

Preview of the main claims and arguments of the book that I'll be commenting on, objecting to, which are themselves previewed in TW's "Introduction".

TW claims that knowledge is a mental state. Several of my arguments will go to show that we have not been given reason to think that. 1) Because there are other good explanations of the broadness and primeness of knowledge.

TW claims that knowledge is the primitive in this area; in particular, it is not analyzable in terms of true belief + X. I argue that because broadness and primeness of knowledge can be explained by a couple of candidate X conjuncts, the broadness and primeness of knowledge give us no reason to think knowledge is a primitive.

TW claims something like that reference to knowledge is necessary for explaining action/behavior. (Sometimes sounds like the weaker claim "sometimes necessary".) I shall argue that this isn't true, and also explain why my particular characterization of knowledge explains why knowledge *can* explain our capability to act, that is, explain why knowledge is power. Williamson doesn't offer an explanation of this, and the reasons he gives for thinking knowledge is necessary for explaining action when it has to do with a robustness that taking knowledge to be a mental state or FMSO does nothing to explain. So, by his own lights there's a hole and a tension. Tracking, on the other hand, explains the robustness that knowledge has, which in turn can explain the capacity to act.

TW claims that accepting that knowledge is the most general factive (stative) mental state operator is the way to see why knowledge is more valuable than true belief—indeed suggests that it's the only way—and why we should care about it at all. "It matters to us because factive mental states matter to us." (34) I will explain how a tracking view explains why knowledge matters to us, and why it's more valuable than true belief.

TW argues that no mental state is luminous. 1) I claim that no internalist needs to suppose it is. Also, no externalist would have thought that mental states were luminous. 2) But more than this the anti-luminosity argument seems to me a bit off-target, since surely perfect resolution was never why the internalist thought his access to his own mind was better than his access to the external world. That was rather because it was *his*, or here rather than there.

Sensitivity—Sherri has some things to say about this.

TW argues that there is an asymmetry in evidence between the normal case and the skeptical case on the basis of the idea that knowledge is a mental state and that  $E = K$ . I explain why a tracking view of knowledge and evidence has a better explanation of the asymmetry, and doesn't implausibly claim this answers the skeptic.

TW argues that  $E=K$ . A relatively minor point: E doesn't equal K on my view because we can be affected by a piece of evidence that we don't have a belief about. So not even belief is strictly necessary for something to be evidence for us. (However, that is different for me from evidence that I have. For that I need to believe it.)

Preparatory points about reading this book:

1) The book is directed largely against internalists about knowledge. E.g. 23, e.g. an externalist would never claim luminosity in the first place. (I'm going to argue later in the course that an internalist wouldn't either.) The reason this matters is that there are a number of his arguments that don't work against particular epistemological externalist theories of knowledge (tracking, process reliabilism), so he has yet to identify why these views should be revised to say that knowledge is a mental.

2) There's a lot of ordinary language argumentation in this book, which I don't think shows very much.

3) As you're reading keep track of the arguments for the claims you're most interested in since different parts of the book will have new considerations that are relevant, so to get hold of why he thinks what he does you have to find all the pieces. Also, it isn't always clear what the structure of his arguments is, so you often have to write them out old-fashioned-analytic-philosophy-style.

4) There are many distinct claims:

1. Knowledge is a mental state.
2. Knowledge is a primitive in analysis.
3. Knowledge cannot be analyzed into true belief + X.
4. Knowledge is the most general factive stative mental state operator.
5. Knowledge is broad.
6. Knowledge is prime.

5) Be very careful about the difference between epistemological internalism vs. externalism, and internalism vs. externalism about the mental. This will arise naturally in the discussion of skepticism below.

Objections: Ch. 1

p. 6 "If the content of a mental state can depend on the external world, so can the attitude to that content." Yes but only in the sense that the consequent is true because anything is possible. Sentences like this puzzle me. Help?

Objections: Ch. 2

p. 22, apparently unsupported claim that our pre-theoretic view should be that knowledge is a mental state. There *is* a big difference between non-factive and factive attitudes, namely that one type is factive and the other is not.

p. 26, Skepticism issue:

Traditional skeptical argument says:

If one's mental state is exactly the same in two situations, then one's knowledge is also the same. (So since one's mental state is the same in skeptical and normal scenarios, one doesn't know in normal scenarios, because one doesn't know in skeptical scenarios.)

TW: True, but one's mental state is *not* the same in the skeptical and normal scenarios. (One knows in the one and not in the other, and a difference in knowledge constitutes a difference in mental state.)

Thus, one can know in the normal scenario though one wouldn't know in the skeptical scenario.

This seems fishy. Moving the line of the mental surely doesn't move the line of the available, and the latter is what's important to skepticism.

1) The point of the internalist skeptical argument is not to focus on the mental per se, but to focus on what we have access to, which happens to be at most the stuff presented to us, which we call the mental (but we can call it something else if someone appropriates "mental" for another use. Then if what we have access to doesn't discriminate the skeptical from normal scenarios, then we don't know we're in the normal scenario (and so forth with traditional lines of argument about this move). To say that nevertheless whether we're in the normal or skeptical scenario is part of the mental seems beside the point! TW appears to freely admit that the mental he's talking about includes things we don't have access to.

This objection to TW works even if we admit that we are not always in a position to know what mental state we're in. The skeptical argument doesn't need that we are always in such a position. Let the mental include things this side of our skin that we may or may not have access to. Still, the point of the traditional skeptical argument is that what we DO have access to doesn't discriminate between the two scenarios.

2) Let's see how tracking does this. On the tracking view there's no particular reason to think knowledge is a mental state (though one may be able to add it). Let's suppose it's not. And let's suppose the mental just is the sort of stuff we have access to (though of course we don't always). Then the following two things are both true:

- a) Our mental state is the same in the normal and the skeptical scenarios.
- b) We know in the one scenario and not in the other. Thus if we are in fact in the normal state, we also know it, and if we are in fact in the skeptical scenario we don't

know we're in the normal state (obviously), but there's nothing accessible to us that will tell us which we're in.

That our states of knowledge are different in the two scenarios tends to be a consequence of externalism about knowledge (cf. process reliabilism). Many people find this quite unsatisfying. But it is only unsatisfying if you're looking for a way to tell if you are in the skeptical scenario. As a hypothetical, descriptive point in the theory of knowledge it can explain a lot of things (e.g. failure, effort, scientists' lack of interest in skepticism), and is not the wrong *sort* of thing to do so. That said, it is supremely unsatisfying as an answer to the skeptic, which is how Williamson seems to want to use his ultimate externalist move—knowledge is a mental state. “If knowing is a mental state then the skeptical argument is not compelling.” (26) When you state the skeptical argument as Williamson has:

Mental state same in normal and skeptical  
I don't know in the skeptical.

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Therefore, I don't know in the normal.

(So, even if I am in the normal, I don't know it.)

first, you're suppressing a premise: if the mental states are the same then I have no way to tell which one I'm in. This is the only way you get to the conclusion and it's crucial to the skeptical argument.

TW is denying the first premise by including knowledge in the mental state. The mere fact that different things are true in the two scenarios (table, not table) is going to make different knowledge statuses and so, for TW, different mental states.

But that you can deny the first premise as written is beside the point for the skeptical argument. What makes the argument go is what is accessible, and what is accessible in the two scenarios is the same regardless of whether knowledge is a mental state because it is the same regardless of how we define mental state. Also, TW will later address the skeptical argument by saying  $E = K$ , from which it follows that your evidence isn't the same in the two scenarios because your knowledge isn't. But even if it's true that  $E = K$ , which I have some doubts about, this doesn't address the skeptic's argument, because the more that the subject gets when you take  $E$  to include  $K$ , and thus a mental state all the way out *isn't accessible*. The skeptic wants a justification for believing that we have tables in front of us, given that we can't distinguish the two scenarios. TW appears to give nothing to this. Tracking doesn't either, but it also doesn't purport to.

It often seems as if the internalist and externalist are just engaged in different projects. (Explain.) However they do disagree about something:

What the internalist and externalist disagree about is whether you know there's a table if everything is normal. Internalist: you can't tell it's all normal so how could you know?

Externalist: it IS normal so you know. Being able to justify the belief that you know, and even being able to justify the belief that there is the table are very different things.

This is also a consequence of process reliabilism.

p. 26: “if knowing is a mental state then the skeptical argument is not compelling.” We can say, on TW’s view, that *if* we are in the normal situation *then* we know that there’s a table in front of us. But that’s available on any externalist view, and it’s hypothetical. Skepticism is generated by access issues, or at least can be, so that is what needs to be addressed.

There’s not enough attention in the Williamson book to how other views of knowledge achieve the results he wants, and have done so already, without assuming his weird views. This goes to whether his views are required in order to explain the phenomena he comments on.

### Section 1.3 Knowledge and Analysis

His argument goes this way:

Believing truly is not a mental state. (Intuition? Not really argued.)

Knowledge is a mental state. (Why? This is an assumption of this section.)

If knowledge is a mental state and it could be analysed at all via conjunction, then it would have to be analyzed into a mental state and a mental state. (? implicit)

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Therefore, knowledge cannot be analyzed as true belief + X.

Hence the claim that knowledge is a mental state *explains* why the project of true belief + X analysis has (supposedly) failed.

More on the relation between TW’s claims about knowledge being a mental state and its being unanalysable as true belief + X: to the extent that being a mental state means it’s the primitive concept, it cannot be analysed at all.