

## TWO ARGUMENTS FOR SHALLOWNESS

*Indrek Lõbus, A Priori Seminar, 19.11.19*

### *1. Williamson's argument: bottom-up vs top-down*

A **bottom-up** criterion is given by examples. "I know a posteriori whether it is sunny. I know a priori that if it is sunny then it is sunny. Such examples are projectible. We learn from them how to go on in the same way, achieving fair levels of agreement in classifying new cases without collusion."

A **top-down** criterion is "a direct statement of the difference between the a priori and the a posteriori in epistemologically significant theoretical terms". Different top-down criteria are possible. The criterion that Williamson targets appeals to **ways of knowing**: "A way of knowing is a priori if and only if it is independent of experience. It is a posteriori if and only if it depends on experience."

The **Norman-scenarios** are meant to illustrate two things:

- (1) Experience can play a *justifying* role without playing an *evidential* role. The top-down criterion does not give us an exhaustive distinction between ways of knowing.
- (2) Two cases of knowledge that the bottom-up criterion puts on different sides of the distinction can fall in the same gap left by the top-down criterion.

**Conclusion:** The classification given by the *bottom-up* criterion is epistemologically shallow. It isn't tracking distinctions between ways of knowing.

- [Though Williamson takes himself to be criticizing the distinction, not a way of drawing it.]

**Question:** How does this amount to a criticism of the top-down criterion?

### *2. Sgaravatti's gloss: drawing a line*

The top-down criterion is to be evaluated based on how well it can *recover* the bottom-up classification. Given (1), we face a **dilemma**: either we treat the third role of experience as counting against apriority or we do not. Either way, the refined top-down criterion will not recover the bottom-up classification.

**Objection:** The purpose of a top-down criterion is not to classify cases of knowledge. It is to *explain* what the difference between a priori and a posteriori knowledge consists in. Thus, a top-down criterion tells us what, if anything, is epistemologically significant in the bottom-up criterion.

If our top-down criterion states that the a priori-a posteriori distinction is a distinction between ways of knowing, then the bottom-up criterion must also be concerned somehow with ways of knowing. We can have different views about how exactly.

- **One option:** The bottom-up criterion *is* tracking a distinction between ways of knowing. Different ways of knowing are paradigmatically associated with different truths. By classifying cases bottom-up, we are relying on shared epistemological stereotypes.

It is not significant *where* the line between cases of knowledge is drawn bottom-up. Different stereotypes would lead to different bottom-up classifications. What matters is *on what basis* it is drawn.

### 3. A different gloss on Williamson's argument

The two criteria are not after the same distinction. The bottom-up criterion is tracking a **secondary** a priori-a posteriori distinction between *truths*:

- A truth is a priori iff it can be known in an a priori way. A truth is a posteriori iff it can be known in an a posteriori way (and cannot be known in an a priori way).
  - [The point against Sgaravatti still stands. The top-down criterion is not supposed to recover a classification of truths.]

The bottom-up criterion would still be epistemologically significant, if it tracked *all* the ways in which truths can and cannot be known. But, given (2), it does not.

The top-down criterion is **motivated** by the prima facie epistemological significance of the bottom-up criterion. If the bottom-up criterion is not significant, the top-down criterion is unmotivated.

**Objection:** The bottom-up criterion helps us *latch onto* something significant without being significant?

### 4. A new shallowness argument: top-down only

If our starting assumption is that the a priori-a posteriori distinction is a distinction between ways of *knowing*, then we must be able to identify cases of knowing independently of the a priori-a posteriori distinction. We must rely on a **neutral** conception of knowing.

The a priori-a posteriori distinction will then be given in terms of two different qualifications to the neutral conception. The result is that a priori and a posteriori knowledge get treated as knowledge **plus** something extra.

- S knows a priori that  $2+2=4$  iff 1) S knows that  $2+2=4$  and 2) does so without relying on evidence delivered by experience.

The a priori-a posteriori distinction is then not a distinction between *kinds* of knowledge but between ways in which knowledge may be *implemented*. This is a psychological distinction.

The only *epistemological* moral that one could draw from any such account concerns not the respect in which a priori knowledge is *different* from a posteriori knowledge but the respect in which they are the *same*.

**Attending:** Carrie Ichikawa Jenkins, Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa, Sonia Roca Royes, Giovanni Merlo, Xintong Wei, Paul Conlan, Crispin Wright, Indrek Lobus, Peter Sullivan, Giacomo Melis.

**Presenting:** Indrek Lobus

**Topic:** Research presentation: Two Arguments for Shallowness

- **Jonathan** pointed out that there are many ways to develop a ‘top-down’ criterion. **Crispin** suggested that if we were to start afresh on the bottom-up criterion we might not begin with the thought that they are ‘independent from experience’, rather they are things you could know just by thinking (somehow).
- **Giovanni** wondered how exactly to understand the notion of ‘shallowness’. **Indrek** suggested that the bottom-up criterion does not track ways of knowing, so might be considered ‘shallow’, but at this stage it is indeed unclear what ‘shallowness’ amounts to, but we can say that ‘epistemologically shallow’ is set against the ‘epistemically significant’ role of top-down distinctions.
- **Peter** wondered what ‘experience’ means in (1) – it appears like a mass term, but the definition of a priority appears to look like it fits that no particular experience is involved in the justification. Does this shift create the gap between enabling and evidential roles for experience. **Jonathan** wondered why the formulation of a priority need not be understood in the mass sense. **Peter** agreed that there should be no such distinction in the formulation.
- **Giacomo** wondered whether **Indrek’s** gloss of and objection to Sgaravatti’s argument suggests that the bottom-up criterion is insignificant. **Indrek** suggested that once your theory defines a priority in terms of ways of knowing it seems to be inappropriate to say that e.g. Mathematics is known a priori and leave it at that. **Crispin** wondered what Sgaravatti says against this. **Indrek** suggested that Sgaravatti aims to suggest that the top-down criteria is not exhaustive so that won’t recover some bottom-up cases which seem paradigmatic. **Indrek** suggested that once you’ve accepted that top-down theorising is explanatory not classificatory you lose the force of the bottom-up examples being paradigmatic. **Sonia** suggested that the bottom-up distinction puts forth contents, not ways of knowing.
- **Indrek** clarified that the top-down distinction differentiates ways of knowing, but the second formulation tracks what you *can* know a priori or a posteriori. A distinction between ways of knowing need not give you a distinction between what you *can* know in an a priori way. **Crispin** pointed out that the bottom-up approach is only given in terms of propositions, so it is unclear how we can recover talk of truths that can be known at this stage. **Giovanni** wondered why a

bottom-up approach could not be given in terms of episodes of knowing. **Indrek** suggested that perhaps we cannot run the Norman scenarios in this case.

- **Giovanni** pointed out that just knowing that things fall in the middle of a distinction does not show that the ends of the distinction are not important.
- **Crispin** wondered whether a theory which proceeds without classification of paradigm cases could be reputable – that is, why would we think of a theory which misses our paradigm cases as reputable. Further, the aim of the Norman case is to show that our intuitive classification of Norman’s knowledge is uncomfortable whatever way it goes.
- **Giovanni** wondered why the a priori/a posteriori distinction is not one between kinds of knowledge. Further, why if the distinction is between ways of knowing must it be psychological rather than epistemological. **Indrek** suggested that what we should understand the theorist is not giving an epistemological distinction because the theorist is not giving an account of what it is for a belief to be e.g. knowledge or justified.