

Mentalism and Epistemic Transparency

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ABSTRACT: Questions about the transparency of evidence are central to debates between factive and non-factive versions of mentalism about evidence. If all evidence is transparent, then factive mentalism is false, since no factive mental states are transparent. However, Timothy Williamson has argued that transparency is a myth and that no conditions are transparent except trivial ones. This paper responds by drawing a distinction between doxastic and epistemic notions of transparency. Williamson's argument may show that no conditions are doxastically transparent, but it fails to show that no conditions are epistemically transparent. Moreover, this reinstates the argument from the transparency of evidence against factive mentalism.

KEYWORDS: knowledge; justification; evidence; mentalism; transparency; luminosity; Williamson.

Mentalism and Epistemic Transparency

‘To relapse perforce into simile, it is supposed that mental processes are phosphorescent, like tropical sea water, which makes itself visible by the light it itself emits.’ [Ryle 1949: 159]

1. Factive and Non-Factive Mentalism

Mentalism in epistemology is the thesis that one’s mental states determine one’s evidence and hence which propositions one has justification to believe. Traditionally, proponents of mentalism have supposed that one’s evidence is determined by *non-factive* mental states, such as seeming to see that *p*, as opposed to *factive* mental states, such as seeing that *p*. However, in his ground-breaking book, *Knowledge and Its Limits*, Timothy Williamson [2000] turns the tables on this traditional view by arguing that one’s evidence is determined by factive mental states, rather than non-factive mental states.

Williamson sums up his epistemology in the slogan: ‘knowledge first’. Instead of explaining knowledge in terms of other epistemic notions, such as justification and evidence, he explains evidence and justification in terms of knowledge and thereby inverts the traditional order of explanation. Thus, Williamson [2000: Ch.9] argues that one’s evidence is determined by one’s knowledge on the grounds that one’s evidence is just the total content of one’s knowledge. Moreover, Williamson [2000: Ch.1] argues that knowledge is the most general factive mental state in the sense that all factive mental states are determinate ways of knowing. Together, these two claims entail a factive version of mentalism on which one’s evidence is determined by one’s factive mental states.

An influential source of resistance to Williamson’s epistemology stems from what he calls ‘the myth of epistemic transparency’ [2000: 11]. According to traditional forms of Cartesian epistemology, one’s evidence is transparent in the sense that one is always in a position to know which propositions comprise one’s evidence. However, if mentalism is true, then knowledge of one’s evidence depends on knowledge of the mental states that determine one’s evidence. Therefore, one’s evidence is not transparent unless the mental states that determine one’s evidence are themselves transparent in the sense that one is always in a position to know which of

these mental states one instantiates. Moreover, it is plausible that only non-factive mental states – and perhaps only phenomenal states – are transparent in this sense. This provides the basis for an *argument from transparency* for non-factive mentalism and against factive mentalism:

- (1) All evidence is transparent.
- (2) If all evidence is transparent, then all mental states that determine evidence are transparent.
- (3) All transparent mental states are non-factive mental states.
- (4) Therefore, all mental states that determine evidence are non-factive mental states.

Williamson's response to this argument is that transparency is a myth – one of the 'quaint relics of Cartesian epistemology' [2000: 193]. The aim of Williamson's [2000: Ch.4] anti-luminosity argument is to undermine the argument by showing that no non-trivial conditions are transparent in the sense that one is always in a position to know whether or not they obtain. Thus, Williamson's rejection of the so-called 'myth of epistemic transparency' plays a central role in motivating the rejection of traditional Cartesian forms of epistemology in favour of his distinctive brand of knowledge-first epistemology.

The purpose of this paper is to argue that Williamson's anti-luminosity argument does not succeed in its aim: it fails to establish that transparency is a myth. My response turns on a distinction between doxastic and epistemic interpretations of transparency. I argue that even if Williamson's argument succeeds in showing that no conditions are doxastically transparent, it nevertheless fails to show that no conditions are epistemically transparent. Moreover, I argue that this has important consequences for debates in epistemology between factive and non-factive versions of mentalism.¹

2. The Anti-Luminosity Argument

A condition is *transparent* if and only if one is always in a position to know whether or not it obtains. A condition is *luminous* if and only if one is always in a position to know that it obtains when it does. So, a condition is transparent if and only

¹ My aim in this paper is not to argue for the premises of the transparency argument, but rather to defend them against Williamson's anti-luminosity argument. However, I argue for premise one in Smithies [forthcoming a, b], premise two in Smithies [2012a], and premise three in Smithies [2012a] and section five below.

if it is *strongly luminous* – that is, one is always in a position to know that it obtains when it does and that it does not obtain when it does not. If there are no luminous conditions, then there are no transparent conditions either.

Williamson's anti-luminosity argument is designed to establish that there are no luminous conditions except trivial ones.² The argument exploits a tension between the assumption that there are luminous conditions and the assumption that knowledge requires a margin for error. These assumptions jointly entail a tolerance principle, which is falsified by any series of pairwise close cases that begins with a case in which C obtains and ends with a case in which C does not obtain. This generates the following inconsistent set of claims:

- (1) **Luminosity:** C is luminous, so if C obtains, then one is in a position to know that C obtains.
- (2) **Margins:** If one is in a position to know that C obtains, then C obtains in every close case.
- (3) **Tolerance:** If C obtains, then C obtains in every close case (from 1, 2).
- (4) **Gradual Change:** There is a series of close cases that begins with a case in which C obtains and ends with a case in which C does not obtain.³

To illustrate, Williamson asks us to consider a morning on which one feels cold at dawn and then gradually warms up until one feels warm at noon. The process is so gradual that one cannot discriminate any change in one's condition from one moment to the next. By hypothesis, one feels cold at dawn. By the definition of luminosity, if feeling cold is a luminous condition, then one is in a position to know that one feels cold at dawn. By Margins, it follows that one feels cold a moment later, since this is a relevantly close case. By repeating these moves, we generate the conclusion that one feels cold at noon, which contradicts the initial stipulation that one feels warm, rather than cold, at noon.⁴

Williamson presents the argument as a *reductio* of the assumption that there are luminous conditions, but why not resolve the inconsistency instead by denying

² A trivial condition obtains in all conditions or none; I omit this qualification in what follows.

³ My presentation of Williamson's argument is simplified in ways that draw on Weatherson [2004] and Berker [2008]. See Williamson [2000: Ch.4] for his own presentation of the argument.

⁴ Some theories of vagueness avoid the contradiction by rejecting classical logic or semantics, but I will assume classical logic and semantics in the hope of responding to Williamson's argument in a way that is neutral on the logic and semantics of vagueness.

that knowledge requires margins for error? Williamson argues that Margins is motivated by independently plausible assumptions that knowledge requires safety from error and that there are limits on our powers of discrimination.

According to the safety requirement, one knows that a condition C obtains only if one does not falsely believe that C obtains in any close case. The rationale is that if one's beliefs are not safe from error, then they are not sufficiently reliable to count as knowledge. Nevertheless, there is a gap between the safety requirement and the margin for error principle. I can know that C obtains, even if C does not obtain in every close case, so long as there is no close case in which I falsely believe that C obtains. As Williamson [2000: 127] observes, this need not impugn my knowledge so long as my powers of discrimination are sufficiently sensitive to the difference between cases in which C obtains and cases in which C does not obtain.

Therefore, the margin for error principle does not hold without exception, but only assuming that one is unable to discriminate between close cases. But what is the content of this assumption? It is question-begging in the present context to assume that one is not in a position to know the conditions that make the difference between close cases. A more neutral assumption is that one's doxastic dispositions are less than perfectly sensitive to the difference between close cases. More specifically, if one's powers of discrimination are limited, then one's degree of confidence cannot differ too radically between close cases. This is the further assumption that we need in order to derive the margin for error principle from the safety requirement.

Consider Williamson's example in which one gradually warms up between dawn and noon. First, let us assume that if one is in a position to know that C obtains, then one knows that C obtains, since throughout the process one does everything that one is in a position to do with respect to knowing whether or not C obtains. Second, assume that one's powers of discrimination are limited and so one's degree of confidence that C obtains cannot differ too radically between close cases. Third, assume that knowledge requires safety from error and so one knows that C obtains only if C obtains in every close case in which one has a similarly high degree of confidence that C obtains. Given these assumptions, Margins follows:

- (1) **Position:** If one is in a position to know that C obtains, then one knows that C obtains.
- (2) **Discrimination:** If one knows that C obtains, then one has a high degree of confidence that C obtains in every close case.

- (3) **Safety:** If one knows that C obtains, then C obtains in every close case in which one has a high degree of confidence that C obtains.
- (4) **Margins:** Therefore, if one is in a position to know that C obtains, then C obtains in every close case.

But if Margins is true, then there are no luminous conditions.

Broadly speaking, responses to Williamson's anti-luminosity argument can be divided into two categories: *offensive* and *defensive*. Offensive responses reject the conclusion of the argument and so take on the burden of rejecting at least one of its premises.⁵ By contrast, defensive responses accept the conclusion of the argument, while engaging in a kind of damage limitation exercise by relocating the epistemic asymmetry between factive and non-factive mental states.⁶

Recall that what is at stake in this debate is whether there is any motivation for rejecting factive mentalism in favour of non-factive mentalism. If a defensive response is to offer anything more than what Williamson [2009: 366] dismisses as 'a pointless compromise', then it must articulate some important epistemic asymmetry between factive and non-factive mental states. If there is some epistemic criterion – call it *quasi-transparency* – that is not satisfied by factive mental states, but only by non-factive mental states, then we can reformulate the argument from transparency against factive mentalism as follows:

- (1) All evidence is quasi-transparent.
- (2) If all evidence is quasi-transparent, then all mental states that determine evidence are quasi-transparent.
- (3) All quasi-transparent mental states are non-factive mental states.
- (4) Therefore, all mental states that determine evidence are non-factive mental states.

⁵ Offensive strategies are pursued by Brueckner and Fiocco [2002], Neta and Rohrbaugh [2004], Weatherson [2004], Berker [2008], Ramachandran [2009], Steup [2009] and Cohen [2010]. I am not persuaded by any of these strategies, but I do not have space to discuss them here.

⁶ Defensive strategies are pursued by DeRose [2002], Hawthorne [2005], Conee [2005], Reed [2006] and Sosa [2009] and criticized by Williamson [2005, 2009]. What unites these strategies is the claim that there are conditions C such that one is always in a position to know that C obtains if C obtains in some restricted way, e.g. safely, determinately, intensely, or to a sufficient degree. By contrast, my own strategy involves no such restriction; compare Berker [2008: 19-21].

This raises the question whether Williamson's anti-luminosity argument can be extended in such a way as to rule out any such epistemic asymmetry between factive and non-factive mental states. After all, the epistemic parity between factive and non-factive states is crucial for motivating his knowledge-first epistemology. Thus, he writes: 'Any genuine requirement of privileged access on mental states is met by the state of knowing *p*. Knowing is characteristically open to first-person present-tense access; like other mental states, it is not perfectly open.' [2000: 25]

3. The Lustrous and the Luminous

A promising defensive strategy is proposed by Selim Berker [2008], who suggests that even if there are no luminous conditions, there may be some lustrous conditions. A condition is *luminous* if and only if one is always in a position to know that it obtains when it does. By contrast, a condition is *lustrous* if and only if one is always in a position to justifiably believe that it obtains when it does. So, a condition is lustrous, but not luminous, if one is always in a position to believe justifiably, if not knowledgeably, that it obtains when it does.

In this section, I explain how Williamson's argument against luminous conditions can be extended to provide an argument against lustrous conditions by exploiting the following inconsistent set of claims:

- (1) **Lustrousness:** C is lustrous, so if C obtains, then one is in a position to justifiably believe that C obtains.
- (2) **Margins:** If one is in a position to justifiably believe that C obtains, then C obtains in every close case.
- (3) **Tolerance:** If C obtains, then C obtains in every close case (from 1, 2).
- (4) **Gradual Change:** There is a series of close cases that begins with a case in which C obtains and ends with a case in which C does not obtain.

As before, the argument relies upon a margin for error principle. But while knowledge requires margins for error, this is not plausible for justified belief. After all, justified belief is non-factive, so one may be in a position to justifiably believe that C obtains even if C does not obtain in the actual case, which is the closest of all possible cases. As Williamson [1994: 224-5] and Berker [2008: 20] note, only factive positions are subject to margin for error principles.

However, this is not yet sufficient to yield a successful defensive response if the aim is to identify an epistemic asymmetry between factive and non-factive mental

states. After all, it is at least arguable that some factive mental states are lustrous – for instance, if one sees that p , then one is in a position to justifiably believe that one sees that p .⁷ Certainly, no factive mental states are *strongly lustrous* in the sense that one is always in a position to justifiably believe that they obtain when they do and that they do not obtain otherwise. For instance, it is not the case that if one does not see that p , but merely seems to see that p , then one is in a position to justifiably believe that one does not see that p , but merely seems to see that p . In order to motivate an epistemic asymmetry, proponents of the defensive strategy must argue that some non-factive mental states, but no factive mental states, are strongly lustrous conditions.

However, there is a simple argument that if C is a strongly lustrous condition, then justified belief that C obtains is factive. Suppose otherwise. If justified belief that C obtains is non-factive, then there is a possible case in which one justifiably believes that C obtains and yet C does not obtain. And if C does not obtain, where C is strongly lustrous, then one is in a position to justifiably believe that C does not obtain. But if one is in a position to justifiably believe that C obtains and also that C does not obtain, then (by closure) one is in a position to justifiably believe a contradiction.⁸ However, this is implausible. Therefore, if C is strongly lustrous, then one is in a position to justifiably believe that C obtains *if and only if* C obtains.

The upshot is that if Margins is restricted to strongly lustrous conditions, then the objection from factivity is blocked. Still, further argument is needed to motivate this restricted version of Margins. After all, justified true belief is factive, but it does not require a margin for error. Gettier cases typically involve a subject who justifiably believes that some condition C obtains, which obtains in the actual case, but not in all or many of the closest non-actual cases. For instance, in Alvin Goldman's [1976] fake barn case, Henry has a justified true belief that there is a barn ahead, although he doesn't have knowledge, since his belief is false in many of the closest non-actual cases. Indeed, one natural response to Williamson's anti-luminosity argument is that it uncovers a new kind of Gettier case in which being close to the margin for error is

⁷ Williamson denies this, but it is accepted by other proponents of factive mentalism, including McDowell [1995]; see the critical discussion in Neta and Pritchard [2007].

⁸ See Hawthorne [2004: Ch.1] for detailed discussion and defence of closure principles. Some argue against multi-premise closure by appealing to lottery and preface paradoxes, but a probabilistic analogue of multi-premise closure designed to avoid these paradoxes would serve for present purposes.

like being in fake barn country – that is, one is in a position to form a justified true belief, which is not sufficiently reliable to count as knowledge.

In what follows, however, I will argue for a restricted version of Margins on which justified belief in strongly lustrous conditions requires a margin for error. The argument is inspired by reflection on Ernest Sosa's [2003] version of the problem of the speckled hen. Following Sosa, we can ask: what explains the difference between the following pair of cases?

- (i) If I experience 3 speckles, then I am in a position to justifiably believe that I experience 3 speckles.
- (ii) If I experience 48 speckles, then I am not in a position to justifiably believe that I experience 48 speckles.

Why am I in a position to form a justified belief in the one case, but not the other?

One response appeals to facts about the representational content of experience. My experience in the first case represents that the hen has 3 speckles, whereas my experience in the second case does not represent that the hen has 48 speckles, since the representational content of my experience of number is simply not that determinate.⁹ Even if there are 48 speckles that I experience, it does not follow that my experience represents that there are exactly 48 speckles; indeed, there may be no determinate number n such that my experience represents that there are exactly n speckles. If so, then my experience in the first case provides justification to believe that I experience 3 speckles, but my experience in the second case does not provide justification to believe that I experience 48 speckles. More generally, an experience e provides introspective justification to believe that e represents that p if and only if e represents that p .

In my view, this response is correct, at least as far as it goes. The problem is that it does not go far enough, since it fails to generalize to other examples. All we need to generate the problem is an example in which the representational content of experience is more fine-grained than one's powers of discrimination in judgement. For instance, it is plausible that colour experience represents objects as having not just determinable shades, such as red, but also more determinate shades, such as red-48

⁹ See Dehaene [1997: Ch.3] for an accessible survey of relevant empirical evidence that the capacity to perceptually discriminate between different 'numerisities' is relatively coarse-grained in human adults, as it is in human infants and primates. Colour experience, by contrast, is relatively fine-grained.

and red-49, which are represented by means of non-linguistic, recognitional modes of presentation that can be misapplied in judgement.¹⁰ For instance, I might be able to discriminate red-48 and red-49 when presented simultaneously, but not when presented in sequence.¹¹ In that case, my experience might represent a shade as red-48, although I am no better than chance in judging whether I am experiencing red-48 or red-49. Once again, we can ask: what explains the difference between the following pair of cases?

- (i) If I experience red, then I am in a position to justifiably believe that I experience red.
- (ii) If I experience red-48, then I am not in a position to justifiably believe that I experience red-48.

Why am I in a position to form a justifiable belief in the one case, but not the other?

Sosa's [2003: 290] solution appeals to *safety*. My belief that I experience red is safe from error, since I would not believe that I experience red unless I were to experience red. By contrast, my belief that I experience red-48 is not safe from error, since I would believe that I experience red-48 even if I were to experience red-47 or red-49. The problem with Sosa's solution is that it is not sufficiently general, since the problem of the speckled hen arises for beliefs about the external world as well as the internal world. Consider the following pair of cases:

- (i) If I experience red, then I am in a position to justifiably believe that there is something red.
- (ii) If I experience red-48, then I am not in a position to justifiably believe that there is something red-48.

Why am I in a position to form a justified belief in the one case, but not the other? In this context, safety is a red herring. If I hallucinate a bloody dagger and I believe that there is something red, then my belief is false. Nevertheless, I am in a position to justifiably believe that there is something red, but not that there is something red-48. However, safety cannot explain the difference, since no false belief is safe from error. What we need in order to explain the intuitive difference is not safety from *error*, but

¹⁰ This is consistent with the claim that colour experience also represents the same determinate shades using non-linguistic demonstrative modes of presentation, which cannot be misapplied in judgement.

¹¹ Compare Raffman's [1995] memory constraint: given the limitations on perceptual memory, one's ability to perceptually recognize or reidentify a colour shade over time is less accurate than one's ability to perceptually discriminate it from other shades at the same time.

rather safety from *lack of justification*, which is the property that a belief has if and only if it is *based* in the right way.

Absent defeaters, my experience provides (non-introspective) justification to believe that *p* if and only if it represents that *p*. If I believe that *p*, however, my belief is justified only if it is based in a way that is counterfactually sensitive to the representational content of my experience, which provides my justification to believe that *p*. As Sosa insists, an actual match in content is not sufficient. Given the limits on my powers of discrimination, this condition is satisfied in case (i), but not case (ii). My belief that there is something red before me is counterfactually sensitive to the content of my experience, since I would not believe that there is something red unless my experience represents that there is something red. By contrast, my belief that there is something red-48 is not counterfactually sensitive to the content of my experience, since I would believe that there is something red-48 even if my experience represents only that there is something red-47 or red-49. My recognitional mode of presentation of that colour shade is too easily misapplied in judgement.

In sum, what we need in order to solve the problem of the speckled hen is not a *safety* condition requiring counterfactual sensitivity to the facts, but rather a *basing* condition requiring counterfactual sensitivity to one's justifying evidence. Thus, one's belief that *C* obtains is justified only if one's justifying evidence obtains in every close case in which one has a similarly high degree of confidence that *C* obtains. If one believes that *C* obtains on the basis of justifying evidence *E*, but there is a close case in which one's justifying evidence *E* does not obtain and yet one believes or has a similarly high degree of confidence that *C* obtains, then one's belief is unjustified because it is not based in the right way.¹²

In the case of strongly lustrous conditions, however, there is no distinction to be drawn between one's justifying evidence and the facts. If *C* is strongly lustrous, then one is in a position to form a justified belief that *C* obtains if and only if *C* obtains; indeed, it is in virtue of the fact that *C* obtains that one is in a position to form a justified belief that *C* obtains. In other words, the very fact that justifies one's belief

¹² Are there counterexamples? I claim that if one justifiably believes that *C* obtains on the basis of evidence *E*, then no case in which one believes that *C* obtains on the basis of different evidence counts as a relevantly close case. Similarly, Williamson [2009] claims that if one knows that *C* obtains, then no case in which one falsely believes that *C* obtains is a relevantly close case. As Williamson insists, what counts as a relevantly close case is not independent of facts about knowledge and justified belief.

is the fact that one's belief is about. And since there is no distinction to be drawn in this case between one's justifying evidence and the facts, we can derive a local safety condition, which requires counterfactual sensitivity to the facts, from a more general basing condition, which requires counterfactual sensitivity to one's justifying evidence. Thus, for any strongly lustrous condition C, we can argue as follows:

- (1) **Basing:** If one justifiably believes that C obtains, then one's justifying evidence E obtains in every close case in which one has a high degree of confidence that C obtains.
- (2) **Identity:** If one justifiably believes that C obtains, then C is identical to one's justifying evidence E.
- (3) **Safety:** Therefore, if one justifiably believes that C obtains, then C obtains in every close case in which one has a high degree of confidence that C obtains.

Now we can derive Margins from Safety by extending the argument in section two:

- (1) **Position:** If one is in a position to justifiably believe that C obtains, then one justifiably believes that C obtains.
- (2) **Discrimination:** If one justifiably believes that C obtains, then one has a high degree of confidence that C obtains in every close case.
- (3) **Safety:** If one justifiably believes that C obtains, then C obtains in every close case in which one has a high degree of confidence that C obtains.
- (4) **Margins:** Therefore, if one is in a position to justifiably believe that C obtains, then C obtains in every close case.

And then we can use Margins to argue that there are no strongly lustrous conditions.

4. The Epistemic and the Doxastic

The situation so far has gone from bad to worse. Williamson's argument can be extended to show not only that there are no luminous conditions, but also that there are no strongly lustrous conditions. However, all is not yet lost. In this section, I will draw a distinction between epistemic and doxastic interpretations of luminosity and lustrousness. Moreover, I will argue that even if Williamson's argument shows that there are no doxastically luminous or lustrous conditions, it fails to show that there are no epistemically luminous or lustrous conditions. Therefore, Williamson's argument fails in its attempt to debunk the so-called myth of epistemic transparency.

I begin by defining epistemic and doxastic notions of luminosity and lustrousness. A condition is *epistemically luminous* if and only if one is always in an

epistemic position to know that it obtains when it does, whereas a condition is *doxastically luminous* if and only if one is always in a doxastic position to know that it obtains when it does. Similarly, a condition is *epistemically lustrous* if and only if one is always in an epistemic position to justifiably believe that it obtains when it does, whereas a condition is *doxastically lustrous* if and only if one is always in a doxastic position to justifiably believe that it obtains when it does.

The key distinction here is between epistemic and doxastic interpretations of the claim that one is in a position to know, or justifiably believe, that some condition obtains. One is in an *epistemic position* to know, or justifiably believe, that a condition obtains if and only if one satisfies all the epistemic conditions for knowing, or justifiably believing, that it obtains. By contrast, one is in a *doxastic position* to know, or justifiably believe, that some condition obtains if and only if one has the doxastic capacity to exploit one's epistemic position by satisfying doxastic as well as epistemic conditions for knowledge or justified belief. There is a broader use of the term 'epistemic' on which all conditions for knowledge and justified belief are epistemic conditions, whereas in my use of the terminology, epistemic conditions are contrasted with doxastic conditions.

The contrast between epistemic and doxastic conditions is most clearly evident in the case of justified belief. One's belief is justified if and only if one satisfies both epistemic and doxastic conditions for justified belief. The epistemic condition is that one has justification to believe the proposition in question, whereas the doxastic condition is that one believes the proposition on the basis of one's justification. Thus, one is in an epistemic position to justifiably believe a proposition if and only if one has justification to believe it, whereas one is in a doxastic position to justifiably believe that proposition if and only if one has the doxastic capacity to believe it on the basis of one's justification.¹³

The distinction between epistemic and doxastic conditions for knowledge applies more generally, since there is a further distinction between epistemic and doxastic interpretations of the requirement that one is safe from error in close cases. Let us say that two cases are *epistemically close* if and only if one's evidence is the

¹³ Compare Firth's [1978] distinction between propositional and doxastic justification: one is in an epistemic position to justifiably believe a proposition if and only if one has propositional justification, whereas one is in a doxastic position to justifiably believe a proposition if and only if one has the capacity to convert one's propositional justification into doxastic justification.

same or similar enough that one has justification to believe the same propositions to a similar degree, whereas two cases are *doxastically close* if and only if one's evidence is treated as the same or similar enough that one believes the same propositions to a similar degree. Now we can say that a proposition is *epistemically safe* if and only if it is true in all epistemically close cases, whereas a proposition that one believes is *doxastically safe* if and only if it is true in all doxastically close cases.

One knows a proposition if and only if one satisfies both epistemic and doxastic conditions for knowledge. The epistemic conditions for knowledge include not only having justification to believe a proposition, but also being safe from error in all epistemically close cases, while the doxastic conditions for knowledge include not only believing a proposition on the basis of one's justification to believe it, but also being safe from error in all doxastically close cases. One is in an epistemic position to know a proposition if and only if one satisfies all the epistemic conditions for knowledge, whereas one is in a doxastic position to know a proposition if and only if one has the doxastic capacity to convert one's epistemic position into knowledge by satisfying doxastic as well as epistemic conditions for knowledge.

The notion of an epistemic position corresponds to an epistemic ideal, which abstracts away from the contingent doxastic limitations of particular subjects.¹⁴ Two subjects may be in the same epistemic position, although only one of them has the doxastic capacity to exploit their epistemic position. Thus, doxastic positions are more demanding than epistemic positions, since being in a doxastic position requires not only being in an epistemic position, but also having the doxastic capacity to exploit one's epistemic position. All doxastic positions are epistemic positions, but not all epistemic positions are doxastic positions, since one may not always have the doxastic capacity to exploit one's epistemic position. Indeed, this is the moral to be drawn from our earlier discussion of the problem of the speckled hen.

Plausibly, an experience *e* provides introspective justification to believe that *e* represents that *p* if and only if *e* represents that *p*. So, if my experience represents that *x* is red-48, then I have justification to believe it does. However, I may not have the doxastic capacity to exploit this justification in forming a justified belief that my

¹⁴ See Smithies [forthcoming a, b] for further discussion of the nature of epistemic ideals, including the extent to which the limitations on one's doxastic capacities impose corresponding limits on which propositions one is in an epistemic position to justifiably believe and know.

experience represents red-48. If I believe that my experience represents red-48, then my belief is justified only if it is based in a way that is counterfactually sensitive to the representational content of my experience, which provides my justification to believe that my experience represents red-48. However, if my powers of discrimination are limited, then I may violate this basing requirement, since I could easily believe that my experience represents red-48 when in fact it represents red-47 or red-49. In that case, I am in an epistemic position, but not a doxastic position, to justifiably believe that my experience represents red-48. Thus, the limits on my powers of discrimination do not constrain which propositions I am in an epistemic position, as opposed to a doxastic position, to justifiably believe.

Similarly, limits on one's powers of discrimination do not constrain which propositions one is in an epistemic, as opposed to doxastic, position to know. Two cases may be doxastically close, but not epistemically close, since one's doxastic dispositions are insensitive to the epistemic difference between them. For instance, if my powers of discrimination are limited, then a case in which my experience represents red-48 is doxastically close, but not epistemically close, to a case in which my experience represents red-47 or red-49. In that case, the proposition that my experience represents red-48 may be epistemically safe, but not doxastically safe, since it is true in all epistemically close cases, but not all doxastically close cases. If so, then I am in an epistemic position, but not a doxastic position, to know that my experience represents red-48.

If doxastic positions are more demanding than epistemic positions, then some conditions may be epistemically luminous or lustrous even if no conditions are doxastically luminous or lustrous. Indeed, the condition that my experience represents red or red-48 is a plausible candidate to be epistemically luminous and lustrous. My aim here, though, is merely to develop a defensive response to Williamson's anti-luminosity argument by arguing that even if it shows that no conditions are doxastically luminous or lustrous, it fails to show that no conditions are epistemically luminous or lustrous. For simplicity, I will focus on the anti-luminosity argument, but the key points apply equally to the anti-lustrousness argument of section three.

Recall that Williamson's strategy is to exploit the following tension between Luminosity, Margins and Gradual Change:

- (1) **Luminosity:** C is luminous, so if C obtains, then one is in a position to know that C obtains.

(2) **Margins:** If one is in a position to know that C obtains, then C obtains in every close case.

(3) **Tolerance:** If C obtains, then C obtains in every close case (from 1, 2).

(4) **Gradual Change:** There is a series of close cases that begins with a case in which C obtains and ends with a case in which C does not obtain.

In this section, I have distinguished between epistemic and doxastic interpretations of ‘luminous’, ‘position to know’, and ‘close case’, so let us reconsider Williamson’s argument under both epistemic and doxastic interpretations.

First, consider the doxastic interpretation, which aims to refute the doxastic interpretation of Luminosity by exploiting a tension with doxastic interpretations of Margins and Gradual Change. If it is sound, the argument shows that there are no doxastically luminous conditions, but it is entirely neutral on the existence of epistemically luminous conditions.

Next, consider the epistemic interpretation, which aims to refute the epistemic interpretation of Luminosity by exploiting a tension with epistemic interpretations of Margins and Gradual Change. This version of the argument fails, since the epistemic interpretation of Gradual Change is false. If C is epistemically luminous, then there is no series of *epistemically* close cases that begins with a case in which C obtains and ends with a case in which C does not obtain. In Williamson’s example, subsequent times in the gradual process of warming up between dawn and noon are *doxastically* close in the sense that one’s powers of discrimination are limited, so one treats one’s evidence as the same or very similar. However, it does not follow that subsequent times are epistemically close in the sense that one’s evidence is in fact the same or very similar. Suppose we assume, following Williamson, that there is a sharp cut-off at some point in the series such that one feels cold in one case, but one does not feel cold in the next case.¹⁵ In that case, one’s evidence differs radically between close cases even if one’s powers of discrimination are limited and so one’s doxastic dispositions are insensitive to the epistemic difference between them.

If we consistently assume either an epistemic or a doxastic interpretation, then the argument fails to show that there are no epistemically lustrous conditions. But what if we mix and match? Consider the following mixed interpretation:

¹⁵ Williamson [2000: 103-4] makes this assumption in explaining why the anti-luminosity argument does not rely on sorites-style reasoning.

- (1) **Luminosity:** C is epistemically luminous, so if C obtains, then one is in an epistemic position to know that C obtains.
- (2) **Margins:** If one is in an epistemic position to know that C obtains, then C obtains in every doxastically close case.
- (3) **Tolerance:** If C obtains, then C obtains in every doxastically close case.
- (4) **Gradual Change:** There is a series of doxastically close cases that begins with a case in which C obtains and ends with a case in which C does not obtain.

This argument fails because the mixed interpretation of Margins is false.¹⁶ After all, limits on one's powers of discrimination do not constrain which propositions one is in an epistemic position to justifiably believe and know, but only which propositions one is in a doxastic position to justifiably believe and know. Therefore, one may be in an epistemic position to justifiably believe and know that some condition obtains, although it does not obtain in every doxastically close case.

It is worth considering why the mixed interpretation of Margins cannot be supported by extending the argument of section two as follows:

- (1) **Position:** If one is in an epistemic position to know that C obtains, then one knows that C obtains.
- (2) **Discrimination:** If one knows that C obtains, then one has a high degree of confidence that C obtains in every doxastically close case.
- (3) **Safety:** If one knows that C obtains, then C obtains in every doxastically close case in which one has a high degree of confidence that C obtains.
- (4) **Margins:** Therefore, if one is in an epistemic position to know that C obtains, then C obtains in every doxastically close case.

The problem with this argument is that the epistemic interpretation of Position is false. It is not the case that if one is in an epistemic position to know that C obtains, then one knows that C obtains, even if one does everything that one is in a doxastic position to do. Again, if one's powers of discrimination are limited, then one is not in a doxastic position to convert one's epistemic position into knowledge. That was the conclusion to be drawn from our discussion of the problem of the speckled hen.

¹⁶ Similar objections apply to versions of Margins that quantify over all close cases, including cases that are epistemically close, doxastically close, or close in some other way.

5. The Threat of Collapse

The aim of Williamson's anti-luminosity argument is to debunk the so-called 'myth of epistemic transparency'. My goal in this paper has been to defend epistemic transparency against this attempt at debunking. Even if Williamson's argument shows that there are no doxastically transparent conditions, it does not thereby show that there are no epistemically transparent conditions. Moreover, this has important ramifications for the debate between factive and non-factive versions of mentalism. Recall the following argument from transparency:

- (1) All evidence is transparent.
- (2) If all evidence is transparent, then all mental states that determine evidence are transparent.
- (3) All transparent mental states are non-factive mental states.
- (4) Therefore, all mental states that determine evidence are non-factive mental states.

Williamson rejects this argument on the grounds that there are no transparent conditions. However, this response fails on the epistemic interpretation, as opposed to the doxastic interpretation, of transparency.

At this stage, however, the question arises whether premise three survives on both doxastic and epistemic interpretations of transparency. It seems plausible to deny that any factive mental states are transparent, since one is not always in a position to know whether or not one is in the 'good case' in which things are as they seem or the 'bad case' in which things are not as they seem because some sceptical scenario obtains. After all, as Williamson [2000: 165] acknowledges, 'Part of the badness of the bad case is that one cannot know just how bad one's case is.' However, someone might exploit the distinction between epistemic and doxastic notions of transparency in claiming that factive mental states are transparent in the epistemic sense, but not in the doxastic sense. Perhaps one's evidence differs between the good case and the bad case in such a way that one's doxastic dispositions are insensitive to the epistemic difference between them. If so, then someone in the bad case may be in an epistemic position, but not a doxastic position, to justifiably believe and know that they are in the bad case. In that case, there is no relevant epistemic asymmetry between factive and non-factive mental states and so my defensive strategy fails.

I have two objections to this proposal. The first appeals to an important contrast between factive and non-factive mental states. All factive mental states are

subject to causal conditions to the effect that one is in a factive mental state only if it is caused in the right way, whereas not all non-factive mental states are subject to causal conditions.¹⁷ For instance, one sees that p only if one's visual experience that p is caused in the right way by the fact that p , whereas one seems to see that p if one has a visual experience with the same phenomenology as seeing that p no matter how it is caused. However, no such causal conditions are epistemically transparent. For any factive mental state M , there is some causal condition C that could be undetectably undermined by Jonathan Schaffer's [2010] debasing demon in such a way that one is not in a position to justifiably believe or know that C does not obtain.¹⁸ In that case, M is not epistemically transparent, since one is not in a position to justifiably believe or know that one is not in M . Thus, we may conclude that no factive mental states are epistemically transparent on the basis of the following line of argument:

- (1) All factive mental states have causal conditions.
- (2) No factive mental states are epistemically transparent unless their causal conditions are epistemically transparent.
- (3) No causal conditions on factive mental states are epistemically transparent.
- (4) Therefore, no factive mental states are epistemically transparent.

A determined opponent might reject premise three by insisting that the causal conditions on factive mental states are epistemically, if not doxastically, transparent. However, this hardline response is not particularly attractive. Moreover, there is a further objection that reveals its hidden costs.

The second objection is that this proposal collapses a distinction between two epistemic ideals, which should be kept apart – namely, being in an epistemic position to know a proposition versus being in an epistemic position to justifiably believe it. The crux of the distinction is *factivity*: one is in a position to know only true propositions, whereas one is in a position to justifiably believe false propositions. The current proposal collapses this distinction, since it entails that one is in an epistemic position to justifiably believe a proposition only if one is in an epistemic position to know it. This follows from the epistemic transparency of knowledge together with a further assumption about defeaters. The argument is as follows:

¹⁷ Some non-factive mental states are subject to causal conditions, including non-factive mental states whose contents are externally individuated by their relations to the environment, but it is widely held that phenomenal states are not subject to causal conditions.

¹⁸ As Schaffer [2010: 233] notes, this applies even to knowledge of the cogito.

- (1) **Transparency:** If one is not in an epistemic position to know that p , then one is in an epistemic position to justifiably believe or know that one is not in an epistemic position to know that p ($\sim Kp \rightarrow J/K\sim Kp$).
- (2) **Defeat:** If one is in an epistemic position to justifiably believe or know that one is not in an epistemic position to know that p , then one is not in an epistemic position to justifiably believe that p ($J/K\sim Kp \rightarrow \sim Jp$).
- (3) **Collapse:** Therefore, if one is not in an epistemic position to know that p , then one is not in an epistemic position to justifiably believe that p ($\sim Kp \rightarrow \sim Jp$).

The conclusion of the argument is that one is in an epistemic position to justifiably believe a proposition only if one is in an epistemic position to know it. Since one is in an epistemic position to know only true propositions, it follows that one is in an epistemic position to justifiably believe a proposition only true propositions. Moreover, one's belief in some proposition is justified only if one takes advantage of one's epistemic position to justifiably believe it. Therefore, it follows that there are no justified false beliefs.

Can proponents of Transparency avoid Collapse by rejecting Defeat? Defeat is motivated by reflection on examples.¹⁹ In Goldman's [1976] example, Henry is in fake barn country and so he is not in an epistemic position to know that there is a barn ahead. Intuitively, however, he is in an epistemic position to form a justified belief that there is a barn ahead so long as he is not in an epistemic position to justifiably believe or know that he is in fake barn country. But suppose Henry acquires evidence that he is in fake barn country, which puts him in an epistemic position to justifiably believe or know that he is not in an epistemic position to know that there is a barn ahead. In that case, he is no longer in an epistemic position to form a justified belief that there is a barn ahead, since his justification is now defeated. Indeed, Williamson himself accepts a version of Defeat on the basis of similar considerations.²⁰

¹⁹ Smithies [2012b] uses examples like this to motivate the JK rule, which states that one has justification to believe a proposition if and only if one has justification to believe that one is in an epistemic position to know it ($Jp \leftrightarrow JKp$). The JK rule entails Defeat given the further assumption that one cannot have justification to believe contradictory propositions (i.e. $Jp \rightarrow \sim J\sim p$).

²⁰ Thus, Williamson [2000: 255-6] writes, 'the knowledge rule for assertion corresponds to the norm that one should believe p only if one knows p . Given that norm, it is not reasonable to believe p when one knows that one does not know p .'

If Transparency is combined with Defeat, then the only remaining option is to accept Collapse. However, this option is highly counterintuitive. In philosophy, of course, no position is without its defenders. Thus, Jonathan Sutton [2005] has argued that a belief is justified if and only if it is knowledge. And yet Williamson, by contrast, seems to reject Collapse. After all, Gettier cases of justified true belief without knowledge play an important role in his argument that knowledge is a factive mental state [2000: Ch.1]. Moreover, his equation of knowledge and evidence is explicitly designed to allow for cases in which one's evidence justifies believing false propositions, which are made epistemically probable by propositions that one knows [2000: Ch.9]. However, Williamson [2005] accepts a qualified version of Collapse, according to which a belief is fully justified only if it is knowledge, although it does not follow that a belief is justified only if it is knowledge, since some beliefs are less than fully justified.

There are good reasons to avoid even this qualified version of Collapse. For one thing, it is highly counterintuitive to deny that false beliefs can be fully justified. For instance, it is inconsistent with the intuitively plausible claim that my beliefs can be fully justified even if I am a brain in a vat, or deceived by an evil demon, or suffering some visual illusion or hallucination. Williamson's [2005] response is to suggest that the beliefs of a brain in a vat are not justified, but merely blameless. However, as James Pryor [2001] observes, this obscures what seems to be a genuine epistemic contrast between the envatted counterparts of subjects whose beliefs are justified and those subjects of mental illness whose beliefs are merely blameless, but unjustified. Plausibly, there is some dimension of epistemic evaluation along which the beliefs of a brain in a vat, or the victim of a visual illusion, can be fully appropriate. Thus, what is at stake here is not just intuitions about cases, but rather the nature of an epistemic ideal.

What is lost on the view that factive mental states are epistemically transparent is the idea that there is a dimension of epistemic evaluation on which the epistemic ideal requires neither omniscience nor infallibility about facts in the external world. If factive mental states are epistemically transparent, then the epistemic ideal involves omniscience and infallibility about all the facts in the external world that make those mental states true. If only non-factive mental states are epistemically transparent, by contrast, then the epistemic ideal involves omniscience and infallibility about a much more limited domain of facts – namely, non-epistemic facts about non-factive mental

states that determine epistemic facts about justification and evidence. On this view, however, the epistemic ideal involves neither omniscience nor infallibility about external facts that extend beyond the subject's point of view on the world. Moreover, this seems essential for capturing a dimension of epistemic evaluation on which the epistemic ideal consists in believing just what one ought to believe given the limitations of one's subjective point of view on an objective world.²¹

6. Conclusions

Let us conclude by taking stock. In section two, I presented Williamson's argument that no conditions are luminous in the sense that one is always in a position to know that they obtain when they do. Moreover, in section three, I explained how Williamson's argument can be extended to show that no conditions are lustrous in the sense that one is always in a position to justifiably believe that they obtain when they do. In section four, however, I exposed a limitation of these arguments: they do not succeed on an epistemic interpretation, as opposed to a doxastic interpretation, of luminosity and lustrousness.

But what is the significance of these conclusions? To answer this, we need to consider the role of Williamson's anti-luminosity argument in the context of the wider debates in epistemology between factive and non-factive versions of mentalism about evidence. As I explained in section one, Williamson's attempt to debunk the so-called 'myth of epistemic transparency' plays a key role in defending his distinctive form of factive mentalism against an influential line of argument from the transparency of evidence. However, the arguments of this paper show that Williamson's defence is unsuccessful, since it does not succeed on an epistemic interpretation, as opposed to a doxastic interpretation, of transparency.

An alternative defence of factive mentalism exploits the distinction between epistemic and doxastic interpretations of transparency by claiming that factive mental states are epistemically, but not doxastically, transparent. In section five, however, I argued that this strategy collapses the distinction between epistemic ideals associated with knowledge and justified belief.

Williamson's anti-luminosity argument changes the complexion of debates in epistemology between factive and non-factive versions of mentalism about evidence.

²¹ These themes are explored further in Smithies [forthcoming b].

If it achieves its aim of debunking the myth of epistemic transparency, then much of the motivation for non-factive versions of mentalism evaporates. If it fails, on the other hand, then factive versions of mentalism are vulnerable to arguments from the transparency of evidence. For all its ingenuity, Williamson's anti-luminosity argument does not succeed in its aim of defusing these traditional forms of argument against his knowledge-first epistemology.²²

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