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## 7 **Privileged access without luminosity**

8  
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13 Williamson’s anti-luminosity argument has been thought to be in tension with the  
14 doctrine that we enjoy privileged epistemic access to our own mental states. In this  
15 paper, I will argue that the tension is only apparent. Friends of privileged access who  
16 accept the conclusion of the argument need not give up the claim that our beliefs about  
17 our own mental states are mostly or invariably right, nor the view that mental states are  
18 epistemically available to us in a way that renders everything within our mind ‘open to  
19 view’ – arguably, two main pillars of their doctrine. What they need to reject is the idea  
20 that the mental is a realm whose ‘determinacy’ or ‘fineness of grain’ never escapes our  
21 appreciation. This idea – I will suggest – is not essential to privileged access and  
22 defenders of the doctrine should not be afraid to give it up.  
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27 According to a doctrine accepted by many philosophers, each of us enjoys *privileged access*  
28 to his or her own mind, meaning that “the kind of knowledge [we have of our] own mental  
29 (psychological) states, such as thoughts and feelings, is in principle not only fundamentally  
30 different from but also *superior* to the knowledge of [our] thoughts and feelings that is available  
31 to anyone else” (Alston 1971, 223; my emphasis).

32 That we enjoy this kind of epistemic privilege seems pre-theoretically plausible, and is  
33 an important presupposition of other well-established philosophical views – including certain  
34 brands of foundationalism,<sup>1</sup> and several accounts of the semantics and metaphysics of our  
35 ordinary discourse about the mental.<sup>2</sup> However, not everyone accepts the doctrine of  
36 privileged access. Some have challenged it by providing counterexamples – actual or possible  
37 cases where one fails to have any belief (or has incorrect beliefs) about this or that aspect of  
38 his or her mental life.<sup>3</sup> Others have challenged it on theoretical grounds – for example, by  
39 showing that the alleged existence of privileged access would conflict with other plausible or  
40 independently motivated philosophical theses.<sup>4</sup>

41 Williamson’s (1996; 2000, ch. 4) anti-luminosity argument raises a challenge of the  
42 second sort. Starting from seemingly innocuous premises, the argument brings out a tension  
43 between the widely accepted idea that knowledge is subject to a ‘safety’ constraint and the

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Chisholm (1966), McGrew (1995) and Fumerton (2009; 2018).

<sup>2</sup> I have in mind ‘neo-expressivist’ accounts like Bar-On’s (2004) and Finkelstein’s (2003) as well as ‘constitutivist’ accounts like Shoemaker’s (1988) and Wright’s (1989).

<sup>3</sup> See, among others, Schwitzgebel (2006) and Snowdon (2012).

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Boghossian’s (1989) argument that privileged access conflicts with externalism about mental content.

1 claim that, whenever we are in a certain mental state, we know or are in a position to know  
2 that this is so. If the tension is genuine, it seems that the latter claim should be rejected. And  
3 once it is rejected, one is left to wonder how much of the doctrine of privileged access can be  
4 coherently upheld.

5 According to several philosophers, the answer to this question is: very little, if anything  
6 at all. For example, in his response to the anti-luminosity argument, Selim Berker writes:

7  
8 If Williamson is right [...] there is no substantive domain of mental [...] facts to which we  
9 have guaranteed access, no subportion of our mental [...] lives within which everything  
10 lies open to view. (Berker 2008, 2)

11  
12 Similarly, in her paper 'Are We Luminous?', Amia Srinivasan claims:

13  
14 If Williamson is right, then the common picture of the phenomenal realm as one of  
15 privileged access turns out to be a Cartesian orthodoxy from which philosophy must be  
16 cleansed (Srinivasan 2015, 294)<sup>5</sup>

17  
18 Berker and Srinivasan disagree on whether Williamson's argument succeeds, but they agree  
19 is that, if it does, we can no longer think of the mental as a realm of privileged access. By their  
20 lights, those who accept the conclusion of the argument must renounce the doctrine, and those  
21 who stick to the doctrine must find a way to resist the argument.<sup>6</sup>

22 My goal in this paper is to argue for a more conciliatory stance. I will not engage with  
23 (or try to improve on) the numerous attempts made so far to show that Williamson is wrong  
24 about luminosity.<sup>7</sup> The claim I want to defend is that, even if we agree with Williamson, we can  
25 insist in thinking of the mind as a domain in which, as Berker puts it, 'everything lies open to  
26 view'. Others, before me, have pursued the same 'compatibilist' line, suggesting various  
27 fallback positions to which advocates of privileged access can retreat if they give up on the  
28 luminosity of the mental. But, as I will try to show in due course, what the existing proposals  
29 concede to Williamson is either too much or too little – too much, because their concessions  
30 make the doctrine of privileged access unnecessarily weak; too little, because they remove  
31 the conflict with the conclusion of the anti-luminosity argument, but not with its premises. The  
32 account I will outline is meant to remedy these problems, aiming for the maximum that  
33 defenders of privileged access can hope to retain compatibly, not only with the anti-luminosity  
34 point itself, but also with the line of reasoning that leads up to that point.

35 One important upshot of my discussion will be that, as far as privileged access goes,  
36 the exact import of Williamson's argument has not been properly appreciated. What advocates  
37 of privileged access need to renounce is not the claim that our beliefs about our own mental  
38 states are mostly or invariably right, nor the view that mental states are epistemically available  
39 to us in a way that renders everything within our mind 'open to view' – arguably, two main

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<sup>5</sup> Srinivasan speaks of the phenomenal realm, but since phenomenal states are supposed to be among the most paradigmatic examples of mental states to which we have privileged access, her claim carries over to the mental realm at large.

<sup>6</sup> Williamson himself encouraged this reading of the argument, directing his polemic against any philosophical temptation to 'postulate a realm of phenomena in which nothing is hidden from us' and noting that Descartes 'thought that one's mind is such a realm' (1996, 554).

<sup>7</sup> For discussion, see Leitgeb (2002), Weatherson (2004), Wong (2008), Berker (2008), Ramachandran (2009), Vogel (2010), Cohen (2010), Zardini (2012; 2013), Srinivasan (2015), Barz (2017) and Duncan (2018).

1 pillars of their doctrine. What they need to renounce is the idea that the mental is a realm  
2 whose 'determinacy' or 'fineness of grain' never escapes our appreciation. This *is* an idea that  
3 Williamson's reasoning shows to be problematic – but it is also an idea that advocates of  
4 privileged access should not be afraid to give up – not least, because it is precisely by giving  
5 it up that one becomes able to conceive of the relation of privileged access as a relation of  
6 *knowledge*, in the proper sense of the term.

7 Here's how I shall proceed. In § 1, I will introduce the anti-luminosity argument. In § 2,  
8 I will distinguish two components of the idea that we enjoy privileged access to our own mental  
9 states – *authority* and *availability*. Since the anti-luminosity argument only threatens one of  
10 two types of availability – *rigid* availability, as I shall call it – I will concentrate my attention on  
11 the other type. In § 3, I will formulate a thesis of *flexible availability* that respects the conclusion  
12 of the anti-luminosity argument. In § 4, I will explain why I think that this thesis is superior to  
13 other fallback positions proposed so far. Finally, in § 5, I will come back to what I take it to be  
14 the real lesson of Williamson's argument – not that we don't have privileged access to our own  
15 mind, but that we never (or almost never) have access to our most specific mental conditions.

## 18 1. The anti-luminosity argument

20 Before presenting the anti-luminosity argument, it is necessary to introduce some of the  
21 terminology that Williamson employs in formulating it. The argument discusses luminosity,  
22 which is said to be a property of conditions. We are invited to think of a *condition* as something  
23 which can obtain or fail to obtain in various cases, where a *case* consists of a subject, a time  
24 and a possible world. A condition is *trivial* if it obtains in all cases or in no case at all, and it is  
25 *luminous* if, in every case in which it obtains, the subject is in a position to know that it does.<sup>8</sup>  
26 To illustrate, the condition of being sitting is one that obtains in a case consisting of me, the  
27 present time and the actual world, and fails to obtain in many other cases. It is not a trivial  
28 condition because one is not always and necessarily sitting, and it is not a luminous condition  
29 because it is possible for one to be sitting without being in a position to know that one is sitting  
30 (for example, one may be blindfolded and under the effect of a drug that compromises one's  
31 proprioceptive skills).

32 Williamson's anti-luminosity argument aims to show that most non-trivial conditions are  
33 not luminous. In other words: unless a condition obtains in all cases or in no case at all,  
34 chances are that it is possible for one to be in that condition without being in a position to know  
35 that this is so. The argument proceeds in two steps: in the first, it is argued that a particular  
36 condition – the condition of feeling cold – is not luminous; in the second, this conclusion is  
37 extended to almost all non-trivial conditions.

38 Let us begin with the first step. To show that feeling cold is not luminous, Williamson  
39 invites us to imagine a cold morning during which:

41 [Switch] One goes from feeling cold to not feeling cold

42 [Uniformity] One constantly pays attention to how cold one feels

43 [Gradualness] One's confidence that one feels cold decreases very gradually.

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<sup>8</sup> More precisely, a condition is luminous if and only if, in every case in which it obtains *and the subject is in a position to wonder whether it obtains*, the subject is in a position to know that it obtains (see Williamson 1996, 556 and 2000, 12-13). I will leave this additional specification implicit hereafter.

1 On the face of it, this scenario (call it 'Cold Morning') is perfectly coherent.<sup>9</sup> But Williamson  
2 shows that a contradiction follows if we combine Switch, Uniformity and Gradualness with:

3  
4 [Luminosity] In every case in which one feels cold, one is in a position to know that one  
5 feels cold.

6  
7 The reasoning goes as follows. Given Switch, the first instant of Cold Morning is one at which  
8 one feels cold:

9  
10 (i) At  $t_0$ , one feels cold

11  
12 Given Luminosity, (i) implies:

13  
14 (ii) At  $t_0$ , one is in a position to know that one feels cold

15  
16 Given Uniformity, (ii) implies:

17  
18 (iii) At  $t_0$ , one knows that one feels cold

19  
20 Now, suppose that knowledge is subject to a safety constraint: if one knows that  $p$ , one's  
21 confidence that  $p$  could not very easily be mistaken.<sup>10</sup> In particular:

22  
23 [Safety<sub>cold</sub>] If one knows that one feels cold, one feels cold in every sufficiently similar  
24 case in which one is almost equally confident that one feels cold.<sup>11</sup>

25  
26 Then consider an instant  $t_1$  shortly after  $t_0$ . One's situation at  $t_1$  is very similar to one's situation  
27 at  $t_0$ . Moreover, given Gradualness, one's confidence that one feels cold doesn't change  
28 significantly between  $t_0$  and  $t_1$ . Hence, given Safety<sub>cold</sub>, (iii) implies:

29  
30 (iv) At  $t_1$ , one feels cold

31  
32 Repeating the reasoning from (i) to (iv) sufficiently many times, it would be possible to show  
33 that one feels cold throughout Cold Morning. Since this would contradict Switch, we need to  
34 deny one of our assumptions – and, according to Williamson, Luminosity is the obvious culprit.

35 Denying Luminosity is tantamount to admitting that it is possible for one to feel cold  
36 without being in position to know that this is so. The second step of the argument generalizes  
37 this conclusion to almost all non-trivial conditions. The key observation is that, for almost any  
38 non-trivial condition  $C$ , we can imagine some scenario satisfying analogues of Switch,  
39 Uniformity and Gradualness. In particular, this is possible if  $C$  is such that:

40 (a) One can be in  $C$  at some times and not others

41 (b) One can pay attention to whether one is in  $C$  while going from being in  $C$  to not being  
42 in  $C$

---

<sup>9</sup> But see Zardini (2012) for a critique of Gradualness.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Sosa (1999), Williamson (2000, ch. 4 and 5) and Pritchard (2005, ch. 6). Critics of the constraint include Comesaña (2005) and Bogardus (2014).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Srinivasan's (CONFIDENCE-SAFETY) principle (2015, 309).

1 (c) One's confidence that one is in C can decrease gradually as one goes from being in C  
2 to not being in C.

3 Williamson notes that, aside from a few 'curiosities', the vast majority of non-trivial conditions  
4 satisfy (a), (b) and (c). Specifically, since most *mental* conditions allow for the kind of uniform  
5 and gradual transition that characterizes scenarios like Cold Morning, Williamson's argument  
6 would seem to show that:

7  
8 [Anti-luminosity<sub>mental</sub>] For almost any mental condition M, it is possible for one to be in  
9 M without being in a position to know that one is in M.

10  
11 Let us refer to this conclusion as the *anti-luminosity* of the mental. The question I want to  
12 address in this paper is a conditional one: supposing that this conclusion is correct and the  
13 argument leading up to it sound, what does this imply for the doctrine of privileged access?  
14 To get ourselves in a position to answer this question, we need to take a closer look at the  
15 doctrine itself.

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17

## 18 **2. Privileged access**

19

20 Let us begin by thinking more carefully about the metaphor of privileged access. Since the  
21 metaphor speaks of the epistemic relationship each of us bears to his or her own mind, two  
22 different ideas can be associated with it, depending on which 'direction' of that relationship we  
23 focus on. On the one hand – if we focus on the subject-to-mind direction – there is the idea  
24 that the subject is mostly right about what is going on in his or her own mind. Let us call this  
25 (alleged) phenomenon *authority*.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand – if we focus on the mind-to-subject  
26 direction – there is the idea that what is going on in the mind is mostly available for the subject  
27 to know it. Let us call this other (alleged) phenomenon *availability*.<sup>13</sup>

28 To get an intuitive grasp of authority and availability, consider how – according to  
29 advocates of privileged access – tacit reliance on these phenomena contributes to shape  
30 ordinary practice. It is supposed to be a manifestation of our faith in authority that, if I tell you  
31 that I'm in pain (or that I intend to buy a house, or that I think that there will be a Third World  
32 War), you will typically take my word for it, unless you have reason to doubt my sincerity.  
33 Conversely, it is supposed to be a manifestation of our faith in availability that, if you are  
34 interested in finding out whether I'm in pain (or intend to buy a house, or think that there will  
35 be a Third World War), you will typically ask me, and expect me to be able knowledgeably to  
36 answer your question. These patterns mark a striking asymmetry between our knowledge of  
37 our own minds and our knowledge of other people's minds – for one's opinions about other  
38 people's sensations, intentions, beliefs etc. can easily be challenged, and nobody is expected,  
39 by default, to have such opinions in the first place.

40 A more precise characterization of authority and availability would require attention to  
41 two complications. First, it is controversial which epistemic notions, exactly, should be invoked  
42 when characterizing these (alleged) phenomena: I said that one is mostly 'right' about what is

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<sup>12</sup> Authority corresponds to what Byrne (2005; 2018, 5-8) identifies as 'privileged access' *tout court*. For discussion, see, among others, Davidson (1984), Shoemaker (1988), Burge (1996), Gallois (1996, 1-30), Heal (2001), Moran (2001, 1-35), Wright (2001; 2015), and Coliva (2016, 62-66).

<sup>13</sup> Availability corresponds to what has traditionally been called 'self-intimation' (cf. Ryle (1949, 148), Armstrong (1968, 101) and Margolis (1970)). For more recent discussion, see Shoemaker (2012) and Strawson (2015) Cf. also Wright's (2015) 'salience', and Coliva's (2016, 58-62) 'transparency'.

1 going on in one's own mind, and that what's going on in the mind is mostly 'available for the  
2 subject to know it', but there are various ways of tweaking these claims by appealing to  
3 alternative notions – for example, epistemic justification instead of knowledge. Second, any  
4 plausible theses of authority or availability should be restricted to subjects that are rational and  
5 competent with the relevant concepts, and to circumstances where the subject's capacity to  
6 exercise concepts in judgment is not somehow diminished or impaired. But here, too, the exact  
7 scope of the restrictions is a matter of controversy.<sup>14</sup> To remain as neutral as possible on these  
8 points, I suggest we adopt the following formulations:

9  
10 [Authority] In any cognitively normal circumstances, our beliefs about our own mental  
11 states are epistemically sound

12  
13 [Availability] In any cognitively normal circumstances, our mental states are  
14 epistemically available to us

15  
16 Here 'epistemically sound' and 'epistemically available' are placeholders for the relevant  
17 epistemic notions, 'our' is meant to restrict attention to rational and conceptually competent  
18 subjects, and 'cognitively normal' rules out all (and only) those special circumstances –  
19 whatever they are – which may diminish or impair the subject's judgmental capacities. Note  
20 that these restrictions, however significant, do not remove the risk of a conflict between these  
21 theses and the anti-luminosity argument, for one can always make it part of the description of  
22 scenarios like Cold Morning that the restrictions are satisfied.<sup>15</sup> So, the risk of conflict should  
23 be taken seriously: does the anti-luminosity argument threaten authority and/or availability, as  
24 formulated above?

25 Let us consider authority, first. It is not difficult to see that the anti-luminosity of the  
26 mental does not threaten this component of privileged access. Consider again the first step in  
27 Williamson's argument. What that step aims to show is that there is an instant during Cold  
28 Morning – call it  $t^*$  – at which one feels cold without being in a position to know that one does.  
29 But this is perfectly compatible with thinking that there is no instant at which one believes that  
30 one feels cold and one's belief that one feels cold fails to be true, fails to be justified, fails to  
31 be knowledge, or fails to have whatever feature is stipulated to be necessary for 'epistemic  
32 soundness'. To see this, note that, for all that Williamson's argument assumes,  $t^*$  could be an  
33 instant at which one *doesn't form any belief at all* about whether one feels cold. Even if one  
34 constantly pays attention to whether one feels cold (as Uniformity prescribes – see § 1), one  
35 can always decide to suspend judgment about whether or not one does. Indeed, it is not  
36 implausible to think that this is exactly what a rational subject would do in a scenario like Cold  
37 Morning: when one feels too warm to form the belief that one feels cold, but too cold to form  
38 the belief that one doesn't feel cold, one may simply decide not to commit one way or the  
39 other. The proponent of the anti-luminosity argument has no basis to assume that rational  
40 subjects never suspend judgment about (some of) their mental conditions. And she cannot  
41 turn this into a stipulation concerning the subject of Cold Morning – otherwise her argument

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<sup>14</sup> For discussion of the importance of these restrictions, see Wright (2015). To block counterexamples to availability and authority similar to those that Conee (2005, 448-449) uses against luminosity, one may also require that the subject not be in possession of defeating misleading evidence.

<sup>15</sup> In this case, one will derive the stronger conclusion that, for any mental state M, it is possible for one to be M without being in a position to know that one is in M *even if one is a rational and conceptually competent subject operating in cognitively normal circumstances*. From now on, everything I will say about the anti-luminosity of the mental applies, equally, to this stronger thesis.

1 would lose force and interest. Therefore, there is no easy way of turning the anti-luminosity  
2 argument into an anti-*authority* argument.<sup>16</sup>

3 Let us, therefore, focus on the other component of privileged access, availability. Here  
4 the prospect of a conflict seems more realistic, so it becomes important to mention another  
5 complication involved in providing a precise formulation of the doctrine of privileged access.  
6 Any advocate of the doctrine access would readily concede that, even in cognitively normal  
7 circumstances, authority and availability are unlikely to apply, indiscriminately, to *all* mental  
8 states. What should go in the list of the exceptions is, itself, a controversial issue, but likely  
9 candidates include irrational or 'alienated' beliefs, phenomenally unconscious experiences  
10 and, possibly, mental states that are 'dispositional' rather than 'occurrent'.<sup>17</sup> Be that as it may,  
11 if privileged access applies, not to all mental states, but only to some of them, we should be  
12 careful to distinguish two logically independent readings of the claim that, in any cognitively  
13 normal circumstances, our mental states are epistemically available to us. On one reading  
14 (letting the existential quantifier take wide scope over the universal one) one would be saying,  
15 of some mental states, that they are epistemically available to us in any cognitively normal  
16 circumstances in which they obtain. Let us call this *rigid* availability:

17  
18 (Availability<sub>rigid</sub>) There are some mental states such that, in any cognitively normal  
19 circumstances where they obtain, they are epistemically available to us

20  
21 On the other reading (letting the universal quantifier take wide scope, instead) one would be  
22 saying that, in any cognitively normal circumstances, some mental states are epistemically  
23 available to us. Let us call this *flexible* availability:

24  
25 (Availability<sub>flexible</sub>) In any cognitively normal circumstances, some mental states are  
26 epistemically available to us

27  
28 To appreciate the difference between rigid and flexible availability, think again about the  
29 condition of feeling cold. If, contrary to Williamson's argument, that condition turned out to be  
30 luminous, this would constitute a kind of rigid availability: it would mean that we are in a  
31 position to know that we feel cold (i.e. that the condition is, in the relevant sense, 'epistemically  
32 available' to us) whenever we do (i.e. 'in any cognitively normal circumstance where the  
33 condition obtains'). The rigid character of this kind of availability is aptly captured by  
34 Williamson's metaphor of a *cognitive home* – a fixed place that affords us an epistemic  
35 privilege as long as we stay within its boundaries. Nothing of this sort is required by flexible  
36 availability. The claim that, in any cognitively normal circumstances, some mental states are  
37 epistemically available to us leaves open the possibility that what mental states are so  
38 available may vary from one circumstance to another. In this case, we may speak, not of a

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<sup>16</sup> This conclusion generalizes a point made by Srinivasan (2015). Srinivasan shows that one can agree with Williamson about the anti-luminosity of the mental while holding that our beliefs about our own mental states are constitutively guaranteed to be *correct* (2015, 308-316). My point is that one can agree with Williamson even if one holds that our beliefs about our own mental states are constitutively guaranteed to qualify as *knowledge* (or to be, in any other sense, epistemically sound).

<sup>17</sup> See Gertler (2011, 70-82). For the notion of an 'alienated' belief see Moran (2001) and Burge (1996, 111-114).

1 cognitive home, but of a *cognitive halo* – an epistemic privilege that ‘surrounds’ us in every  
2 situation, affording us access to potentially different sets of mental states at different times.<sup>18</sup>

3 Now, I think it should be admitted that the anti-luminosity argument leaves only very  
4 limited room for conceiving of availability in rigid terms. We know that the argument rules out  
5 luminosity for almost all mental conditions. If one is interested in advocating a kind of rigid  
6 availability that does not apply only to trivial conditions and other ‘curiosities’, one could gloss  
7 ‘epistemic availability’ in term of notions other than that of being in a position to know. For  
8 example, one might say that our mental conditions are *correctly believed* (rather than known)  
9 by us to be present whenever they are.<sup>19</sup> Alternatively, one might say that our mental states  
10 are epistemically available to us, not in any (cognitively normal) circumstance whatsoever, but  
11 only in any *favourable* circumstances – where a circumstance qualifies as ‘favourable’ if  
12 (besides being cognitively normal) it presents us with a particularly intense, clear or vivid  
13 specimen of the relevant mental state. However, neither of these strategies seems especially  
14 attractive for an advocate of privileged access. Epistemic availability is naturally understood  
15 as availability *for knowledge* – so, in articulating this aspect of privileged access, it seems  
16 appropriate to stick to Williamson’s notion of being in a position to know. As to restricting  
17 availability to ‘favourable’ circumstances, we shall see, in § 4, that this move leaves advocates  
18 of privileged access in a much weaker position and/or fails to solve all their problems.

19 These difficulties should, I think, encourage interest in a different approach: defending  
20 the compatibility of the anti-luminosity of the mental with the doctrine of privileged access by  
21 advocating a certain sort of flexible availability. It is to this approach that I shall now turn.

### 24 3. Our cognitive halo

26 I associated flexible availability with the idea that we are surrounded, not by a cognitive home,  
27 but by a cognitive halo. Let us try to make this idea more precise by formulating it in  
28 Williamson’s own terms. Availability ‘in any cognitively normal circumstance’ can be  
29 understood as availability *in every cognitively normal case*, where a case is defined as  
30 *cognitively normal* if, and only if, it involves a rational and conceptually competent subject  
31 whose judgmental capacities are not impaired or diminished. Following Williamson, we can  
32 think of mental states as *conditions*, and gloss the idea that a condition is ‘available’ (in a given  
33 case) by saying that the subject of the case *is in a position to know* that that condition obtains  
34 (in that case). These stipulations give us the following flexible availability thesis:

36 (1) In every cognitively normal case *g*, there is some mental condition *M* such that one  
37 is in a position know that *M* obtains in *g*

39 This is a rather weak thesis – for example, the mere fact that, in every cognitively normal case,  
40 one knows (or is in a position to know) that one feels something would be enough to make it  
41 true. To arrive at a more substantive form of flexible availability, we need to specify *what kind*

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<sup>18</sup> There are some similarities between the idea of a cognitive halo and Greco’s (2017) idea of a mobile cognitive home – but because Greco’s idea, unlike mine, rests on a contextualist account of, e.g., what criteria evidence propositions must meet to be rationally updated upon, I preferred to adopt a different terminology.

<sup>19</sup> The notion of justified (rather than true) belief may also be invoked in this context, as in Berker’s (2008) ‘lustrousness’ thesis. See also Smithies’s suggestion that we should retreat from a ‘doxastic’ to a purely ‘epistemic’ notion of luminosity (Smithies 2019, ch. 11).



1 of mental conditions are within our epistemic grasp in various cases. Are they all as generic  
2 and unspecific as the condition of feeling something, or can they be more discriminating than  
3 that?

4 It is useful to start by fixing an upper limit for the specificity of our cognitive halo.  
5 Suppose we call a mental condition *maximally specific* if it is maximally discriminating – that  
6 is to say, if it discriminates between any two mentally different cases, no matter how similar  
7 they are. To illustrate, consider one of my mental conditions in the actual world at the present  
8 time – the complex condition consisting of my feeling tired, happy and somewhat thirsty, while  
9 entertaining various propositions concerning Williamson’s argument. This condition is more  
10 discriminating than the condition of feeling something, but it falls short of maximal specificity  
11 because it doesn’t discriminate between, e.g., cases where one merely *entertains* various  
12 propositions concerning Williamson’s argument and cases where one entertains *and endorses*  
13 those propositions. Maximal specificity requires maximal discrimination.<sup>20</sup>

14 Let us suppose for a moment that our cognitive halo gave us access to our maximally  
15 specific mental conditions. We would then have:

16  
17 (2) In any cognitively normal case *g*, if *M* is one’s maximally specific mental condition  
18 in *g*, one is in a position to know that *M* obtains in *g*

19  
20 Clearly, a maximally specific mental condition qualifies as maximally specific in every case in  
21 which it obtains. So (2) implies that, for any maximally specific mental condition *M*:

22  
23 (3) In any cognitively normal case *g*, if *M* obtains, one is in a position to know that *M*  
24 obtains in *g*

25  
26 But if we accept the spirit of the anti-luminosity argument, we should steer clear of any thesis  
27 like (3) (for remember that a proponent of the anti-luminosity argument can always make it  
28 part of the description of scenarios like Cold Morning that they involve only cognitively normal  
29 cases). So (2) must be rejected – which means that our flexible availability thesis should say  
30 something along the following lines:

31  
32 (4) In any cognitively normal case *g*, there is some *less than maximally specific* mental  
33 condition *M* such that one is in a position know that *M* obtains in *g*

34  
35 (4) fixes the upper specificity limit of our cognitive halo. Let us now try to fix the lower one.  
36 One natural idea, here, is to take inspiration from Berker’s slogan: in specifying the nature of  
37 our cognitive halo, we want to be able to say that the kind of mental conditions to which our  
38 halo gives us access are specific enough to guarantee that *everything* within our mind ‘lies  
39 open to view’. Clearly, we are not going to be able to say anything of this sort if, having  
40 conceded that almost no mental condition is luminous, we take ‘everything’ to range over  
41 atomic mental facts – facts consisting in the instantiation by the subject of some such  
42 condition. Fortunately, however, such reading of ‘everything’ is not the only possible one – nor  
43 the most natural for anyone but an expert in the metaphysics of mind. What we want to capture  
44 is the general idea that our access to our own mind is, in some suitable sense, *comprehensive*  
45 – and comprehensiveness need not require omniscience or absolute precision.

---

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Williamson’s notion of a maximally specific phenomenal character (Williamson 1990, 48).

1 An analogy will help to bring this point into focus. Imagine a weather station that can  
2 measure, with high but less than perfect precision, all the meteorological parameters at its  
3 location – pressure, temperature, wind speed, humidity and the like. The weather station is  
4 made of incorruptible steel and nobody (and nothing) can temper with it. Now imagine being  
5 the owner of that weather station. One could say that, as far as the weather is concerned,  
6 everything 'lies open to view' for you: at any moment, you can know, with high though less  
7 perfect precision, what the pressure, temperature, wind speed and humidity are at your  
8 location. It's true that some atomic weather facts can't be determined by your station: for  
9 example, you may be in a position to know that the speed wind at your location is between  
10 12.3 and 12.5 mph, but not that it is exactly 12.43 mph (or, say, between 12.4 and 12.6 mph).  
11 However, few would regard this as the kind of limitation to your access to the weather  
12 conditions that renders your knowledge of the weather less than comprehensive. Even if some  
13 atomic weather facts escape of your appreciation, there is a clear sense in which no aspect of  
14 the weather does.

15 I want to suggest that something closely analogous may be said by an advocate of  
16 privileged access: even if our cognitive halo doesn't guarantee access to each atomic mental  
17 fact, it may still secure comprehensive knowledge of every aspect of our mental life. To finesse  
18 this response, what we need is an intuitive account of what an *aspect* is, such that knowledge  
19 of all the aspects of x doesn't require knowledge of all the atomic facts concerning x. Here is,  
20 in broad outline, an account that does the job.

21 Let us think of aspects as corresponding to *open questions* concerning the subject  
22 matter of which they are aspects – the kind of questions that admits of correct answers with  
23 varying degrees of specificity. When the subject matter is the weather at a certain location L,  
24 such questions could be:

- 25  
26 What is the air pressure at L?  
27 What is the temperature at L?  
28 What is the wind speed at L?  
29 What is the humidity at L?  
30 ...

31  
32 In the case of one's mental life, they would be:

- 33  
34 How do you feel?  
35 What are you thinking about?  
36 What do you believe?  
37 What do you want?  
38 ...

39  
40 Obviously, not just *every* open question about the weather corresponds to an aspect of the  
41 weather in the intuitive sense of 'aspect' we're working with – the questions that do are,  
42 roughly, those that are of interest to meteorologists. Similarly, not just every question about  
43 one's mental life will correspond to an 'aspect' of it – the questions that do are, roughly, those  
44 that a psychologist might want to investigate. These include both such broad questions as the  
45 ones listed above and more narrow questions like 'How *cold* do you feel?', 'What do you  
46 believe *concerning Brexit?*' and 'What do you want to do *about the cheese in the fridge?*'.  
47 Open questions concerning all sorts of extrinsic, unnatural, gerrymandered or so-called  
48 'Cambridge' properties of one's mental life will *not* correspond to aspects of it.

1 If we understand aspects in terms of open questions, we should take knowledge of  
2 aspects to involve the ability satisfactorily to answer those questions. Some answers to the  
3 question 'What is the wind speed at L?' are incorrect or unacceptably generic. But for the  
4 purposes of everyday 'folk meteorology', 'Between 12.3 and 12.5 mph' is a perfectly  
5 satisfactory answer (when the actual wind speed is, say, 12.43 mph). Similarly, if I ask you  
6 'How cold do you feel?', the answer 'I feel barely cold' is perfectly satisfactory by the standards  
7 of ordinary 'folk psychology' (when you feel cold without feeling very cold). More generally, let  
8 us say that your knowledge of a certain aspect of your mental life is *satisfactory* when you can  
9 answer the corresponding question in a way that is folk-psychologically satisfactory.

10 We are now in a position to formulate a flexible availability thesis according to which  
11 our access to our own minds is just as comprehensive as your access to the weather in the  
12 analogy described above:

13  
14 [Comprehensive Flexible Availability] In any cognitively normal case *g*, for every aspect  
15 of one's mental life *A*, there is some (less than maximally specific) mental condition *M*  
16 such that one is in a position know that *M* obtains in *g* and such knowledge constitutes  
17 satisfactory knowledge of *A*.

18  
19 Let us call this thesis *Comprehensive Flexible Availability*. What it says is that, at any moment  
20 of our life, our cognitive halo (though less than maximally specific) is specific enough to ensure  
21 that we can satisfactorily describe every aspect of our mind at that moment.

22 To illustrate the implications of this thesis, consider again Cold Morning. Recall that, if  
23 Williamson is right, there is an instant during Cold Morning (we've call it *t\**) when one feels  
24 cold without being in a position to know that one does. Advocates of Comprehensive Flexible  
25 Availability will say that, even if this is so, there remain plenty of *other* mental conditions that  
26 one is in a position to knowledgeably self-ascribe at *t\** – for example, the condition of feeling  
27 barely cold. They will then point out that, since knowledge of the fact that one feels barely cold  
28 constitutes satisfactory knowledge of the *same* aspect of one's mind as knowledge of the fact  
29 that one feels cold would (namely, an aspect corresponding to the question 'How cold do you  
30 feel?') nothing of substance is lost if we accept that a subject who is in a position to attain the  
31 former piece of knowledge is not in a position to attain the latter.

32 The general point is that Comprehensive Flexible Availability can be shown to imply:

33  
34 (5) In any C-normal case *g*, for any mental condition *M* concerning an aspect *A* of one's  
35 mental life, if *M* obtains in *g* and one is *not* in a position to know that this is so, there is  
36 another mental condition *M'* such that one *is* in a position to know that *M'* obtains in *g*  
37 and such knowledge constitutes satisfactory knowledge of *A*.

38  
39 (5) says that whatever knowledge is 'lost' due to the anti-luminosity of the mental can always  
40 be satisfactorily 'replaced' by other knowledge concerning the same aspect of one's mind.

41 Let me be perfectly clear about the nature of this result. I am not suggesting that (5) or  
42 Comprehensive Flexible Availability hold true. In fact (though I have some sympathy for these  
43 claims) I haven't offered any argument or reason to think that they hold true. My aim here is  
44 simply to articulate a form of availability that advocates of privileged access can appeal to if  
45 they are interested in reconciling their doctrine with Williamson's anti-luminosity. The task for  
46 the next section is to explain why, as far as *this* task goes, Comprehensive Flexible Availability  
47 should be preferred to the main fallback availability theses discussed so far in the literature  
48 responding to Williamson.

1  
2  
3 **4. Rigid availability fallbacks**  
4

5 Suppose that, instead of adopting the idea of a cognitive halo, we insist on thinking of  
6 availability in rigid terms. If we are persuaded by the anti-luminosity argument and don't want  
7 our rigid availability thesis to apply only to trivial conditions and other 'curiosities', we may be  
8 tempted simply to restrict the range of circumstances in which the relevant mental states are  
9 said to be epistemically available to the subject – that is to say (if we gloss 'epistemic  
10 availability' in the simplest and most natural way) the range of circumstances in which the  
11 subject is in a position to know . This can be done in various ways.

12 One idea, inspired by DeRose (2002, 576) is to say that any mental condition M is *weakly*  
13 *luminous*, meaning that:

14  
15 [Weak Luminosity] In any cognitively normal case *g* in which M safely obtains, one is in  
16 a position to know that M obtains in *g*.

17  
18 A second idea, inspired by Conee (2005, 450), is to say that any mental condition M is *centrally*  
19 *luminous*, meaning that:

20  
21 [Central Luminosity] In any cognitively normal case *g* which is an exemplary case of M,  
22 one is in a position that M obtains in *g*.

23  
24 The third and last idea, inspired by Hawthorne (2005, 454), is to say that any mental condition  
25 M is *cozy*, in the sense that:

26  
27 [Coziness] In any cognitively normal case *g* in which M determinately obtains, one is in  
28 a position to know that M obtains in *g*.

29  
30 I shall set Coziness aside because accepting this thesis would offer advocates of privileged  
31 access only very limited solace. Coziness implies luminosity for all precise mental conditions  
32 (these being conditions for which obtaining and determinately obtaining come down to the  
33 same thing). Thus, advocates of privileged access who accept both Coziness and the  
34 conclusion of the anti-luminosity argument are bound to say that there are no precise mental  
35 conditions (except the trivial ones). As Williamson points out, this claim is neither very  
36 plausible nor very congenial to the ideology of privileged access (Williamson 2005, 477-478).<sup>21</sup>  
37 Neither Weak Luminosity nor Central Luminosity raise the same problem. I shall deal with  
38 Central Luminosity first, because DeRose's notion of a condition 'safely obtaining' requires  
39 special discussion.

40 One immediate problem with Central Luminosity is that, as stated, it is likely to have  
41 implications that contradict the conclusion (or the premises) of the anti-luminosity argument.  
42 To see this, take any maximally specific mental condition M\*. It is hard to see how M\* might  
43 obtain in a case without that case being exemplary of it: by hypothesis, M\* is maximally  
44 specific, so it doesn't admit of various degrees of intensity, vividness, clarity and the like. But  
45 if every (C-normal) case in which M\* obtains is exemplary M\*, the central luminosity of M\*  
46 reduces to its (C-)luminosity simpliciter – and we know that, if the anti-luminosity argument

---

<sup>21</sup> For further discussion, see Zardini (2013) and McGlynn (2014, 161).

1 goes through, M\* cannot be (C-)luminous. What's more, even conditions that are less than  
2 maximally specific may be just too specific to be centrally luminous – this will be so if our  
3 confidence that a certain mental condition obtains varies gradually in nearby cases, and some  
4 mental conditions happen to be so specific that they fail to obtain even in cases that are  
5 'nearby' the exemplary ones (I will say more about these 'highly specific' mental conditions in  
6 the next section).

7 To remove these difficulties, Conee's proposal could be restricted to mental conditions  
8 that are suitably 'broad' or unspecific. The claim would then become that we are in a position  
9 to know that such suitably 'broad' mental conditions obtain in every case that is exemplary of  
10 them. But, while this doubly qualified claim no longer conflicts with Williamson's argument, it  
11 also seems unnecessarily weak. Plausibly, one is in a position to know that one is in a certain  
12 mental state even when one is *not* in an exemplary case of that state – for example, I may be  
13 in a position to know that I feel cold even when I feel only moderately cold, or when the kind  
14 of cold I feel is, for whatever reason, very unusual and unexemplary.<sup>22</sup> In any case, it seems  
15 that friends of privileged access will be much better served by Comprehensive Flexible  
16 Availability than by a modified version of Conee's proposal. Comprehensive Flexible  
17 Availability guarantees that, in every case, the subject has satisfactory knowledge of every  
18 aspect of his or her own mind, independently of whether or not such knowledge involves  
19 mental conditions of which the case in question is exemplary.<sup>23</sup>

20 This leaves us with Weak Luminosity, the thesis that one is in a position to know that  
21 a certain mental condition obtains in every case in which it 'safely obtains'. DeRose says that  
22 a condition 'safely obtains' when "[it] obtains and is not even close to not obtaining in the case"  
23 (DeRose 2002, 576). But what does 'close to not obtaining' mean, in this context? We can  
24 distinguish two options.

25 The first to interpret the phrase 'not even close to not obtaining' according to some  
26 objective (i.e. non-case-relative) standard of closeness – for example, it may be said that a  
27 condition 'is not even close to not obtaining in the case' if and only the case is (by some  
28 objective standard) an exemplary, typical, representative, severe etc. specimen of that  
29 condition. On this interpretation, the proposal will either boil down to or share the same  
30 limitations of proposals invoking Central Luminosity: what's objectively 'not even close to not  
31 obtaining' may be too close to not obtaining for knowledge-purposes (given the specificity of  
32 the condition and the nature of the subject's confidence in the case) or not close enough to  
33 guarantee satisfactory knowledge of every aspect of the subject's mind.

34 The second option is to interpret the phrase 'not even close to not obtaining' according  
35 to a case-relative standard of closeness – specifically, the same standard that determines  
36 which cases are 'close' to the actual one for the purpose of knowledge-ascriptions. Now,  
37 whether a case 'count' as close to the actual one for the purpose of knowledge-ascriptions  
38 depends, among other things, on the specific basis of the subject's confidence in the actual  
39 case.<sup>24</sup> So, in the present sense of 'close', it makes no sense to speak of a case being 'close'  
40 to actuality unless it is assumed that the subject *is actually confident* in the truth of the relevant  
41 proposition. This means that, on this option, Weak Luminosity should be unpacked as follows:  
42

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. McGlynn (2014, 162)

<sup>23</sup> Analogous considerations apply to Sosa's 'quasi-luminosity' thesis (Sosa 2010, 208). In addition, this thesis risks being insufficiently general, as it applies only to mental conditions that come in degrees (see Williamson 2010, 366-367).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Williamson (2010, 326).

1 [Weak Luminosity\*] In every C-normal case  $g$  in which (i) the subject is confident that M  
2 obtains and (ii) M obtains in all nearby cases where the subject's confidence is  
3 sufficiently similar, the subject is in a position to know that M obtains  
4

5 Unfortunately, it is not difficult to see that Weak Luminosity\* does *not* capture a substantive  
6 form of availability. Instead, it has the shape of a (weak) authority thesis according to which,  
7 in the case of mental conditions, safe confidence implies knowledge.

8 It seems fair to conclude that, as things stand, no attempt to capture availability in rigid  
9 terms holds much promise. Proponents of this kind of approach need to find a way of defining  
10 which circumstances should count as 'favourable' that is neither arbitrary nor overly or  
11 insufficiently restrictive. Pending success on this front, Comprehensive Flexible Availability  
12 enjoys a clear advantage.  
13

## 14 **5. Luminosity, elusiveness, exhaustiveness**

15  
16  
17 Let us take stock. So far, I have argued that, of the two components of privileged access –  
18 authority and availability – the anti-luminosity of the mental threatens the second, not the first  
19 (§ 2). I have also argued that friends of privileged access can perfectly well retain availability,  
20 and with it the idea that everything within our mind 'lies open to view', if they conceive of this  
21 phenomenon in flexible (rather than rigid) terms (§ 3). If this is right, Williamson's followers  
22 need not see the doctrine of privileged access as 'a Cartesian orthodoxy from which  
23 philosophy must be cleansed'. Our access to our own mind may well be privileged even if all  
24 (or almost all) mental conditions fail to be luminous.

25 This 'compatibilist' conclusion can be reinforced from another direction. In this final  
26 section, I want to show that, insofar as knowledge of our own mental states is governed by a  
27 safety constraint (as the anti-luminosity argument assumes) such knowledge will be subject  
28 to limitations that are even *more* severe than Williamson's own discussion of luminosity  
29 suggests. Crucially, though, what the existence of these limitations forces us to give up is not  
30 the doctrine of privileged access, but something else.

31 Let us start by reconsidering the notion of a maximally specific mental condition. If  
32 knowledge is subject to a safety constraint, an argument can easily be made that such  
33 conditions not only fail to be luminous – meaning that they sometimes obtain without us being  
34 in a position to know that they do – but are positively *elusive* – meaning that they never (or  
35 almost never) within our epistemic grasp.

36 The argument has the following shape. Consider a case  $h$  where one believes oneself  
37 to be in a certain maximally specific mental condition M:  
38

39 (v) In  $h$ , one believes that M obtains in  $h$   
40

41 Let us suppose that, much like one's confidence that one feels cold (in a case where one is  
42 feeling cold) one's confidence that one is in M (in  $h$ ) would be only slightly higher or lower if  
43 one happened to be slightly different in some mental respect. This is tantamount to supposing  
44 there is at least some case  $h^*$ , sufficiently similar to  $h$ , in which one's confidence that one is in  
45 M is almost the same as in  $h$ , but one is slightly different in some mental respect:  
46

47 (vi) In  $h^*$  (which is very similar to  $h$ ) one's confidence that one is in M is almost the same  
48 as in  $h$ , but one is slightly different in some mental respect

1  
2 Given the assumption that M is maximally specific,  $h^*$  will be a case in which M does *not* obtain  
3 (for recall that a maximally specific mental condition discriminates between any two mentally  
4 different cases, no matter how similar they are):

5  
6 (vii) In  $h^*$ , one is not in M

7  
8 Generalizing from Safety<sub>cold</sub> (see § 1), we should take knowledge that one is in a certain  
9 mental condition to be subject to the following constraint:

10  
11 [Safety Constraint] If one knows that one is in M, one is in M in every sufficiently similar  
12 case in which one is almost equally confident that one feels cold.

13  
14 Given (v), (vi), (vii) and the Safety Constraint, one's confidence, in  $h$ , that one is in M is not  
15 'safe' enough to constitute knowledge. Therefore, we have:

16  
17 (viii) In  $h$ , one does not know oneself to be in M.

18  
19 Note that we didn't assume anything about  $h$  and M except that M is maximally specific and  $h$   
20 is the kind of case in which the subject's confidence that M obtains varies gradually in nearby  
21 cases. Consequently, our conclusion should be that:

22  
23 (ix) For any maximally specific mental conditions M and any case  $g$  in which M obtains,  
24 if one's confidence that one is in M varies gradually in nearby cases, one is *not* in a  
25 position to know that M obtains in  $g$

26  
27 It would be incautious to suggest that *whenever* one has a certain confidence in the claim that  
28 one is in certain mental condition, one's confidence will vary gradually in nearby cases.<sup>25</sup>  
29 Certainly, however, in the vast majority of cases I can think of, we should indeed expect this  
30 kind of gradualness.<sup>26</sup> Hence, I think we should take (ix) to imply:

31  
32 (x) For any maximally specific mental conditions M and almost any case  $g$  in which M  
33 obtains, one is *not* in a position to know that M obtains in  $g$

34  
35 Here's an intuitive way of seeing this result. The Safety Constraint, together with the fact that,  
36 most of the time, our confidence that we are in a certain mental condition varies gradually in  
37 nearby cases, make knowledge 'at the margins' mostly unattainable for us. But when it comes  
38 to maximally specific mental conditions, knowledge that one is in any such condition is *always*  
39 knowledge 'at the margins'. Hence, such knowledge is mostly unattainable for us: maximally  
40 specific mental conditions not only fail to be luminous but are – as I suggested we may put it  
41 – elusive.

---

<sup>25</sup> Consider a case  $g$  where my confidence that I am in a certain maximally specific mental condition M is based on someone else's testimony. If a 'nearby' case is a case where I am only slightly different in some mental respect, it is unclear that my confidence, in  $g$ , will vary gradually in nearby cases. The testimony may come from an infallible neuroscientist who, had I been even only slightly mentally different, would have provided me with very different information (or with no information at all).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Srinivasan's (DOXDIS\*) principle (2015, 310).

1           It is possible to generalize this conclusion to at least some mental conditions that are  
2 highly but less than maximally specific. Here is how the argument would proceed. Take any  
3 case *g* in which one has a certain confidence in the claim that this or that mental condition  
4 obtains and one's confidence varies gradually in nearby cases. Let us suppose that, in any  
5 such case, the nearby cases (those in which one's confidence is 'sufficiently' similar) can differ  
6 from the case in question up to a certain degree  $\delta$ . Then consider a mental condition *M* that  
7 is less than maximally specific and yet so specific that, for every case *j* in which *M* obtains,  
8 there is a case *j'*, less than  $\delta$ -different from *j*, in which *M* *doesn't* obtain. Given how specific *M*  
9 is, and given how, in any case like *g*, one's confidence varies in nearby cases, one will never  
10 (or almost never) be in a position to know that *M* obtains. Even if it is not maximally specific,  
11 *M* is just as elusive as any maximally specific mental condition. And the same applies to any  
12 condition that is as specific as (or more specific than) *M*.

13           Reflection on these corollaries of Williamson's argument – the elusiveness of  
14 maximally and highly specific mental conditions – brings out what I take to be the real toll of  
15 that argument. We've seen in the last section that, if Comprehensive Flexible Availability holds  
16 true, any knowledge 'lost' due to the anti-luminosity of the mental can always be satisfactorily  
17 'replaced' by other knowledge concerning the same aspect of one's mind (see (4), § 3). But it  
18 now turns out that – if we accept the premises of Williamson's argument – the replacements,  
19 however satisfactory, can never (or almost never) match the 'determinacy' or 'fineness of  
20 grain' of our mental life: even if we always have satisfactory knowledge of every aspect of our  
21 mind, we never (or almost never) know our maximally (or highly) specific mental conditions.

22           This result certainly gives pause, but I want to conclude by mentioning three reasons  
23 why advocates of privileged access should not be worried by it. These are, equally, reasons  
24 why they should be perfectly satisfied with Comprehensive Flexible Availability.

25           The first reason is that the elusiveness of maximally (and highly) specific mental  
26 conditions straightforwardly implies that we do not even possess any 'recognitional' concepts  
27 referring to these conditions. A recognitional concept is a concept whose possession requires  
28 the ability successfully to recognize the presence or absence of its referent in experience.<sup>27</sup> If  
29 a condition is elusive – that is to say, if we are never or almost never in a position to know that  
30 it obtains – this requirement simply cannot be met.

31           Now, to say that we do not possess any recognitional concepts referring to maximally  
32 (or highly) specific mental conditions is not to say that such conditions are a complete mystery  
33 to us (after all, one can always refer to one's maximally specific mental condition at a certain  
34 instant as 'this maximally specific condition' or 'the maximally specific mental condition I am in  
35 right now'). However, the impossibility to recognize these conditions *in experience* puts them  
36 in the same bag with other mental conditions for which (as already noted in § 2) advocates of  
37 privileged access have always been prepared to make special provision – irrational or  
38 'alienated' beliefs, phenomenally unconscious experiences and, possibly, mental states that  
39 are 'dispositional' rather than 'occurrent'. A natural hypothesis, supported by this similarity, is  
40 that introspectability is a pre-requisite for privileged access – or, a little more carefully, that,  
41 for authority and availability to hold with respect to a certain class of mental conditions, it must  
42 be possible (at least, in principle) to form introspective recognitional concepts for members of

---

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Loar (1990, 87), Yablo (2002, 461), Sosa (2003, 281) and Chalmers (2012, 140-142).



1 that class.<sup>28</sup> If this hypothesis is correct, maximally (and highly) specific mental conditions are  
2 just another exception that proves rule.

3 A second reason why advocates of privileged access should not be bothered by the  
4 elusiveness of maximally (and highly) specific mental conditions is that this datum does  
5 nothing to deprive their doctrine of its interest and significance. As I pointed at the outset of  
6 this paper, some philosophers think that the existence of privileged access should constrain  
7 our account of the semantics and metaphysics of our ordinary discourse about the mental. A  
8 thesis like Comprehensive Flexible Availability can act as such a constraint even if it is  
9 compatible with maximally (and highly) specific mental conditions being elusive. Other  
10 philosophers endorse the doctrine of privileged access because they are interested in finding  
11 an epistemic 'foundation' for the rest of our justified beliefs. But, on the face of it, a cognitive  
12 halo of the kind guaranteed by Comprehensive Flexible Availability could provide such a  
13 foundation even if it never (or almost never) encompasses our maximally (and highly) specific  
14 mental conditions.<sup>29</sup>

15 The third and final reason why advocates of privileged access should not worry about  
16 the elusiveness point is also the most straightforward. Suppose we call *exhaustiveness* the  
17 idea that every detail of a subject's mental life, even the most minute and insignificant, can  
18 always be accessed by that subject. It is simply unclear why the doctrine of privileged access  
19 – and specifically, whatever component of that doctrine can be associated with the slogan that  
20 everything within our mind 'lies open to view' – should be thought to imply exhaustiveness.  
21 This is obvious if one understands the slogan in the way I suggested in § 3. But it is also

---

<sup>28</sup> Note that restricting authority and availability to what is (at least, in principle) 'introspectable' does not trivialize the doctrine of privileged access: clearly, analogues of availability and authority do *not* hold for what is visible, or otherwise accessible through the 'outer' senses.

<sup>29</sup>It may be objected that, insofar as it is compatible with phenomena like elusiveness and anti-luminosity, Comprehensive Flexible Availability cannot be used to vindicate certain forms of *normative internalism*, according to which:

[Normative Internalism] What an agent should do or believe supervenes on his or her mental states

The views in question qualify as 'internalist' because their proponents assume that an agent has privileged access to facts concerning his or her mental states. But, as we know, Comprehensive Flexible Availability fails to guarantee access to *all* such facts. However, the objection ignores that, for all Normative Internalism says, what an agent should do or believe may also supervene on a proper subset of his or her mental states – and the relevant subset may comprise exactly those mental conditions to which Comprehensive Flexible Availability says that we *do* have access. Consider:

[Normative Internalism\*] What an agent should do or believe supervenes on any set of facts S such that knowledge of every member of S would constitute satisfactory knowledge of every aspect of that agent's mind

According to Normative Internalism\*, having satisfactory knowledge of every aspect of one's mind is enough to have knowledge of a supervenience base for normative facts concerning what one should do or believe – any additional knowledge is unnecessary. But if Comprehensive Flexible Availability holds true, one *is* in a position to have satisfactory knowledge of every aspect of one's mind. Thus, the combination of Normative Internalism\* and Comprehensive Flexible Availability gives us a normative internalist package that the anti-luminosity of the mental and the elusiveness of maximally (and highly) specific mental conditions leave unscathed.

1 obvious if one sticks to the literal content of the slogan. Imagine being in front of a large  
2 painting. If your eyes work properly, the lighting conditions are optimal and nothing obstruct  
3 your sight, it seems correct to say that the painting lies open to view for you. But this hardly  
4 implies that you can access every part of the painting – including, e.g., the atoms making up  
5 its surface. Indeed, when one reflects on this kind of analogy, it not clear that exhaustiveness  
6 is even *compatible* with the kind of metaphor on which the doctrine of privileged access is  
7 based. The claim that there cannot be anything more to our mind than what we are able to  
8 ‘see’ in it does not sit comfortably with the idea that our minds are – much like paintings – bits  
9 of objective reality to which we can be said to have *access*, albeit of a privileged sort. Arguably,  
10 the very idea that one has access to x requires making sense of the possibility that x might be  
11 a certain way despite one’s inability to know that this is so. Exhaustiveness rules out exactly  
12 this possibility.

1 *References*

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