

Master's in Philosophical Knowledge:
Foundations, Methods, Applications

Bergamo
Pavia

5. Knowledge first

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lecture aims

- to look at knowledge-first epistemology and the differences between it and traditional epistemology

traditional epistemology

- focussed on belief
- knowledge to be defined in terms of belief and other conditions
- knowledge not a mental state
- mental states always knowable by introspection (luminous)
- concerned with building knowledge from indubitable (certain) foundations (foundationalism v. I)

knowledge-first epistemology

- focussed on knowledge
- other states to be defined in terms of knowledge
- knowledge is a mental state
- mental states not always knowable by introspection (not luminous)
- knowledge and probability built on evidence (=knowledge)(foundationalism v.2)
- indubitable foundations not possible

traditional and knowledge-first epistemology

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-
- knowledge the norm for belief and assertion
 - evidence = knowledge
 - epistemic probability = conditionalizing on knowledge

knowing as a mental state

traditional epistemology (TE)

- belief is a mental state
- the set of states of knowing is a subset of states of believing
- that subset is defined by additional conditions on knowledge, e.g.
 - ▶ truth
 - ▶ justification
 - ▶ etc.
- according to Williamson, TE holds knowing to be a metaphysical hybrid

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is this true? how should we understand this claim?

are mental states luminous?

a state X is luminous if and only if a subject in state X is always in a position to know that they are in state X

more generally and precisely ...

A condition C is luminous iff
(L) For every case α , if in α C obtains, then in α one is in a position to know that C obtains.

are mental states luminous?

a state X is luminous if and only if a subject in state X is always in a position to know that they are in state X

perceiving a tree is not luminous, because I might perceive a tree but not know that I am — I might suspect that I am hallucinating etc.

however, the the state:
having a visual experience as of seeing a tree
is (according to traditional philosophy) luminous

are mental states luminous?

likewise, according to traditional epistemology, belief is luminous

(whether, in traditional epistemology, *knowledge* is luminous is contentious; knowing is rejected as a mental state because it is not luminous)

are mental states luminous?

Williamson's anti-luminosity argument

important premise used by Williamson

safety

if S knows that p in case α , then in any very similar case α' , it is true that p

similarity is relative to the belief-forming method

are mental states luminous?

Williamson's anti-luminosity argument

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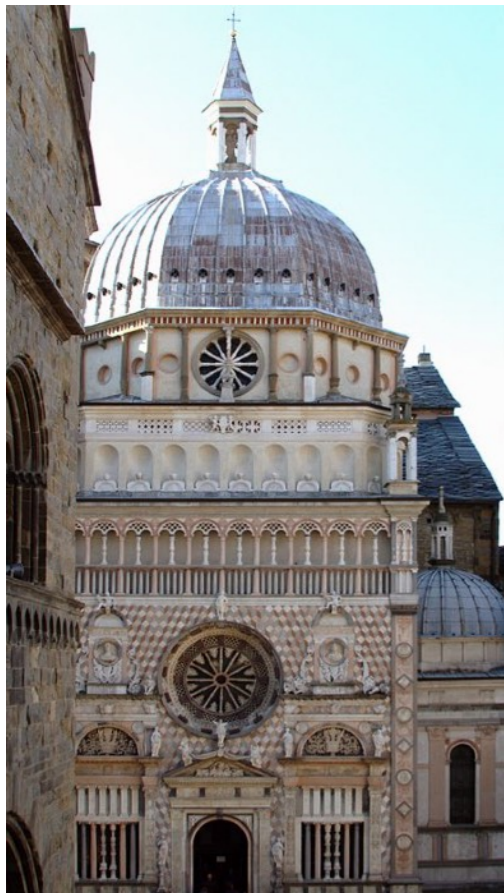
safety embodies the idea that knowledge must be reliable, its truth is not truth by luck

are mental states luminous?

Williamson's anti-luminosity argument

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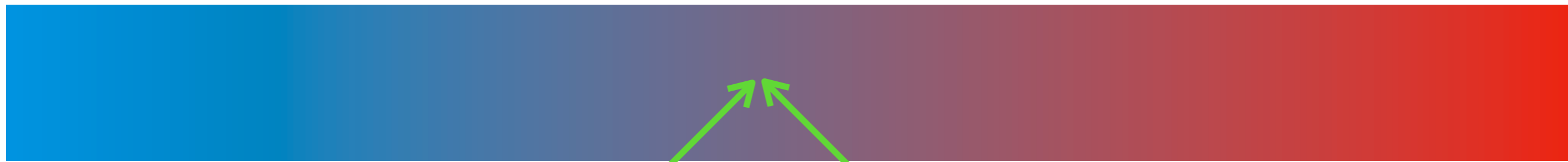
S judges by eyesight that the Cappella Colleoni is over 30m tall

assume that Cappella Colleoni is 30.02m tall

does S know that the Cappella Colleoni is over 30m tall?

are mental states luminous?

Williamson's anti-luminosity argument



feeling cold

feeling hot

α : S feels cold

α' : S does not feel cold

safety

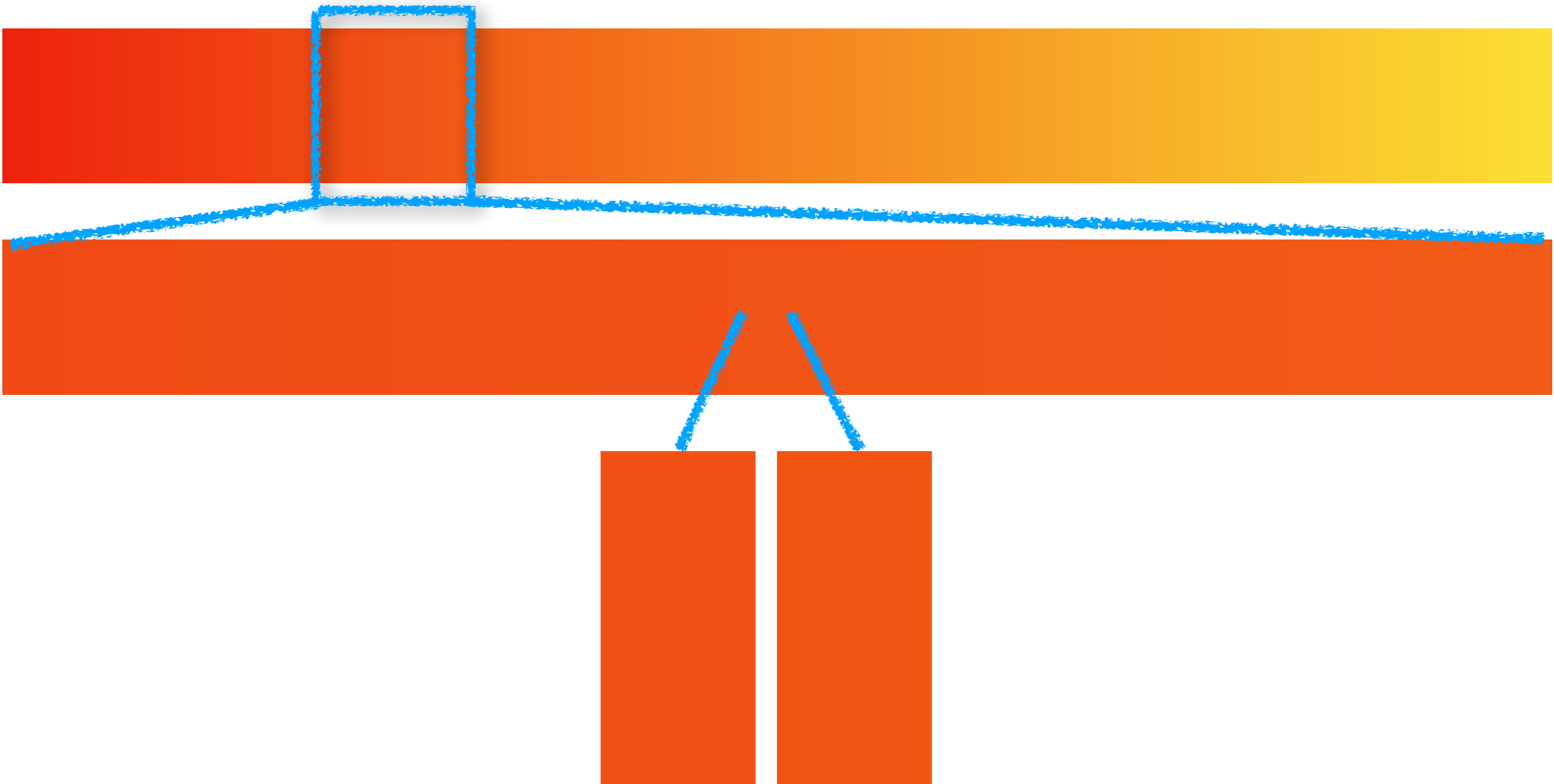
in α S does not know that S feels cold

α : S does not know that S feels cold

luminosity
is false

are mental states luminous?

a related anti-luminosity argument



are mental states luminous?

a related anti-luminosity argument



you cannot distinguish the two experiences you have

are they the same experience?

are mental states luminous?

are they the same experience?

yes

absurd
consequence
....

no

then the
nature of each
experience is
not luminous

are mental states luminous?

are they the same experience?

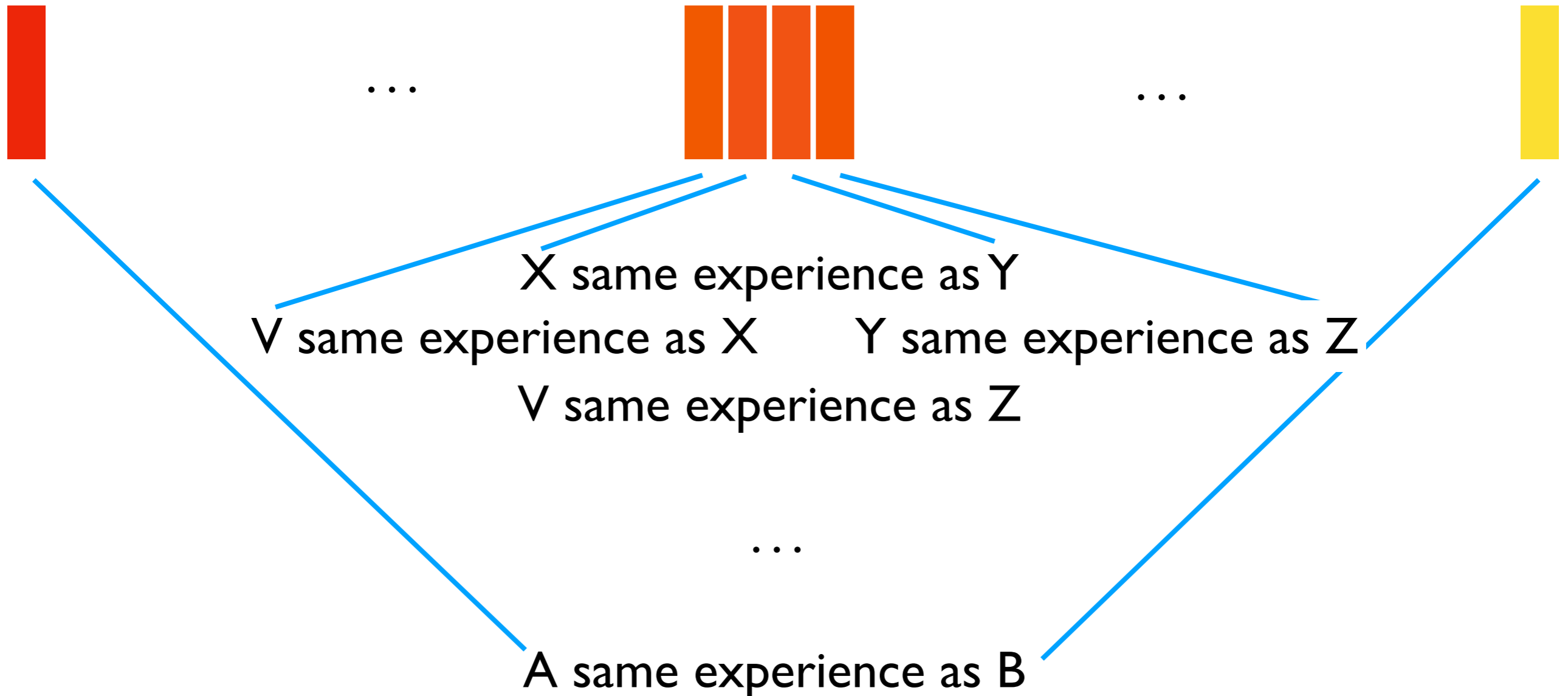
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are mental states luminous?



X and Y are different experiences, but S cannot distinguish X and Y

does this refute luminosity?

are mental states luminous?



X and Y are different experiences, but S cannot distinguish X and Y

converse-luminosity

a state X is conversely luminous if and only if a subject is *not* in state X is always in a position to know that they are not in state X

S is in state X

luminosity: S knows that S is in X

converse luminosity: S knows that S is not in Y

therefore

S can distinguish X and Y

are mental states luminous?



X and Y are different experiences, but S cannot distinguish X and Y

so this case refutes the combination of luminosity and converse luminosity

but luminosity does not imply converse luminosity
(consider being awake and not being awake)

so this case does not refute luminosity alone

are mental states luminous?



X and Y are different experiences, but S cannot distinguish X and Y

so this case does not refute luminosity alone

hence Williamson needs a different argument to show that S does not know that S is in X
this is supplied by the safety argument

are mental states luminous?

consequences of anti-luminosity

for evidence

in order to be rational, one must be in a position to know what one's evidence is (i.e. evidence must be luminous)

hence evidence cannot be knowledge
(but might be belief or justified belief)

are mental states luminous?

consequences of anti-luminosity

for the Cartesian project

Descartes's project assumes that foundations for knowledge are to be found in knowledge of one's own mental states
e.g. if I am thinking, I am in a position to know that I am thinking

are mental states luminous?

consequences of anti-luminosity

for empiricism

Moritz Schlick's version of empiricism: protocol sentences report inner experiences, to provide certainty

certainty and indubitable foundations

what is certainty?

feeling of confidence
betting disposition
indubitable
cannot have counterexamples/counterevidence
foundations for theory construction
self-evidence

foundationalism v.2

knowledge as a foundation

Williamson treats knowledge/evidence as a foundation for other knowledge claims and for rational probabilities ('proportion your beliefs to the evidence')

this comes close to evidentialism
but as we saw $E=K$ + evidentialism leads to scepticism

so some states of knowing must have the status of being justified,
but not justified by further knowledge/evidence

foundationalism v.2

knowledge as a foundation

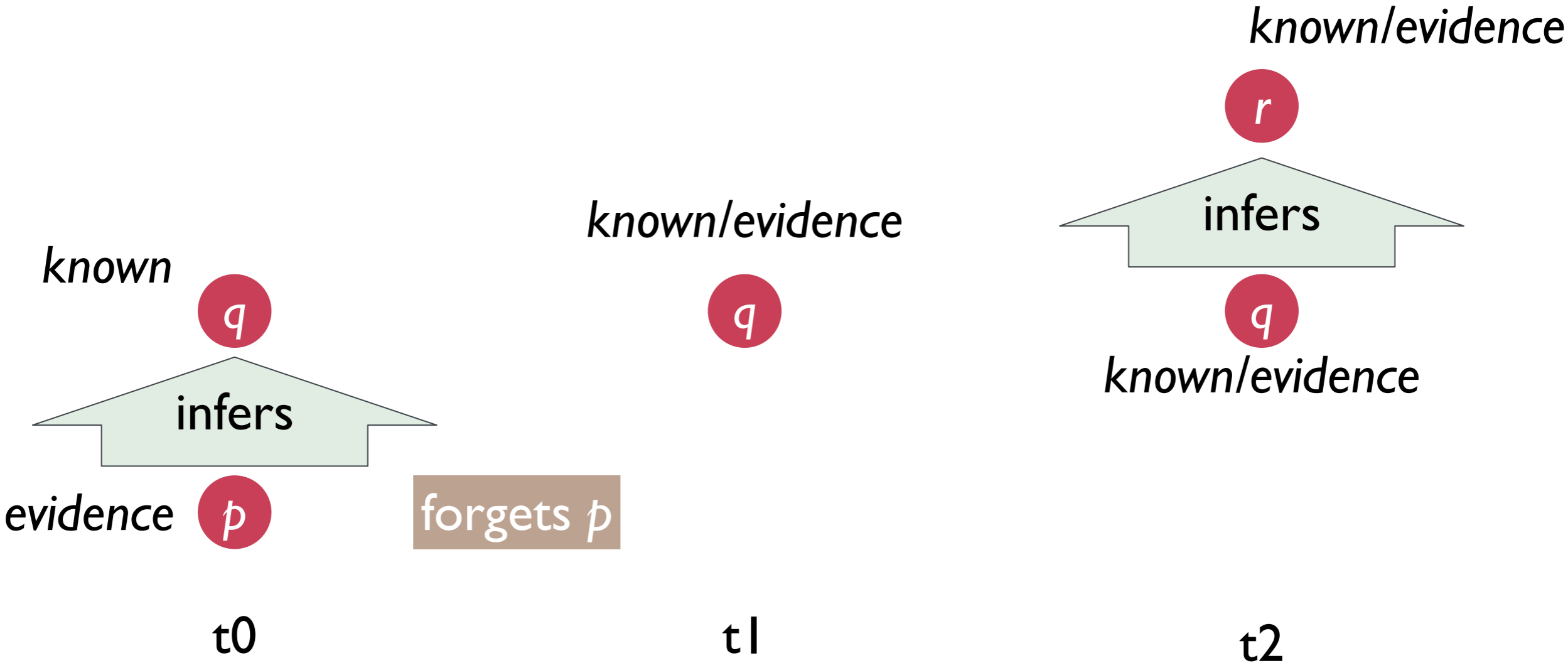
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note though that this means that inferred knowledge can also be 'foundational' — further knowledge can be justified by reference to this knowledge/evidence, not to 'ultimate' foundations

e.g. knowledge originally based on evidence that is now forgotten remains as evidence

foundationalism v.2

knowledge as a foundation



reading

see reading list at: http://www.alexanderbird.org/Teaching/Reading_lists.pdf