



An Appraisal of Accessism: Strengths, Limitations, and Theoretical Boundaries

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Abstract

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This paper offers a critical evaluation of Accessism as a nascent framework in modern epistemology, emphasising accessibility and exposure as essential prerequisites for knowledge acquisition. This critique contends that, although the theory provides a current and contextually pertinent extension of conventional epistemological issues especially with structural disparities in information access its overall contribution is conceptually and logically constrained. The approach assesses Accessism on three primary dimensions: originality, coherence, and explanatory scope. The theory is argued to risk conceptual triviality by formalising what seems to be an intuitive and already implicit condition of knowledge, while also demonstrating theoretical imbalance due to inadequate engagement with fundamental epistemic criteria, including justification, truth, and belief assessment. Moreover, the critique underscores problems of overgeneralisation, especially with structural ignorance, and points out persistent tensions related to circularity and normative foundation. The research suggests, through comparison analysis with established epistemological traditions, that Accessism should be seen not as an independent theory, but as a supplemental meta-framework that enhances current approaches rather than supplanting them. Its importance is in elucidating the structural conditions of knowledge; nonetheless, its enduring significance is contingent upon more conceptual refinement and integration with fundamental epistemological issues.

Keywords: Appraisal, Accessism, Strengths, Limitations, Theoretical Boundaries.

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Introduction

Throughout its history, epistemology has focused on the examination of knowledge via the lenses of belief, justification, and truth. The field has mostly focused on internal cognitive processes and the criteria that establish whether beliefs can be classified as knowledge. The requirements encompass older models like

justified true belief (JTB) as well as modern discussions on epistemic justification and reliability. They generally function under the implicit premise that the subject possesses the requisite knowledge for belief formation. Although these methodologies have produced substantial findings, they often operate on this presumption. Although this assumption has



undergone minimal scrutiny, it conceals a basic aspect of knowledge that transcends the immediate focus of conventional epistemic research.

In reaction to this neglect, accessism arises, highlighting the structural aspects that facilitate knowledge (Green & Ezenwa, 2026). It contends that accessibility and exposure are not only incidental factors but essential conditions for information acquisition. The objective of accessism is to shift epistemological analysis from a narrow emphasis on internal justification to a more comprehensive framework that considers the impacts of the environment, society, and technology. This transformation is particularly noteworthy within the context of a current global society marked by discrepancies in educational access, digital divides, and uneven distribution of informational resources.

The philosophical status of accessism remains subject to critical assessment, even though it is intuitively attractive and contextually pertinent. Green and Ezenwa (2026) believe that knowledge relies on accessibility and exposure. This remark initially seems to represent a self-evident truth. Mach et al.'s 2020 research posits that knowledge necessitates interaction with information, hence making access to some sort of information logically essential. The statement of a necessary condition, in isolation, does not represent a significant advancement in theoretical comprehension. Consequently, a critical inquiry is whether accessism provides authentic epistemic understanding or simply formalises what has long been tacitly recognised within established frameworks.

The focus on structural factors raises issues about theoretical equilibrium. Green and Ezenwa (2026) assert that accessism poses a challenge to the essential epistemic issues of justification, truth, and belief assessment by prioritising access and exposure. The absence of a robust rationale for integrating these traditional criteria within its framework may render the theory inadequate or excessively simplistic. It is uncertain if accessism can effectively resolve enduring epistemological issues, such as scepticism and Gettier-type paradoxes, or if it only recontextualises the circumstances in which

these challenges arise.

This study aims to critically evaluate Accessism to ascertain its originality, coherence, and explanatory capacity. It questions whether the theory significantly expands epistemology or if its contributions are better appropriately regarded as supplemental rather than basic. Accessism will be contextualised within the broader framework of epistemic theory, with both its merits and shortcomings being emphasised through this analysis.

Summary of Accessism

Accessism is a novel epistemological framework that seeks to highlight the structural conditions essential for knowledge acquisition. The central premise posits that knowledge is not merely a function of belief, truth, and justification; it is fundamentally contingent upon two prior conditions: accessibility and exposure (Harris et al., 2018). This hypothesis is central to the argument. Carter (2022) asserts that the development of beliefs and, hence, knowledge is unattainable without access to relevant information and exposure to important epistemic material. Accessism introduces a pre-epistemic dimension to traditional epistemological theories, positioning structural variables prior to cognitive evaluation. From the standpoint of accessibilityism, the term "accessibility" refers to the availability of information to an individual. This encompasses not only access to physical or technological resources, such as books, digital materials, or educational institutions, but also access to cognitive and linguistic resources, which influence a subject's capacity to meaningfully engage with the provided material (Raniolo, 2025). Kar et al. (2024) assert that accessibility is not a binary state; instead, it occurs on a spectrum shaped by socio-economic, cultural, and technological influences. The concept of exposure is closely related to this idea, denoting the real contact between a subject and accessible information (Goyanes & Demeter, 2022). Accessibility pertains to the potential for involvement, while exposure relates to the realisation of that potential. Factors such as educational limitations, societal conditioning,

or algorithmic filtering in digital contexts may result in an individual having access to extensive knowledge without actual exposure to it. This may occur. Consequently, accessism distinguishes between the mere existence of information and the successful conveyance of that knowledge to the individual cognisant of it. These principles are unified under the overarching notion of structural mediation, which emphasises that knowledge acquisition is always situated within a network of contexts that either facilitate or constrain it (Hicks, 2022). The knowledge individuals possess is influenced by structures such as educational systems, media infrastructures, cultural standards, and political institutions. These structures influence both access to and exposure to external information. From this viewpoint, knowledge is not solely an individual cognitive accomplishment but is instead a result influenced by the system's structure. Green and Ezenwa (2026) assert that accessism elucidates the existence of structural ignorance. Accessism underscores forms of ignorance stemming from institutional restrictions to access and exposure, as opposed to conventional perspectives that regard ignorance as a deficiency in belief or reasoning. Structural ignorance may persist despite the availability of reliable information if such information is either challenging to acquire or distributed unevenly. This hypothesis accounts for the disparities in epistemic knowledge among different social groups, avoiding the attribution of ignorance solely to individual shortcomings. Accessism is a theoretical framework positing that access and exposure are essential, but insufficient, prerequisites for the development of beliefs, which subsequently underpin justification and knowledge (Green & Ezenwa, 2026). This layered approach seeks to include elements traditionally considered external or peripheral, hence expanding the scope of epistemology. The anticipated contribution of Accessism is dual in nature. Theoretically, this attempt aims to expand epistemological analysis by highlighting the structural prerequisites of knowledge. It offers a framework for analysing issues such as epistemic inequality, information poverty, and the impact of technology on the distribution of knowledge. It aims to present itself as a theory

that is both philosophical and socially attuned.

Strengths of Accessism

Green and Ezenwa (2026) assert that a significant advantage of accessism is its ability to illuminate some facets of epistemic discourse that have remained obscured for an extended period. Conventional theories of knowledge often presume that an individual is already capable of forming beliefs about the world; however, they seldom scrutinise the process via which that individual attains such a capability. Accessism highlights the prerequisites that enable epistemic engagement by prioritising accessibility and exposure. While seemingly simple, this clarification possesses profound philosophical implications since it uncovers a foundational layer that underpins all knowledge claims.

This is intricately linked to the ability of accessism to effectively integrate structural, social, and technological elements into epistemology (Boschen et al., 2024; Horn et al., 2022). The acquisition of knowledge has become progressively challenging in this era marked by swift technical advancements and global information networks. The circumstances surrounding the acquisition of information have become progressively intricate. (Green & Ezenwa, 2026) Accessism provides a conceptual framework for analysing how digital infrastructure, educational systems, and socio-economic disparities affect the knowledge individuals may attain. Consequently, the framework is especially relevant for analysing contemporary issues such as the digital divide, algorithmic bias, and disparities in educational access, which traditional epistemology inadequately addresses independently.

Concerning the management of ignorance, the theory exhibits an additional significant advantage. By introducing the concept of structural ignorance, accessism expands the comprehension of ignorance. Green and Ezenwa (2026) assert that this approach recognises that ignorance can be systematically generated and perpetuated by external factors. This theory posits that ignorance is not solely a result of

individual cognitive deficiencies or reasoning failures, but can also be generated and sustained by environmental influences. This shift is significant not only ethically but also explanatorily, as it facilitates a more sophisticated analysis of epistemic responsibility. Individuals may be uneducated not due to a lack of effort in seeking knowledge, but rather because the necessary structural elements for acquiring such information are either absent or distorted.

The formalisation of the interdependencies among access, exposure, belief, and knowledge represents another manner in which accessism enhances epistemological analysis (Green & Ezenwa, 2026). This results in a more nuanced account of the knowledge acquisition process, wherein traditional elements like belief and reasoning are situated within a broader framework of facilitating variables. This structural arrangement elucidates the logical progression via which knowledge is facilitated, hence enhancing the conceptual framework of epistemology.

The practical significance of accessism should not be underestimated. The emphasis on accessibility and exposure has substantial implications for fields like as education, governance, and technology system design. It underscores the importance of inclusive educational practices, the fair allocation of informational resources, and the ethical responsibilities of digital platforms for the modification of user exposure to knowledge. Accessism connects abstract philosophical inquiry with practical societal challenges, demonstrating how epistemological ideas might inform initiatives to address social injustice (Felder, 2025). Accessism seeks to tackle the problem of social inequality.

Collectively, these advantages suggest that accessism significantly enhances epistemic thought. It not only critiques existing frameworks but also provides additional tools for understanding the conditions that contribute to the creation and distribution of knowledge. Conversely, the attributes that constitute its strengths also provide considerable challenges, especially concerning its distinctiveness,

breadth, and balance within the broader epistemological framework (Hourdequin, 2024; Mosinyan, 2024).

Critical Limitations

Accessionism is a strong and independent epistemological framework; nonetheless, it has some fundamental limitations that challenge its position as such. This persists despite its intellectual allure and practical utility. The matter of conceptual triviality is the most significant among these issues. The fundamental assertion that knowledge entails access and exposure seems indisputable; nonetheless, this very fact renders it potentially cognitively uninteresting (Keller et al., 2025). Asserting that knowledge requires access to the relevant material may merely reiterate an obvious prerequisite. Although accessism effectively formalises this intuition, it remains unclear whether this formalisation represents a theoretical innovation or simply a rearticulation of longstanding assumptions.

The issue of uniqueness is intricately linked to this subject. Established traditions, such social epistemology and externalism, encompass numerous notions associated with accessism. These insights can be located in their nascent state. These frameworks have long recognised the significance of environmental and structural elements in the creation of knowledge. Consequently, Accessism risks being perceived as derivative rather than innovative, especially if it fails to meaningfully distinguish its principal contributions from these established methodologies. The theory struggles to substantiate its claim of distinctiveness due to its failure to offer a more explicit articulation of what is specifically explanatory within its framework.

A substantial problem exists about theoretical imbalance. Accessism has the ability to marginalise the evaluative dimensions of epistemology, including justification, truth, and the normative assessment of belief, as it prioritises structural variables like accessibility and exposure. Access alone does not ensure epistemic trustworthiness; one may possess

extensive access to falsehoods or disinformation. Likewise, exposure does not ensure critical engagement or sound reasoning (Abiri & Buchheim, 2022). Without a thorough elucidation on how ideas generated under conditions of access should be assessed, accessism remains inadequate. It delineates the method via which knowledge is generated, although it does not elucidate how it is rendered valid.

The theory's approach to access presents a circularity issue. Accessing information often necessitates prior knowledge or skills, such as literacy, linguistic proficiency, or familiarity with digital technologies. This leads to the establishment of a recursive reliance, wherein access is contingent upon preceding forms of epistemic acquisition. Accessism fails to fully elucidate how the initial layer of access is established, hence questioning its capacity to offer a basic explanation or only shifting the issue to a prior stage.

Moreover, the concept of structural ignorance, albeit insightful, risks being overly generalised. If all forms of ignorance are ascribed to structural constraints, there is a danger of obscuring the significance of individual agency, accountability, and cognitive endeavour (Boodman, 2022). Conversely, ignorance may stem not just from structural issues but also from neglect, bias, or the deliberate evasion of evidence (Rohrer, 2024). Treating epistemic failure as universally external may lead a framework that excessively relies on structural explanations to oversimplify the phenomenon's complexity.

Accessism is defined by a degree of normative ambiguity. It fails to sufficiently delineate the ethical principles that would regulate activities inside its framework, despite making a cursory reference to practical outcomes in domains such as education and information equity. Consider, for instance, the inquiry of the moral need to guarantee universal access to information, given that such availability is a necessity for knowledge acquisition. If this is the case, on what basis, and to what degree? The framework's capacity to shift from descriptive analysis to normative prescription is impeded by the

persistent lack of theoretical underpinning for these problems.

Although accessism offers a substantial perspective on the structural aspects of knowing, it fails to constitute a comprehensive epistemological framework. This conclusion is derived from the assessment of these restrictions collectively. It is more precise to consider its findings as additional to current frameworks rather than as a replacement for them.

Comparative Assessment

A fuller grasp of Accessism's philosophical position emerges when it is set against established traditions within epistemology. Such comparison not only emphasises its points of agreement with previous ideas but also reveals the extent to which it delivers a genuinely different contribution.

In respect to classical epistemology, notably the justified true belief (JTB) model, Accessism functions at a different analytical level. While the JTB framework is concerned with the internal criteria that make a belief count as knowledge (Krzanowski & Lipińska, 2023), Accessism concentrates on the prior conditions that make belief formation possible at all (Green, & Ezenwa, 2026). In this way, it does not directly attack the JTB paradigm but rather enriches it by introducing a precondition layer. However, this also underscores a limitation: Accessism does not resolve the well-known problems associated with JTB, such as Gettier cases, nor does it significantly modify the criteria of justification or truth. Its contribution is consequently structurally additive rather than conceptually transformational.

When compared to externalist theories, particularly reliabilism, Accessism shares an emphasis on things outside the subject's immediate cognitive awareness. Reliabilism examines knowledge in terms of the dependability of belief-forming processes, many of which are environmentally placed. Accessism similarly pays attention to external factors, but its focus is broader and less evaluative. Whereas reliabilism seeks to determine whether a belief is

justified based on the reliability of its source (Goldman, 2025), Accessism is primarily concerned with whether the subject had the opportunity to encounter the relevant information in the first place. This distinction underlines both its novelty and its limitation: it widens the area of inquiry but does not give criteria for measuring epistemic correctness.

Accessism also shows a significant resemblance to advancements in social epistemology, particularly ideas addressing epistemic injustice and the social distribution of knowledge (Green, & Ezenwa, 2026). These approaches have already underlined how power dynamics, social identities, and institutional frameworks determine who gets to know what. In this way, Accessism can be considered as systematising and formalising insights that are already present in these traditions. Its notion of structural ignorance, for instance, parallels previous descriptions of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice, where individuals are excluded from knowledge systems due to societal constraints. The overlap shows that Accessism may serve more as a conceptual consolidation than as a radical departure.

In regard to broader philosophical traditions such as empiricism and rationalism, Accessism again appears complementary rather than hostile. Empiricism prioritises sensory experience as the foundation of knowledge, whereas rationalism values reason and inherent concepts (Warf, 2026). Accessism does not directly challenge either stance but rather emphasises the circumstances that enable sensory or rational involvement. In the absence of empirical evidence or exposure to logical arguments, neither empiricist nor rationalist methodologies can function. Consequently, Accessism serves as a foundational framework that supports various traditions without supplanting them.

A comparable pattern arises when examined in conjunction with critical philosophy, especially methodologies that scrutinise the conditions need for knowledge acquisition. Accessism addresses this issue by emphasising tangible socio-structural elements, concentrating on material and institutional issues rather than solely spiritual ones. Nonetheless, its

contribution remains predominantly ancillary, providing an alternative perspective rather than a rival basis.

This comparative analysis indicates that Accessism should be seen not as an independent epistemological theory but as a meta-framework that functions in conjunction with existing methodologies. It enhances epistemological investigation by highlighting structural prerequisites, but it depends on other theories to tackle issues of justification, truth, and epistemic assessment. Consequently, its significance is in its ability to integrate and expand upon, rather than supplant, the established foundations of epistemology.

Implications of the Critique

The critical evaluation of accessism has substantial implications for both epistemological theory and practical application. The critique elucidates the specific character of accessism's contribution at the theoretical level. Accessism is more accurately regarded as a structural enhancement that augments existing frameworks, rather than as an independent epistemic system. It effectively highlights the conditions necessary for knowledge, however it does not obviate the need for conventional analyses of justification, truth, and belief. This repositioning is crucial as it avoids the theory from being overstretched while maintaining its conceptual validity within a broader epistemic framework.

Furthermore, the critique underscores the necessity for a more robust integration of theoretical frameworks. For accessism to attain greater philosophical significance, it must engage with essential epistemic issues more rigorously. This involves examining how structural variables affect both the accessibility of information and its reliability and epistemic credibility, while also establishing clearer links between access circumstances and standards of justification. Without such integration, accessism risks being descriptively insightful while limiting its analytical potential.

The consequences hold equal normative

relevance. Accessism underscores ethical concerns with the disparity in knowledge distribution, especially in contexts where information access is inequitable or systematically limited. This is particularly applicable in contexts when information is not easily accessible. In cultures marked by educational disparities, technological deficiencies, and socio-economic inequality, particularly in many emerging environments, this concept provides a valuable perspective for assessing epistemic disadvantage (ZAKARIA & RAJASEGARAM, 2025). The criticism, conversely, indicates that these normative implications remain in their nascent phases. Accessism must articulate more exact conceptions regarding the obligation to provide access, the prioritisation of resources, and the limits of structural responsibility to effectively influence policy or ethical decision-making. The theory's focus on accessibility and exposure is crucial for education, technology, and information governance. This is due to the theory's significant emphasis on these two criteria. It underscores the importance of developing educational systems that are inclusive and not merely focused on information transmission, but also guarantee that students engage with it meaningfully throughout their educational journey. Likewise, in the domain of digital technology, it presents issues regarding how algorithms, media platforms, and information infrastructures establish patterns of exposure, often exacerbating pre-existing disparities. Nonetheless, the critique cautions that simply enhancing access is insufficient; without addressing the quality, reliability, and interpretation of information, increased exposure may merely perpetuate disinformation rather than enhance comprehension (Bowles et al., 2025).

The critique also uncovers some prospective avenues for more inquiry. It is essential to investigate, through empirical evidence, how structural barriers to access operate in specific contexts and their effects on diverse groups. In the field of philosophy, further research is necessary to elucidate the notion of structural ignorance. This work should guarantee that the term accounts for both human agency and

external constraints. The integration of multidisciplinary methodologies from fields such as education, sociology, and information science might augment the practical applicability of Accessism while concurrently grounding its claims in empirical data.

The ramifications of this analysis underscore a balanced viewpoint: Accessism offers a significant perspective for comprehending the circumstances that enable knowledge, although its complete potential can only be actualised through further theoretical advancement and integration with recognised epistemological issues.

Conclusion

Accessism represents a significant and provocative addition to contemporary epistemology. It highlights the structural conditions linked to the acquisition of various forms of knowledge. This focus on accessibility and exposure highlights a characteristic that is typically neglected within the conventional paradigm. This approach expands the scope of epistemological investigation and offers a more contextually attuned view on the distribution and acquisition of knowledge. This is particularly significant in a society characterised by technical advancement and enduring inequities.

Conversely, as this critique has illustrated, the benefits of accessism are coupled with considerable constraints. Although intuitively persuasive, the primary assertion of this argument risks being conceptually banal and does not represent a sufficiently significant theoretical advancement alone. Furthermore, its significant focus on structural components is disproportionate, as it fails to sufficiently address essential epistemological issues, like the assessment of belief, justification, and truth. Without addressing these fundamental concerns, accessism cannot be regarded as a comprehensive epistemic framework.

The comparative analysis not only bolsters this position but also reveals that accessism is intricately linked to established traditions like social epistemology and externalism,

highlighting instances of their overlap. Although it provides a satisfactory organization of structural concepts, it does not significantly diverge from established frameworks. Conversely, it is more precise to regard it as a meta-level perspective that complements rather than supplants existing concepts. Its significance is not in altering the essence of knowledge but in illuminating the prerequisites necessary for the acquisition of any understanding.

Accessism should be regarded as an auxiliary framework for the epistemological discourse, rather than a substitute for the fundamental principles of the discussion, when all presented concerns are considered. The primary function it serves is to remind scholars that knowledge is not generated in isolation, but is instead embedded within systems that facilitate or hinder access and visibility. As the theory evolves, it will be essential to integrate the normative and evaluative dimensions of epistemology more rigorously. Furthermore, it is essential to enhance the conceptual clarity that distinguishes its assertions from those of analogous systems. Accessism ultimately provides a substantial avenue for investigating the structural dynamics of knowledge; however, its long-term relevance will depend on its capacity to transcend mere descriptive analysis and develop a more comprehensive and critically engaged philosophical framework.

Recommendations

1. Future development of Accessism should prioritise a systematic integration with established normative theories of epistemology, particularly those concerned with justification, truth, and epistemic reliability. At present, the framework remains largely descriptive, identifying the conditions under which knowledge becomes possible without sufficiently addressing how knowledge claims ought to be evaluated.
2. To avoid redundancy and strengthen its claim to originality, Accessism must more precisely define its conceptual boundaries in relation to existing

traditions, particularly social epistemology and externalism. This involves identifying what is uniquely explanatory about its framework beyond the general acknowledgement of structural influences on knowledge. A more rigorous conceptual clarification should distinguish between what Accessism adds analytically and what it merely restates in formal terms.

3. While Accessism provides a compelling account of structural constraints, it currently underplays the role of individual epistemic agency. Future work should aim to balance structural explanations with an account of how agents navigate, resist, or compensate for limitations in access and exposure. This includes examining how critical thinking, intellectual virtues, and deliberate inquiry function within constrained environments.
4. To enhance its practical and theoretical relevance, Accessism would benefit from deeper engagement with empirical research across disciplines such as education, sociology, information science, and media studies. Empirical investigation can illuminate how structural barriers to access and patterns of exposure operate in real-world contexts, particularly in relation to digital technologies, algorithmic curation, and educational inequality.

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