

## *Epistemological Disjunctivism and Anti-Luminosity Arguments*

**Abstract:** Epistemological disjunctivists hold that perceiving subjects have “reflective access” to factive perceptual support for belief (Pritchard 2012, 2015). However, little has been done to elaborate the intended notion of reflection, or introspective awareness more generally. Moreover, critics have pointed out that the disjunctivist conception of “reflective access” can seem vulnerable to varieties of Williamson’s anti-luminosity argument (Haddock 2011). In this paper I defend disjunctivism from this charge, arguing that it holds the resources for a potent defense of the claim that knowledge of perceptual states is luminous. Indeed, I argue that appreciating the relation between disjunctivism and luminosity sheds critical light on how the disjunctivist conceives of perceptual support for belief.

Keywords: epistemological disjunctivism • perception • Williamson • self-knowledge • luminosity

Visual experiences have “epistemic value”: they improve a subject’s epistemic position with respect to the stretch of environment before her. How should we understand the epistemic value of a visual experience? According to epistemological disjunctivists, the value of an ordinary, non-hallucinatory perceptual experience is *factive*: beliefs formed appropriately on the basis of a perceptual experience are guaranteed to be true (Pritchard 2012, 13). Strikingly, epistemological disjunctivists take an internalist view of experience’s epistemic value, on which the epistemic value of a perceptual experience is said to be within the subject’s reflective reach.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, in appropriately forming a belief based on her experience, the perceiving subject can be aware that her thus-formed belief will be true. In other words: the perceiving subject finds herself *ensured* of possessing sufficient grounds for perceptual knowledge. It is this point that allows epistemological disjunctivists to advertise the strong anti-skeptical properties of the view.<sup>2</sup>

The remarkably strong claims of epistemological disjunctivism have engendered significant literature, but in this paper I will focus on an area that has received comparatively less attention: the conception of perceptual self-knowledge implied by the disjunctivist’s notion of “reflective access”.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “[O]ne’s perceptual knowledge can, in suitable conditions, enjoy rational support which is both reflectively accessible and also factive” (Pritchard 2015, 589).

<sup>2</sup> For these treatments, see Pritchard 2008, McDowell 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Henceforth I will use “disjunctivism” to refer specifically to epistemological disjunctivism. The other variety of disjunctivism, metaphysical disjunctivism, will not be at issue in this paper.

Specifically, as I will suggest below, it can seem that the disjunctivist is committed to self-knowledge of our perceptual experiences being *luminous*, i.e. self-knowledge that is “transparent” or “immediately available” to the subject. However, ever since the classic anti-luminosity argument formulated in Williamson (2000), many philosophers have found reliance on luminous self-knowledge questionable.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper I will argue that anti-luminosity arguments, and their purported application to disjunctivism, have failed to account for a claim like the following:

**Bifurcation Thesis:** Our self-knowledge of distinctively rational states is structured in a manner unlike our self-knowledge of states that are not distinctively rational.<sup>5</sup>

In several recent papers, some philosophers (including prominently Matthew Boyle) have advocated for a thesis of this sort, i.e. a view on which we should recognize two importantly different types of knowledge of our own minds.<sup>6</sup> On such a view, our theorizing about our self-knowledge of distinctly rational states like occurrent thoughts or intentions for action should be sensitive to unique conditions associated with the rational nature of these states, while our theorizing about our self-knowledge of, for example, our bodily and sensory states may not need to take these into account. This is relevant because while Williamson focuses his original anti-luminosity argument on a sensory state (a case of feeling cold), the way the question of luminous self-knowledge arises for the disjunctivist concerns having a perceptual experience of a certain sort. This raises the question whether the Bifurcation Thesis provides the disjunctivist with a way out from under the threat of anti-luminosity arguments. In this paper I will argue that this is so.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In §1 I briefly introduce disjunctivism as a conception of the epistemology of perceptual experience, and I argue that a type of luminous self-knowledge is in fact a natural and arguably critical feature of the view. In §2 I sketch the application of an anti-luminosity argument to disjunctivism, focusing on the version of Williamson’s argument articulated in Haddock

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<sup>4</sup> For a previous application of the argument to disjunctivism, see Haddock 2011.

<sup>5</sup> For an exposition of the bifurcation thesis, see Boyle 2009.

<sup>6</sup> As Boyle notes, this division goes back at least to Kant. As Matthew Boyle puts it, “Kant famously held that we possess two fundamentally different kinds of self-knowledge: knowledge of ourselves through ‘inner sense’ and knowledge of ourselves through ‘pure apperception’” (2009, 133).

(2011). In turn, in §3 I accept Amia Srinivasan (2015)'s suggestion that the anti-luminosity argument fundamentally relies on a safety condition for knowledge in combination with what Srinivasan characterizes as a "plausible empirical assumption" concerning the limited sensitivity of our epistemic capacities. I exploit this point by arguing that disjunctivists should revert to the Bifurcation Thesis to deny that this latter assumption holds for the domain of rational states. In §4 I conclude by showing that the Bifurcation Thesis and a notion of luminous self-knowledge shed fundamental light on the way disjunctivists conceive of perceptual justification for knowledge.

### *1. Luminous Experiences*

Epistemological disjunctivists deny a Highest Common Factor thesis concerning perceptual support for belief. *Pace* the possibility of phenomenally indiscriminable hallucinations (so-called 'bad cases'), disjunctivists believe that ordinary perceptual experiences ('good cases') provide *factive* support for belief, i.e. support that entails the truth of a suitably formed perceptual belief. Moreover, disjunctivists are internalists: they believe that subjects can be aware of their perceptual support for belief, and can rationally structure their belief-forming process accordingly. In this way, disjunctivists believe that subjects can have "reflective access" to possessing factive perceptual support for belief.

While much has been written on the disjunctivist's notion of factive perceptual evidence, less has been said (including by disjunctivists themselves) about how we should understand the notion of "reflective access" in play. My present interest is in the relation between disjunctivism and a claim like

**Perceptual Luminosity:** The reason a perceptual experience's factive epistemic support is "reflectively accessible" to its subject is that perception is "luminously" or "transparently" self-known. Perceiving suffices for the subject to be in a position to *know* that she is perceiving.

While for the duration of this paper I am happy to assume Perceptual Luminosity as a way of understanding the disjunctivist's epistemology of perceptual self-knowledge, I also think there are good reasons for the disjunctivist to find Perceptual Luminosity appealing as a way of spelling the notion of "reflective access". To see why, suppose that for the disjunctivist perceptual self-knowledge is *not* luminous. It follows that in having a perceptual experience the subject is not guaranteed to be in a

position to acquire self-knowledge of this perceptual experience. For the disjunctivist this raises the question how, in cases where the subject *does* know that she is perceiving, we ought to conceive of the subject's entitlement to this self-knowledge. Here the disjunctivist is left with two poor options. Option 1 is for the disjunctivist to suggest that having a perceptual experience provides the subject with *sufficient grounds* for believing that she is having a perceptual experience. However, the problem with this first option is that the possibility of phenomenologically indistinguishable hallucinations would seem to rule out possessing precisely such grounds. This is the *point* of the hallucination being phenomenologically indistinguishable (however phenomenal indistinguishability is understood). Accordingly, option 1 is not acceptable.

By contrast, option 2 is for the disjunctivist to take a page from the externalist book by, for example, invoking reliability as entitling the subject to perceptual self-knowledge. However, the problem with this second option is that disjunctivism is intended as a form of internalism. Disjunctivism's appeal is partly due to the claim that perceiving subjects are, or can be, reflectively aware of having perceptually provided grounds that ensure the truth of suitably formed perceptual beliefs, thus ruling out skeptical scenarios. But if disjunctivism bottoms out in a form of externalism about the subject's knowledge of possessing these sorts of grounds, then it can seem these internalist ambitions must be relinquished or are at least compromised.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, option 2 is unattractive as well. While not conclusive, these considerations provide *prima facie* reason for the disjunctivist to conceive of perceptual self-knowledge as luminous.

## 2. *Anti-Luminosity: The Perceptual Case*

On Williamson's telling, it was once an essentially unchallenged bit of received philosophical wisdom that conscious human mental states are "luminous", such that having a conscious mental state *M*

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<sup>7</sup> The problem, in short, is that it does not seem especially compelling to claim that subjects enjoys access to factive perceptual support for belief, if in turn this "access" is *not* factive—this does little more than move the bump under the rug.

is sufficient for a subject to be in a position to know that she is having *M*.<sup>8</sup> Williamson's classic objection to this view exploits a gradual shift in mental conditions to show that, in at least some cases, the very notion of "luminous" mental states results in a contradiction, and should be abandoned. Williamson's conclusion is that conscious mental states, *qua* objects of knowledge, are not special. For Williamson, forming beliefs about our minds is fallible in the way of belief-formation generally. As Amia Srinivasan puts the core idea to be taken from Williamson's resistance to luminosity (Srinivasan 2015, 294):

If Williamson is right, then the common picture of the [conscious] realm as one of privileged access turns out to be a Cartesian orthodoxy from which philosophy must be cleansed.

Following common usage, I will refer to this line of thinking as Williamson's "anti-luminosity" argument.

In its classic formulation in Williamson (2000), the example chosen for *p* concerns a sensation, specifically a case of gradually feeling less cold).<sup>9</sup> But as Adrian Haddock (2011) has illustrated, the argument seems not difficult not transpose to a perceptual case, thus bringing out the obvious implications for disjunctivism. Consider a case of a subject supposedly having luminous self-knowledge of a proposition *p*. The anti-luminosity argument starts by asking us to imagine a case where the truth-value of *p* gradually moves from true to false. In the example provided by Haddock (2011, 30),

imagine a stretch of time between two intervals, at the beginning of which I see that your sweater is brown, but at the end of which I do not (perhaps this is a stretch of time during which your sweater is slowly starting to look a different colour, because the lights which make it impossible to tell the colours of things are slowly turning on).

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<sup>8</sup> It is good to say a little more Williamson's formulation of the relevant status as the subject being "in a position to know" (cf. Williamson 2000, 13). This formulation introduces a complication that it is worth remarking on briefly. It is clear that "being in a position to know" does not equate to knowledge: luminosity does not require that subjects know the contents of their minds at all times.<sup>8</sup> Instead, luminous mental states, simply by existing, somehow make it easy for the subject to gain self-knowledge. Williamson characterizes such a position in terms of a subject's ability to gain the relevant knowledge provided she wakeful and attentive. Here it is important to be careful. "Attention" might seem to imply a certain care in observation, and consequently to entail a perceptual model of self-knowledge. But observation should not as such be part of the relevant position to know. Instead, a mere need for "attention" should bring into focus the specific way in which such self-knowledge is made available by the relevant mental states: mere alertness or wakefulness is required for this knowledge to be acquired by its subject. In this sense inattention can be an obstacle to arriving at this knowledge, but a type of observational attention is not specifically required.

<sup>9</sup> See Williamson 2000, 97. For extensive discussions of Williamson's argument in this form, see Weatherson 2004, Wong 2008.

Accordingly, we imagine a time span from  $t$  through  $t + n$  over which the subject gradually stops seeing something (in this case, that a sweater is brown). So at  $t + n$  the subject is no longer seeing that the sweater is brown.

The second step of the argument is to suppose a type of safety or reliability condition on knowledge.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, where  $t$  and  $t + 1$  are an infinitenessimally short time period apart, if at  $t$  a subject knows that  $p$ , then at  $t + 1$   $p$  must be still be true. As Haddock puts the idea (2011, 30):

let us assume a certain sort of reliability principle for knowledge: for any times  $t$  and  $t + 1$ , where  $t$  and  $t + 1$  are any two times spaced only fractionally – say, one millisecond – apart, if at  $t$  one knows that something is the case, then at  $t + 1$  this very thing is the case.

In a rough and ready formulation to be further examined below, the idea here is that if  $p$  were to be false at  $t + 1$ , then at  $t$  we could not suppose the subject to have sufficiently reliably judged that  $p$  for her belief to count as knowledge. As we will see below, the idea here turns fundamentally on the supposition that ordinary human doxastic dispositions are inevitably merely finitely sensitive to changing conditions.

The third and final step of the anti-luminosity argument is to derive a contradiction from the combination of (1) the safety condition on knowledge; (2) the supposed luminosity of self-knowledge; and (3) the example of a gradual change in a subject's mental condition. From the safety condition it follows that where  $t$  and  $t + 1$  are some infinitesimally small fraction apart, if a subject knows  $p$  at  $t$ , then  $p$  is true at  $t + 1$  (just so if the subject knows  $p$  at  $t + 1$ , then  $p$  is still true at  $t + 2$ , etc.) As Haddock notes the implication (ibid.):

if at  $t$  I know that I see that your sweater is brown, then at  $t + 1$  I see that your sweater is brown.

In turn, from luminosity it follows that if  $p$  is true at  $t + 1$ , then  $t + 1$  the subject *knows* that  $p$  (just so for  $t + 2$ , etc.) Re-applying the safety condition, it in turn follows from the subject knowing that  $p$  at  $t + 1$ , that then at  $t + 2$  it is still true that she is seeing that the sweater is brown. And so on. But now assume that at  $t + n-1$  the subject is seeing that the sweater is brown. Then, if perceptual consciousness were luminous the

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<sup>10</sup> On the understanding of Williamson explicated in Wong (2008), this point is not derived from a reliability constraint on knowledge, but rather grounded in soritical reasoning. However, as pointed out by Amy Srinivasan, this is clearly at odds with Williamson's emphasis on reliability (Srinivasan 2015, 297).

subject at  $t + n - 1$  would (or could) know that she is seeing that the sweater is brown. From this it follows that the subject at  $t + n$  is seeing that the sweater is brown. But in Haddock's example we stipulated that at  $t + n$  the subject is no longer seeing that the sweater is brown. Contradiction. It seems we must deny that perceptual self-knowledge is luminous.

### 3. Responding to Anti-Luminosity

As several commentators have noted, much in Williamson's argument depends on the proper formulation of a safety condition on knowledge.<sup>11</sup> Consider again the step in Haddock's argument according to which

if at  $t$  I know that I see that your sweater is brown, then at  $t + 1$  I see that your sweater is brown.

From Haddock's exposition it is clear that this step is supposed to be grounded in two considerations: (i) knowing  $p$  requires suitable responsiveness to  $p$  being true; (ii) moreover, a capacity for such responsiveness must in some sense be limited in its sensitivity. Humans are simply not *perfectly* sensitive in detecting truths. Accordingly, the idea is that at  $t + 1$  should the subject believe herself *falsely* to be seeing a brown sweater, then at  $t$  the same belief would not qualify as knowledge, even if true.<sup>12</sup> And given the limited sensitivity of our capacities for detecting truths, it seems eminently plausible that  $t + 1$  the subject *will* still believe that she is perceiving a brown sweater. Consequently, this belief at  $t + 1$  had better be true.

As Srinivasan notes, several commentators have attempted to resist Williamson's argument by denying that the relevant claim—the sweater being brown at  $t + 1$ —does not in fact follow from a

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<sup>11</sup> Srinivasan 2015, Conee 2005. Neta and Rohrbaugh 2004 seek to refute the anti-luminosity argument by denying altogether that knowledge requires being safe in a relevant way.

<sup>12</sup> As Williamson puts the same point (Williamson 2000, 101)

[I]f one believes outright to some degree that a condition C obtains, when in fact it does, and at a very slightly later time one believes outright on a very similar basis to a very slightly lower degree that C obtains, when in fact it does not, then one's earlier belief is not reliable enough to constitute knowledge.

plausible safety condition on knowledge.<sup>13</sup> As these critics point out, the Williamson-style premise seems to require a safety condition along the lines that in order for a subject *S* to know that *p*, in very nearby possible worlds *S* needs to truly believe that *p*.<sup>14</sup> But this safety condition seems too strong: more plausibly, *S* knowing that *p* merely requires that in very nearby possible worlds *S* does *not falsely* believe that *p*. However, this safety condition is not sufficient for Williamson's argument: it does not entail that *p* obtains in  $t+1$ , since the subject may believe that *p* in *t*, but not in  $t + 1$ . As Selim Berker writes concerning Williamson's example of gradually feeling less cold (Berker 2008, p. 8):

[W]ho is to say that [...] as one gradually gets warmer and warmer during the course of the morning while carefully attending to how cold one feels, one stops feeling cold before one stops believing that one feels cold?

In response to these types of objections, Amia Srinivasan (2015) supports Williamson's rendering of safety by emphasizing, I think correctly, that implicit in the Williamsonian argument is a conception of our cognitive capacities, including those for gaining self-knowledge. In Srinivasan's characterization, the anti-luminosity argument relies fundamentally on a "plausible empirical supposition about the kind of creatures we are" (2015, 298). Here Srinivasan refers to the idea that, as finite products of evolution, we should acknowledge an inevitably limited sensitivity of our capacities for gaining knowledge.<sup>15</sup> For Srinivasan, this idea is what fundamentally underlies the claim if in *t* a subject knows *p*, then at  $t+1$  she will be likely continue to believe that *p*. According to Srinivasan, this "is just the kind of thing you would expect to be true of creatures like us. This is because we don't just believe at random. Our mental lives are structured by certain [finitely precise] dispositions" (2015, 303). For Srinivasan it follows that "If in condition *R*, *S* believes she is *F*, then for any condition *R'* very similar to *R*, *S* has some disposition in *R'* to believe she is *F*" (ibid).

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<sup>13</sup> I here include only a brief sketch of the debate on Williamson's safety condition. For more elaborate discussion, see Srinivasan 2015.

<sup>14</sup> For consideration of this type of safety condition, Weatherson 2004 and Vogel 2010. For discussion Srinivasan 2015, 298ff.

<sup>15</sup> For Williamson's original reliance on this idea, see Williamson 2000, 12, 97, 103-4.

My strategy in this paper is not to deny Srinivasan's "plausible supposition", or to join the above-discussed criticism of Williamson's safety condition. On the contrary, I think Srinivasan (and on her rendering, Williamson) is fundamentally *correct* that limitations are integral features of our cognitive capacities to detect truths, including, potentially, certain truths about our own mental lives.<sup>16</sup> Instead, I will provide a more limited defense of luminosity in the context of disjunctivism specifically.<sup>17</sup> In particular, I will argue that in the case of disjunctivism about perception it is the positing of a capacity of detect truths about the subject's own perceptual states that is fundamentally out of step with the disjunctivist's intentions. I will argue that the upshot is significant both for disjunctivism and our understanding of luminous self-knowledge in general.

#### 4. "Reflectivism" and Perceptual Self-Knowledge

In this section I will spell out a recently popular "reflectivist" way of thinking about certain forms of self-knowledge, developed perhaps most prominently by Matthew Boyle (2009, esp. 2011). The aim of the section will be to show that attributing this view to the disjunctivist undermines the apparent force of the anti-luminosity argument against the disjunctivist's view. While the aim of this section is this particular dialectical point, in the next section I show the connection between "reflectivism" and the Bifurcation Thesis, and the deeper significance of this Thesis for our understanding of the disjunctivist view.

In recent years, there has been significant attention for what can seem like a peculiar feature of certain type of self-knowledge.<sup>18</sup> With respect to some of mental states, it can seem our path to our self-knowledge is "transparent": in order to attain the relevant type of self-knowledge, it seems we merely

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<sup>16</sup> Indeed, I would be sympathetic to going further: it is arguably not merely an empirical truth but rather a *conceptual* truth that our capacities for detecting truths are limited. That is, I would venture that for any capacity to detect the truth of  $p$ , we can specify two conditions  $C$  and  $C'$  such that if the subject can detect  $p$ , then in  $C$  she inevitably believes that  $p$  in  $C'$ . My claim, then, is not to deny Srinivasan's idea that there are limits on our capacities for detecting truths, but rather to deny that such capacities account for the acquisition of perceptual self-knowledge.

<sup>17</sup> To be sure, the anti-luminosity argument is intended to apply generally.

<sup>18</sup> See Moran 2002 for a *locus classicus* of this observation.

need to conduct a first-order, object-directed investigation, and part of the investigation's outcome—gained for free, so-to-say—will be a bit of self-knowledge. In one of the familiar examples, this seems true for belief. To answer the question “What do I believe?”, it seems I need to merely turn my attention to the first-order question of what is the case in some stretch of the world, and I will obtain the relevant bit of self-knowledge about my beliefs. For example, by making up my mind that Napoleon won at Austerlitz, I can find out that I believe that Napoleon won at Austerlitz.

What explains “transparent” self-knowledge? For Matthew Boyle, this form of self-knowledge is associated with a type of “reflection”. In Boyle's exposition, his preferred “reflectivist” view contrasts with an “inferentialist” view, on which self-knowledge is the result of a type of inference from first-order judgments to second-order self-attributions (i.e. inferences from  $p$  to “I believe that  $p$ ”).<sup>19</sup> For Boyle, the fundamental mistake in the inferentialist view is that it understands the attaining of transparent self-knowledge as a genuine transition between two truly distinct beliefs with distinct contents (“ $p$ ” and “I believe that  $p$ ”). By contrast, here is how Boyle understands the notion of “reflection” (Boyle 2011, 227):

Instead of thinking of the subject as making an inference from  $P$  to  $I$  believe  $P$ , he can think of the subject as taking a different sort of step, from *believing*  $P$  to *reflectively judging* (i.e. consciously thinking to himself) I believe  $P$ . The step, in other words, will not be an inferential transition between *contents*, but a coming to explicit acknowledge a *condition* of which one is already tacitly aware. The traditional philosophical term for this sort of cognitive step is ‘reflection’, so I will call this a *reflective* approach to explaining transparency.

As Boyle has it in this passage, “transparent” self-knowledge is not a really a matter of forming a belief altogether distinct from the mental state of which it is self-knowledge (in this case, a belief). Instead, the “reflectivist” takes self-knowledge to involve “a coming to explicit acknowledge a *condition* of which one is already tacitly aware.” Transparent self-knowledge involves the *explication* of something already tacitly within the subject's consciousness, i.e. something already in some way part of the mental state of which this explication constitutes self-knowledge. As Boyle goes on to explain (ibid.):

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<sup>19</sup> This is the view defended by Byrne 2011.

[Reflectivism] explains this [self-knowledge] not by appeal to some mechanism or method that allows the subject to know an otherwise unknown fact about himself, but in terms of the nature of belief itself. [...] in the normal and basic case, believing *P* and knowing oneself to believe *P* are not two cognitive states; they are two aspects of *one* cognitive state---the state, as we might put it, of knowingly believing *P*.

As we might express Boyle's idea, doxastic attitudes are *self-conscious*: doxastic self-knowledge explicates a feature internal nature of doxastic attitudes themselves.<sup>20</sup>

Famously, Gareth Evans (1982) observed that perceptual experiences appear to be among the mental states of which it is possible to gain "transparent" self-knowledge.<sup>21</sup> In order to know what my visual experience is like, Evans says, it seems I merely need to form a perceptual judgment about the world and attach some phrase like "it visually seems to me that...". As Evans expresses the suggestion: "[The subject] goes through exactly the same procedure as he would go through if he were trying to make a judgment about how it is at this place now, but excluding any knowledge he has of an extraneous kind" (Evans 1982, 227). How would the "reflectivist" understand the inclusion of perception within the fold of "transparent" self-knowledge?<sup>22</sup> On the model discussed above for belief, she would claim that a type of self-awareness is already tacitly bound up with perceptual experience, such that attaining the relevant bit of self-knowledge ("it seems to me that...") would merely articulate something already present in the first-order state, i.e. the perceptual experience.<sup>23</sup>

Let me now return to epistemological disjunctivism. In the subsequent section I will argue that there is substantial philosophical significance in the connection between disjunctivism and the "reflectivist" view of self-knowledge. But in the remainder of this section my concern is merely with the tactical properties of the "reflectivist" view in the dialectical skirmish between disjunctivism and the anti-luminosity argument.

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<sup>20</sup> [how does this work; not topic; issue is what mode is knowledge-acquisition]

<sup>21</sup> Note the topic of "transparency" here is different from another type of "transparency" famously at issue in perception, viz. the claim that perception (re)presents only mind-independent objects and properties.

<sup>22</sup> Gareth Evans himself nowhere commits himself to a "reflectivist" view, although I believe it is plausible that his remarks tend in this direction. This topic is beyond the present discussion.

<sup>23</sup> The view that some type of self-awareness is involved in perceptual experience (or visual experience more broadly) is popular, e.g. with proponents of a self-representational view of consciousness (see Kriegel and Williford (2006) for an overview). However, as I have argued elsewhere [removed for review] there are significant differences between those views and the one I here associate with disjunctivism.

For the disjunctivist, a perceiving subject has “reflective access” to being in a perceptual condition. This is a bit of perceptual self-knowledge: by “reflection alone”, the subject can know that she is enjoying a perceptual experience. I propose here that the disjunctivist conceive of this bit of self-knowledge along the “reflectivist” lines developed above. Accordingly, this self-knowledge is not properly a cognitive achievement distinct from its object state, the perceptual experience. Instead, self-awareness is already part of this experience. Adrian Haddock himself shows awareness of the possibility of this position when in his version of the anti-luminosity argument he concedes that “unlike my perceptual knowledge that *P*, my knowledge that I perceive that *P* is, for [the disjunctivist], in some sense spontaneous.”<sup>24</sup> As Haddock describes the contrast between perceptual and “spontaneous” knowledge<sup>25</sup>: the object of spontaneous knowledge that *p* suffices to put me in a position to know that *p*, whereas the object of perceptual knowledge does not. That is, the object of perceptual knowledge does not by itself put me in a position to know this object; to know the latter, I need to bear a receptive nexus to the object, i.e. a capacity for detecting the truths in the relevant area. Applied to the example of perceptual knowledge: in order to know perceptually that *p* I require a perceptual capacity for detecting the truth that *p*. The same is not true for “spontaneous” knowledge: the object itself suffices for me to have or gain self-knowledge. I accordingly require no capacity for detection of the relevant truth: to know *that I am perceiving that p* requires no further capacity than my capacity for perceiving that *p*. On this “reflectivist” view, in gaining self-knowledge of my perceiving that *p* I am exploiting something internal to my exercise of that first-order perceptual capacity, not deploying a second-order capacity.<sup>26</sup>

The availability of this type of “reflectivist” conception of perceptual self-knowledge critically undermines the potency of the anti-luminosity argument in this area. As Srinivasan (2015) correctly

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<sup>24</sup> Haddock 2011, 29. For more on “spontaneous” self-knowledge, see Rödl 2007.

<sup>25</sup> More properly, the opposition is between “receptive” and “spontaneous” knowledge, to use the Kantian terminology (A51/B75). Perceptual knowledge is a species of receptive knowledge: i.e. a knowledge that requires sensitivity to an object independent of this knowledge itself.

<sup>26</sup> That this sort of position is outside of Srinivasan’s focus is evinced by her characterization of anti-luminosity as a failure of “introspection” (2015, fn. 3). On the view I am here recommending, luminous self-knowledge of perceptual experience is not the exercise of an introspective capacity.

diagnoses, the anti-luminosity argument depends crucially on the premise that it follows from empirically plausible limits on my cognitive and discursive capacities that, if I am to have self-knowledge of perceiving a brown sweater at  $t$ , I will also believe that I am perceiving a brown sweater at  $t+1$  (and if my self-knowledge is safe, in turn it follows that I am perceiving a brown sweater at  $t+1$ ). But the upshot of the “reflectivist” view is that the “plausible empirical assumption” of limits to our discursive capacities need not be accepted as applying to the perceptual self-knowledge that is relevant for the disjunctivist. In effect, while not overtly marked as a positive view of self-knowledge, in truth the anti-luminosity argument prejudices the nature of the account to be given. The idea of limits to the fine-grainedness of our discursive capacities fits a conception of self-knowledge on which such knowledge somehow arises through the *detection* of the relevant first-order mental states.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, for areas in which knowledge arises from the exercise of capacities for detecting relevant truths, the idea that the sensitivity of these capacities is limited may well be empirically plausible. But on the “reflectivist” view this type of capacity is not in play in attaining perceptual knowledge: self-knowledge is already in some sense (tacitly) part of the perceptual state known, and the path to self-knowledge is one of articulation of one’s conscious state, not arriving at a self-knowledgeable belief in virtue of the detection of a conscious state. There is no reason to suppose that articulation is limited in the way capacities for detection are.<sup>28</sup>

### 5. *The Bifurcation Thesis*

I have suggested that a “reflectivist” view of perceptual self-knowledge immunizes the disjunctivist to worries about luminosity. But by itself this does nothing render intelligible or plausible the “reflectivist” view of self-knowledge, or the way it fits the disjunctivist view of perceptual knowledge.

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<sup>27</sup> The abstract phrasing here is intended not to draw the analogy too close to observation, though some quasi-observational model would be a salient way of spelling out this variety of view.

<sup>28</sup> Of course such capacities may be limited in all sorts of ways: attention and ordinary mental functioning may only permit so much explicit self-knowledge at any time. But critically this is not the sort of limit on which the anti-luminosity argument depends. In particular, it does not follow that safety demands that if the subject knows  $p$  at  $t$ , then  $p$  is still true at  $t+1$ . What substantiates *that* entailment is the idea that for some suitable  $t$  and  $t + 1$ , a subject’s capacities for knowing  $p$  cannot be sufficiently sensitive to discriminate  $t$  and  $t+1$ . This idea plays no role in “reflective” self-knowledge.

Must the disjunctivist embrace “reflectivism” as a view of self-knowledge *simpliciter*? That is, must the disjunctivist argue that the anti-luminosity argument fails generally? Moreover, why does the disjunctivist hold that a perceptual experience’s *perceptual* character is reflectively available to the subject? Note here that many non-disjunctivist internalists will plausibly be sympathetic to a type of “reflectivism”, but may hold—*pace* the disjunctivist—that what is available for self-knowledge in this way is merely the conscious or phenomenal character of a visual experience, irrespective of whether the experience is veridical or not. That is, what is *not* available (by reflection, anyway) is that the subject is in a *perceptual* state.<sup>29</sup>

To answer these questions, we should more closely inspect the way “reflectivism” fits the disjunctivist view. Why hold that internal to (certain) mental states there is a type of self-awareness, i.e. an element explicable as a bit of self-knowledge? On one common view, this is in virtue of the way the content of such states includes a *self-representational* element.<sup>30</sup> For example, a perceptual state of a red apple may include a bit of content representing the subject as having an experience as of a red apple. Critically, this type of self-representation does not figure in the form of “reflectivism” defended by Matt Boyle, and it is not the view that I would suggest as part of an understanding of disjunctivism.<sup>31</sup> Instead, what motivates Boyle is that the *rationality* of certain a subject’s capacities is associated with a form of self-awareness.<sup>32</sup> For Boyle, exercises of these capacities—including thinking, judging, inferring, intending etc.—necessarily involve the activity of a self-aware subject, i.e. a subject of the sort expressed

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<sup>29</sup> Indeed, it may seem that the possibility skepticism of *requires* this, since skepticism depends on a subject not being capable of knowing whether or not she is hallucinating. For this worry, see e.g. Ranalli 2018. I address this worry elsewhere, [removed for purposes of review].

<sup>30</sup> For a number of such views, see the collection of papers in Kriegel and Williford 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Plausibly, self-representationalists would accept a type of “reflectivism” for self-knowledge of any conscious state, since typically the self-representational element is understood as explicating the conscious character of the state.

<sup>32</sup> See e.g. Boyle’s focus on “making up one’s mind” as a core case that involves “reflective” self-knowledge. The association of rationality with a type of self-awareness is, of course, common and classic, see e.g. [Korsgaard, intro book].

in explicit self-reference as “I”.<sup>33</sup> On the view defended by Boyle, it is the way self-awareness is internal to exercises of specifically rational capacities that underlies a subject’s “reflective” self-knowledge of mental states associated with those capacities (rather than e.g. a more general point about the nature of consciousness).<sup>34</sup>

Given this explication of the sort of “reflectivism” with which I am here concerned, we can now turn to the

**Bifurcation Thesis:** Our self-knowledge of distinctively rational states is structured in a manner unlike our self-knowledge of states that are not distinctively rational.

In essence, the Bifurcation Thesis articulates a claim that is entailed by the association between rationality and “reflective” self-knowledge: namely, that for rational beings mental self-knowledge is *not uniform*, being reflectively grounded for rational states and not grounded this way for non-rational states.<sup>35</sup> That is, one *type* of path to coming to know what I believe—viz. through operation of a rational first-order process like belief-formation—may not be available for coming to know that I have a painful sensation in my left toe. What this shows is that, *pace* the assumption in Haddock (2011), it really matters that the case at issue in Williamson’s original argument concerns self-knowledge of *a feeling of coldness*. If the Bifurcation Thesis is true, then there no easy transition from conclusions about this case to claims about self-knowledge generally. Moreover, while Williamson’s example assumes sensations as paradigm examples of supposedly luminous self-knowledge, for present purposes self-knowledge of rational states should be equally central to our considerations. In claiming luminous perceptual self-knowledge, there is no reason to think that the disjunctivist conceives of perceptual self-knowledge on the model of knowledge of sensations like coldness. Instead, I will suggest that the disjunctivist’s view turns precisely

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<sup>33</sup> It is important that the role of self-awareness is *necessary*; arguably provided a subject is rational, exercises of non-rational capacities, too, can be associated with the “I” (as in, “I have a painful sensation in my toe.”) I turn to this point in my discussion of the Bifurcation Thesis below.

<sup>34</sup> From this it would follow that, while we can attribute knowledge and perhaps even self-knowledge to non-rational animals, *reflective* self-knowledge is proprietary to rational beings.

<sup>35</sup> It is possible, perhaps, to claim that once rationality is present, *all* of a subject’s mental self-knowledge is reflectively grounded, even self-knowledge of non-rational states like sensations. I am not sure this view would be consistent with doing justice to the intimate connection between rationality and reflective self-knowledge, but the view at any rate goes beyond my defense of disjunctivism.

on the opposite point: a view of mature human perceptual states as distinctly *rational*.

For the disjunctivist, perceptual support for belief is both (1) factive and (2) reflectively accessible. In most presentations of the view, (1) is taken as the central driver of the view, while (2) is presented as raising a logically posterior question of self-knowledge; a question moreover that can be postponed without losing much understanding of the disjunctivist idea. Accordingly, instead of (2), most attention has been given to the question what is supposed to undergird the factive character of perceptual epistemic support, and specifically whether an answer to this question can be given based in the nature of the items that serve as the objects of perception. For Pritchard (2012), for example, these are *facts*: for Pritchard, it is a subject's perceiving *that the fridge is white* that entails the truth of this proposition.

Here, however, I want to suggest a different way of understanding the fundamental driver behind the way that the disjunctivist proposes to think of perceptual knowledge. On a "reflectivist" conception, exercises of a rational capacity, in the normal case, available for "reflective self-knowledge": thinking a thought, for example, by itself puts me in a position to know that I am thinking (and arguably what).<sup>36</sup> Now suppose the same is true for perception. Suppose, that is, that in exercising my capacity for perceiving (or multiple capacities, if that is more appropriate), I am in a position to know that I am in a perceptual state. Observe that this bit of self-knowledge is sufficient to entail the exclusion of skeptical scenarios, and to entail the existence of the environment that my perceptual experience appears to present. That is: on the way of understanding the disjunctivist that I am proposing, it is not the objects of perception or other factors that the disjunctivist's view of perceptual support for belief as factive. Rather, it is the fact that I as the subject know my state to be *perceptual* that does the relevant work. It is a bit of *self-knowledge*, as captured by (2), that plays the vital role in illuminating why the disjunctivist thinks that perceptual grounds ensure an opportunity for knowledge. Rather than the driver of the disjunctivist view, the disjunctivist's reference to the factivity of epistemic support merely highlights the subject's

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<sup>36</sup> I will here not address any implications for internalist-externalist debates of representational contents.

awareness of a guaranteed opportunity for knowledge. Perceptual support is factive because the subject is aware of being in a perceptual state, and accordingly being guaranteed an opportunity for knowledge, rather than the subject being aware of being guaranteed an opportunity for knowledge because she is aware of perceptual support that is factive.

Of course, this elaboration of disjunctivism leaves a major question overhanging disjunctivist view: how can we accept that enjoying a normal perceptual experience suffices to provide a subject with self-awareness that she is perceiving, given that the denial of just this point seems the upshot of the most basic skeptical reflection? I cannot address this question here<sup>37</sup>, but we should not let puzzlement on this score interfere with our attempt to simply understand the disjunctivist's view of perception. Failing to understand how there can be "reflective" perceptual self-knowledge can blind us to the importance of just this sort of knowledge in the way the disjunctivist understands our justification for perceptual knowledge. Instead of answering this question directly, then, I will end this discussion by addressing the remaining positive question for the disjunctivist view: what is the significance of the disjunctivist viewing perception as involving a "rational capacity" or "rational capacities"? The question seems pressing because unlike thought or inference, perception seems a paradigm of a capacity shared by non-rational creatures. I also hope that addressing this question will do *something* to give confidence that the disjunctivist may be able to answer the above challenge.

On the version of disjunctivism I aim to capture here, an understanding of the rational character of perceptual experience needs to start from an appreciation of perception (and the capacities involved in it) against the background of encompassing epistemic capacities, the full exercise of which involves not merely perception but also subsequent, knowledgeable judgment.<sup>38</sup> In turn, the disjunctivist thinks of these epistemic capacities as paradigm examples of rationality, involving as they do the subject's rational

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<sup>37</sup> See Ranalli 2018 on this point. See my [reference removed for review] for an answer I find attractive.

<sup>38</sup> See McDowell 2011 and Kern 2017 for views that emphasize perceptual capacities for knowledge.

responsiveness (in the form of judgment) to perceptually provided grounds.<sup>39</sup> The resultant disjunctivist picture, as I understand it, is as follows: owing to the rational nature of the subject's perceptual capacities, perception puts the subject in a position that ensures knowledge, viz. a state of a self-awareness of her being in a *perceptual* state. In judgment, subsequently, the subject exploits the awareness of her perceptual condition by judging in corresponding ways, thereby converting an opportunity for knowledge into knowledge *sans phrase*.<sup>40</sup> Throughout this process, the subject has exercised a single capacity, which encompasses self-awareness in perception and self-awareness in judgment: a capacity for perceptually-coming-to-know the relevant propositions.

### 5. Conclusion

I will conclude. As I have suggested, disjunctivism's reliance on "reflective access" to perceptual support for belief can seem vulnerable to a version of Williamson's popular anti-luminosity argument. In defending disjunctivism from such a charge, I have argued that there is an important and under-discussed aspect of the disjunctivist position: the close association between luminous self-knowledge and the disjunctivist conception of perceptual knowledge. It is worth briefly marking the philosophical substance of this point. As pointed out by Neta and Rohrbaugh (2004), the significance of Williamson's anti-luminosity argument lies in part in "the continuing absence of a robust account of the distinctive epistemological features of introspection" (2004, p. 405). Similarly, Srinivasan writes that "a large part of what is at stake in the debate about anti-luminosity is a certain vision of what kind of creatures we are, empirically speaking" (Srinivasan 2015, 295). On my view, disjunctivism rests at heart on an orientation on these fundamental philosophical questions: a distinct, non-observational type of self-knowledge is an essential feature of our nature as rational beings. Critically, such self-knowledge is not acquired through the exercise of some mechanism or method that allows for the detection of our mental states. As I have

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<sup>39</sup> In this sense, I take the disjunctivist to understand internalism as essential to the rational achievement that is mature human knowledge.

<sup>40</sup> But what determines which judgments are appropriate given a perceptual experience? This is not a question I can take up here, but my preferred view is that it is the *representational content* of an experience that plays this role.

argued, it is this supposition that lies at the heart of Williamson's critique of luminosity. Instead, the disjunctivist should embrace "reflectivism" in holding that self-awareness is already implicit in the nature of first-order rational states, and the acquisition of corresponding self-knowledge is not an independent epistemic achievement, but rather a mere explication of something already in some sense consciously present. On my understanding, this idea drives the disjunctivist's factive conception of perceptual support for belief, which is grounded in the subject's self-awareness of exercising her perceptual capacities. The conclusion is that in order to be successful against disjunctivism, a Williamsonian type of anti-luminosity argument faces additional work incorporating the specific way self-knowledge functions within the disjunctivist view. *Pace Srinivasan (2015)*, a "plausible empirical" premise concerning the limits of our human doxastic dispositions cannot by itself do this work.

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