'.

We can make sense of this: reliability is needed for knowledge to be a good explainer of actions at a temporal distance.

Hunters and deer behind rock

Vagueness:

Is the Margin premise a 'Soritical' premise? Example: baldness.

Response:

In Sorities, 'sharpening' the concept (always) makes one of the premises clearly false.

Not so with this argument: making 'feels cold' precise with physiology³ and 'know' precise by being conservative makes the Margin premise *more* plausible.

³ Should it be qualia? Freezons

Soritical arguments have no (classical-logic) models.

But Margin *does*, as soon as we drop Luminosity.

[Example]

IV. Generalizations

The condition has to be nontrivial, non-eternal, and you have to be able to actively consider it while you go from having it to not.

In any case, we may conjecture that, for any condition C, if one can move gradually to cases in which C obtains from cases in which C does not obtain, while considering C throughout, then C is not luminous....

Luminous conditions are curiosities. Far from forming a cognitive home, they are remote from our ordinary interests. The conditions with which we engage in our everyday life are, from the start, non-luminous. (109)