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On the Faculty of Intuition

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Abstract

The topic of this paper is an investigation of intellectual intuition as a faculty of the human mind. The aim of this investigation is to draw a strong analogy between the faculty of intuition and the various faculties of empirical sense (vision, hearing, and so on). I begin by examining the phenomenology of intuition, highlighting the similarities between the subjective experience of intuition and empirical sense. I explain these similarities by arguing that both activities are alike in being presentational mental activities. Developing the concept of a presentational activity in general, I examine the relationship between presentations and beliefs formed on the basis thereof. I argue that beliefs based on intuition and sense perception enjoy *prima facie* justification proportional to the quality of that presentation. After explaining how beliefs formed on the basis of intuition can err, I spend some time distinguishing intuition-based beliefs from sense-based beliefs by underscoring the *a priori* and immaterial nature of intuitions. It turns out that this difference is key to explaining how intuition serves an exalted role in the production of philosophical knowledge. In particular, I argue for a modest epistemic foundationalism in which intuition and sense perception both provide non-inferential justification. After explaining why philosophical knowledge is especially concerned with *a priori* knowledge, I concur that intuition, in being the only immediate ground for *a priori* knowledge, must serve as the foundation of all philosophy. Finally, I argue that this theory of intuition is capable of protecting philosophy from certain skeptical scenarios in which knowledge might be thought impossible.

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Introduction

Having served as the cornerstone of philosophical systems and as something to be avoided at all costs, the nature and purpose of intellectual intuition is a question with which philosophy as a discipline has been occupied since its inception. The continued interrogation of this subject is the task of the present work. It is divided into two chapters, which can be thought of as responding to the **nature** and the **purpose** of intuition in turn.

In the first chapter I develop the notion of presentational mental activity to postulate a similarity between intuition and sense perception. Such a comparison is neither novel nor outlandish, but in this work the analogy is both made explicit and strengthened. Owing to their shared status as presentational activities, intellectual intuitions and sense perceptions analogize both phenomenologically and epistemologically. Though there are critical differences (which are discussed at length in the final section), I argue that intuition and sense perception are much more alike than most previous authors suggest. Importantly, the way that both activities relate to belief mean that they are both the sort of thing which can ground knowledge. But, as I argue, the knowledge grounded by either intuition or perception is neither infallible nor incorrigible. There are many commonly accepted ways that empirical senses are said to err, from the optical illusion of the submerged stick to drug-induced hallucinations, and I posit that these phenomena have their analogies in intuition as well.

The second chapter uses the epistemology developed in the first to assert that the nature of philosophy is such that it necessitates the use of intuition—despite its fallibility—and that all philosophical knowledge is ultimately beholden to intuition. I support this claim with the development of a modest foundationalism in which the inferential knowledge is grounded by non-inferential knowledge, which is in turn grounded by presentational activities (i.e. by intuition and sense perception). Subsequently, I show why intuition, as capable of giving *a priori* knowledge, enjoys a privileged status among all methods of non-inferential justification as far as philosophy is concerned. The final task of the paper is to show that, given everything theretofore developed, intuition is capable of providing an escape from certain scenarios of radical skepticism in which knowledge might be thought impossible.

A full exploration of the consequences of the epistemology developed in this paper is not possible due to its limited scope. Therefore here I wish to explain some future projects or theories made possible (in whole or in part) by the machinery I develop in this paper.

First, there are some implications for moral realism that 'fall out' of my picture of intuition. This is because intuitions about moral propositions (which are very common) are in this model intuitions about propositions about the universe, which seems to imply that the universe is in possession of moral properties (and that the contrary notion, that morality is somehow invented or purely subjective, is false). Although I treat these issues somewhat in the second chapter when dealing with an objection, the moral realism above suggests certain metaphysical assumptions or implications of this picture. Intuition as I describe it seems to require its proponent defend some form of dualism or even idealism. Because I am not prepared to do this here, I would only gesture toward this demand and make the connection between the epistemology, the ethics, and the metaphysics plain.

Additionally, these results could well be applied in the philosophy of mathematics. In mathematics everything happens within axiomatic systems—essentially a fancy way of saying all math is the result of very basic assumptions. But questions about which of these assumptions are true are often circumvented through the use of language like "reasonable" or "believable." This leads to some disagreement on which axioms, and consequently which results, are true; in other words, which results describe the universe and which are merely speculative. In providing a foundationalist epistemology I provide a way to determine the (*prima facie*) truth of axioms handed to mathematicians by intuition. Though it is unlikely to solve the conflicts created by disagreements in the "believability" of axioms, since these conflicts are themselves typically the product of conflicting intuitions, it can at the very least explain how these conflicting intuitions are possible.

If nothing else, however, the aim of this paper is ultimately to demystify intuition and show that it is a fruitful wellspring for (analytic) philosophical investigation. There are many philosophies and philosophers that seem to dismiss intuition out-of-hand as something which is not capable of being rigorously specified and described. I think that this position is antiquated and stems from the positivist current which took hold of philosophy during the twentieth century

whose consequences are still being dealt with. I maintain, contra the positivists, that not only is *a priori* knowledge possible but that the elucidation of this knowledge through intuition is the central aim of philosophy. Thus in some sense I see this present paper as laying the groundwork necessary to begin philosophizing.

Chapter I: Intuition

§ 1 Introduction

This chapter is a discussion of the nature of **intuition**. With this first chapter, I endeavor to answer the questions "what is intuition?" and "when and how does intuition provide knowledge?" These being somewhat vague and demanding questions, this chapter is partitioned into several sections. The opening section is devoted to the phenomenology of intuition, and will discuss what it is like to have an intuition. I develop this account in parallel with the adjacent mental activities of sense perception, relying heavily on analogy. The results of this phenomenological inquiry result in a great deal of similarities between sense perception and intuition, and thus in order to highlight why intuition in particular enjoys a distinguished role in epistemology I take some time to explain how intuition and sense perception are quite different. All of this leaves room to develop an epistemic theory of intuition, and in particular to determine if and when intuitions can be reliable sources of knowledge. Along the way it will be important to determine to what extent this theory of intuition commits the account to certain metaphysical or meta-philosophical claims, and examines the plausibility of those claims where committed. With objections of this kind disposed of, the intention is to provide a reasonably fertile ground upon which the next chapter can flourish.

What is it like to have an intuition? When one speaks of intuitions, one will say something like "it struck me that thus-and-so was true" or "suddenly it seemed to me that such-and-such could not be otherwise" or "I knew this-and-that immediately." It therefore seems pre-theoretically that an intuition consists in the apprehension of a proposition, and a secondary apprehension or evaluation that the proposition is true. Additionally, the apprehension of the truth of the proposition is non-reflective and immediate. The apprehension of truth at the same time strongly disposes one to believe the proposition at hand. In common parlance, one speaks of the experience of an intuition as an instance of "seeing as true."

I maintain, contrary to what one might expect, that intuition is a rather benign constituent of the manifold of experience. It is something most people take for granted: moral intuitions, for example, serve as the sole justification for most moral beliefs, while low-level mathematical

intuitions are simple enough that one can expect them in any primary school classroom. Even more fundamental intuitions about the necessity of the laws of nature seem to be the only thing allowing one to proceed through life with a relatively high degree of confidence and sanity. It is not particularly shocking to have an intuition, and intuitions are so commonplace that it is miraculous that they remain relatively unanalyzed in philosophy while other mental phenomena are the subject of such high levels of scrutiny. It is also troubling because there are many dogmas of philosophy that either rule out, dismiss, or fail to address the possibility of knowledge grounded in intuition. Part of the reason for these failures is the want of a thoroughgoing and comprehensive account of the phenomenology of intuition. In this section, I aim to rectify that.

§ 2 What Intuition Is Not

Though I have already provided a primitive positive definition of intuition, it is better to begin with a negative one. There are many adjacent phenomena with which intuition is often confused or conflated. Distinguishing from these adjacent phenomena will also reveal some positive properties of intuition.

Something with which intuition is often confused is latent belief. Latent beliefs are beliefs which one ostensibly possesses but which are not currently before the consciousness. Suppose during an introductory course on logic I form the belief that " p or not p is a valid principle of inference." While I am in class, this belief is at the front of my mind, as it is required in many of my proofs; I have to attend to this belief frequently. When I cease to perform formal logical deductions on a regular basis, this belief slips from my mind. But several semesters later, I take a class on advanced logic. When during the first class the principles of inference are reintroduced, one might be inclined to say that I re-form the belief that " p or not p is a valid principle of inference" by the same mechanism that caused it to be formed in the first place. But it seems more appropriate to say that I recalled the belief I already possessed, or re-attended to the latent belief. The reason that this recollective process or direction of attention is often confused with intuition is because intuition often provokes both the formation of the belief and its recollection; it was an intellectual seeming that " p or not p " was true that caused me to believe that it is a valid principle of inference, and it is the same seeming that provoked me to remember

my belief. It makes sense to call beliefs that were formed in this way intuitive beliefs. But intuition can be distinguished from intuitive beliefs in two ways. First, the intuition appears prior to the belief when describing the history of conscious mental activity, as it is the intuition which *causes* the formation or recollection of intuitive belief. Second, the intuitive belief, once formed, persists even when the intuition is not present and even when the consciousness does not attend to the belief. It is not necessary that every time I invoke the law of excluded middle in my proof that I experience an intellectual seeming that "p or not p" is true. This argument for the distinction between intuition and latent belief can be extended more generally to a distinction between intuition and belief *qua* belief. Intuition may aid in the formation of belief or allow one to believe, but in such cases the intuition of the proposition is not itself the belief in question.

But having distinguished intuition from belief, there is yet another mental process with which intuition is mistakenly identified: the disposition to believe. Following Bengson¹ this confusion can be resolved through separation of dispositions to believe from intuitions by showing that each can take place without the other. To illustrate how an intuition might not cause a disposition to believe consider the following case:

Headstrong Heraclitian

One day Hermes comes across Heraclitus delivering an address to a crowd. As Heraclitus is an excellent orator, Hermes is captivated. During the course of the speech Heraclitus provides a convincing argument that the principle of non-contradiction is false. Later on, when Hermes reflects on the principle of non-contradiction, he finds that it strikes him as true, but his encounter with Heraclitus has instilled in him a disposition to believe its negation. Though it appears to him as true, Hermes trusts the wisdom of Heraclitus more than his own and so dismisses this seeming as illusory.

Cases like the *Headstrong Heraclitian* are common in everyday life. Through reason and experiment it is quite easy to form dispositions and beliefs counter to intuition. These practices need not completely remove the dispositional power of intuition, since absent the convincing reasons, the disposition to believe will realign with the intuition. What is important about this

¹ John Bengson. "The Intellectual Given." *Mind*, vol. 124, no. 495, 25 May 2015, pp. 707–760.

case is that the statement "I have an intuition that p" does not imply "I am disposed to believe p." To see why the reverse implication fails as well, consider another case:

Effete Ethicist

Professor Felix is appointed to an end-of-life committee to determine if a patient should receive euthanasia. Because he is rather bored by the details of the complicated case he does not have any judgement by his own lights, and so resolves to flip a coin and write a defense of whatever the coin rules. Because he is an excellent writer, he is convinced by his own argument and is inclined to agree with his own arbitrary argument.

In such a case, it is possible to form a disposition to believe when there is no intuition present at all. Again, this is a common occurrence. Many of the things about which persons have dispositions to believe require too much intellectual labor to comprehend and so it is impossible to consider them, let alone form an intuition about them. But this is precisely what leads to the confusion of intuition with disposition to believe. In ordinary language something is 'intuitive' precisely when it requires little cognitive investment to understand, and hence when one is easily disposed to believe things about it.

An additional mental phenomenon from which intuition must be distinguished is revelation. Though intuition and revelation are alike insofar as they are both mental events that impart some kind of content which is presented as true, there are two major points of differentiation which are often overlooked. The first is the reliance of a theory of revelation on the concept of the revelator—the entity doing the revealing. If this entity is supernatural or divine in any way then the theory must make certain theological claims, and in so doing becomes subject to any number of skeptical or learned theological objections. The second difference (an advantage a theory of intuition has over a theory of revelation) is that intuition is not mystical or obscure in the way revelation is. Not many people frequently have revelatory experiences, but almost everyone frequently experiences intuition. It is mostly for this reason that I leave the topic of revelation here undeveloped and reorient the discussion.

Distinguishing intuitions from latent beliefs, dispositions to believe, and revelations potentially raises more questions than it answers. For it is clear that while intuitions are not

themselves beliefs or dispositions thereto, they are certainly involved in the formation and maintenance of beliefs. Thus a complete account of belief requires one to examine the relationship between belief and intuition more closely. Therefore with the remainder of this section I will develop a positive account of intuition which strongly suggests this relationship with belief.

§ 3 Intuitions as Presentations

The pivotal insight in recent work on intuition² is creating an analogy between intuition as a "rational seeing" and the faculties of the empirical senses. This manoeuvre is important not only because it gives a plausible phenomenology of intuition that makes sense of such experiences, but it also provides an epistemological framework upon which a real theory can be built. The question of epistemology, however, is the task of the next section. The remainder of this section will focus on constructing and defending the perceptual analogy. The central move that Bengson makes in formulating the perceptual analogy is his theory of presentations.³ Although I make use of much of this theory (which is essentially a move of abstraction to observe a formal thing which is common to empirical sense and intuition), I depart from Bengson in a few significant ways to make room for an even more general concept which is applicable to a wider range of mental activities.

My aim is to show that the analogy between sense perception and intuition is strong enough that each step in the causal chain for sense perceptions has a corresponding step in the causal chain for intuition. Therefore what is desired is some kind of "rational eye" that takes intellectual content from the outside world⁴ and converts it into something which is meaningful to the subject, with this in turn initiating some sort of inner motion. I take for granted the existence of the "rational eye" as the **faculty of understanding**, though I would maintain that any person is capable of the introspection necessary to find this faculty within oneself if he is not

² It is of course true that intuition has been placed in analogy with perception since Plato and this thread was carried through to the rationalism of Descartes and beyond. An actual explanation of and development of the analogy was rather lacking, however, and as far as I can tell only in the 21st century has this idea really been taken seriously in the analytic tradition.

³ Bengson, *Op. cit.*

⁴ At least initially.

already convinced it is there. I also generally avoid the "initiation of inner motion" because it seems that the entire process is "inner motion" in a formal sense. Just as the engagement of the eye in sense perception is actually a mental activity (insofar as the eye is a part of the nervous system) capable of causing further mental activity (i.e. the formation of perceptual beliefs), the engagement of the faculty of the understanding in intuition is also a mental activity capable of causing further mental activity (i.e. the formation of belief from intuition). In both cases it seems as if there is mental activity going on at all stages and so to inquire how inner motion can occur in intuition is to inquire how it can occur at all, which is well beyond the scope of this work. With these goals in mind, I begin with Bengon's definition of presentations.

Presentations are mental activities which possess **content** and present that content as "being so." Bengson gives five important characteristics of presentations: they are baseless, gradable, non-voluntary, compelling, and one is disposed to rationalize their content. Briefly, this means that: presentations are not consciously formed on the basis of other mental states; that the quality of presentations can vary in different situations; that one is passive in the face of presentations; that one is compelled to believe in the content of presentations; and that one is compelled to justify those beliefs with reason and the intellectual faculties.⁵ I accept these criteria but only hesitantly. In this section, I aim to provide a more general account of what counts as a presentation and thus a presentational mental activity, which will warrant a re-examination of these criteria. If Bengson's position that intuitions are like sense perceptions in being presentational activities is "quasi-perceptualist," my more radical position might be called a "full-throated-perceptualist" account insofar as I extend the analogy with sense perception further than him. In order to understand how I extend Bengson's analogy it is first necessary to determine some things about the beliefs which perceptions and intuitions both serve.

It is rather uncontroversial⁶ to assert that beliefs are **representational** mental activities, and that if a subject *S* **believes** *P*, then *S* **represents** *P*. But here there is already some ambiguity: to what or to whom is *P* represented? This point of confusion hides itself when one couches mental activity in the language of mental states, and the elucidation of this point in particular is

⁵ Ibid., pp. 720–723.

⁶ Though uncontroversial, the claim "beliefs are representational mental states" is seldom given a theoretically convincing defense. My own motivations for accepting this claim lie in a pseudo-Reinholdian analysis of the relational structure of representation, though proper treatment of this issue would take me too far afield.

another motive for preferring the active characterization. It is not as easy, however, to answer this question as it is to ask. The most natural answer would be that S represents P to himself. This certainly captures the idea of mental representation; that a belief about P is constituted by mental activity simulating P . But this position is derelict when it comes to supplying the connection between this internal mental activity (if it even occurs at all) and other attributes of belief. In particular: the affective components of belief, the components of belief that compel a subject to (external) action,⁷ the notion that beliefs are metaphysically or ontologically distanced from a subject,⁸ how beliefs can be shared amongst subjects,⁹ and the relation between belief and its objects. Rather than S representing P to himself, I posit S represents P to the universe U . The universe to which S presents P is, to use some mathematical terminology, the **domain** of thought, which might be understood canonically as logical space or set of all possible worlds. Because I do not wish to be burdened by the conceptual baggage such ideas might carry, I stress the important characteristic of the universe is that any proposition one can formulate is about the universe or something ‘contained’ in it.

This analysis of the representational character of belief allows one to formulate a general schema for a certain pair of relations:

Schema I (presentation-representation):

Some universe U **presents** P to some subject S , and S **represents** P to U .¹⁰

This schema makes sense of what goes on during both sense perception and intuition. While the subset of the universe about which one forms sensory beliefs and about which one forms beliefs through intuition can be radically different from one another, this language captures the idea that

⁷ If a belief is a purely "internal" representation then any motivation or affect created by that belief would also seem to be purely internal. But this is not what it feels like to be motivated by (or affected by) belief. Such affectations and motivations feel external, and so it is important to connect the external objects of belief with their representations in a way that can explain this phenomenon.

⁸ Here, I mean to capture the idea that even if a subject undergoes a change of (individual) beliefs, the metaphysical identity of the subject is unchanged, but that the subject seems to be metaphysically identifiable only by its mental activity.

⁹ Certainly you and I both believe "squares have four right angles" but given that I do not have mental pictures and thus cannot see a square when reflecting on this proposition almost guarantees that we do not represent it in the same way. Likewise someone with no mental pictures who does not speak English represents the proposition in yet a different way. But one is compelled to say that in all three cases we share the belief "squares have four right angles."

¹⁰ It is worth noting that this schema does not rule out the possibility that some proposition Q different from P might be represented by the subject in response to the presentation he experiences. There are many confounding factors and thus many explanations as to why this can occur, as I shall explore later.

in both cases there is some content or information external to oneself that one is accessing by engaging the correspondent faculties. Before moving on, it is advantageous here to contrast my account with Bengson's in order to highlight the gaps that this new way of framing the issue fills.

The first problem arises when Bengson describes a classification of mental states which places "presentational" and "merely representational" states under the shared type of "representational."¹¹ He explains this classification by asserting that during an intuition, "it is not simply that one is in a state that represents the world as being such that [*P*] is true. One *has the impression* that it is."¹² I will object on two counts. First, the framing of the discussion in terms of mental states rather than mental activities ignores the active character which is essential to the presentation relation. Second, this way of treating the issue assumes that during a presentational mental activity there is representation by the subject; moreover, that the presentational activity is constituted of this representational mental activity and the property of 'having the impression.' Though I will explain precisely why this is erroneous, it is important to briefly address how the first error leads to the second and why I therefore conceive of the mind as manifold activities rather than as manifold states.

The reason that thinking of representation and presentation as states rather than as actions is misguided is because there is no theoretical mechanism available to Bengson that allows distinguishing between a belief (or generally, a representation) and an intuition (or generally, a presentation) that does not involve the introduction of further mental states or activities. If representation is merely a state, it is much harder to speak about the agents who are performing the action of representation and the objects (or agents) which receive that representation. Thus treating representations as states limits discussion only to their content and their 'situatedness' (i.e. in whom the representations occur and under what circumstances). The conjunction of these two facts is what admits the confusion found in Bengson. In Bengson's picture, it is impossible to ask the central motivation question for this investigation: "to what or to whom is *P* represented?" (The answer to this question forms what I call the **direction** of the mental activity, a concept which I will return to later.) If one ignores the active characteristics of representation (and presentation), and considers the direction-free mental activity in either, one will find that a belief

¹¹ Bengson, *Op. cit.*, p. 718.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 719.

that *P* and an intuition that *P* appear identical. They both contain the same content, and are both situated in the same subject. Therefore presentation and 'mere' representation are both types of representation which can be distinguished only by the presence of the additional mental state of 'having the impression.'

I find this unconvincing. Bengson distinguishes 'having the impression' from 'being under the impression' as a way to justify his introduction of the former as a criterion for a mental state being presentational. For Bengson the difference lies in whether a proposition is actively presented to as opposed to endorsed by the subject.¹³ But this merely gestures at the distinction in question: it does no explanatory work as to how it comes to be that one can have the impression that some propositions are true while being merely under the impression that others are true. Furthermore, I claim that the state of 'having the impression' is actually a consequence of—rather than a constituent of—presentational mental activity. It is in no way characteristic of the phenomenology of the presentation that one has the impression. It is a presentation that *P* which causes one to have the impression that *P*, and it is not even a necessary consequence thereof. This subtlety is better illustrated through analogy with the empirical senses.

Spacey Seeker

Lizzie has lost her keys and is searching all over the house. Although they are on her kitchen table, and she has looked at the table a great many times in her quest, she has not noticed that the keys are there. It is only when her roommate points out the keys are on the table that Lizzie becomes aware of the fact.

Though in such a case Lizzie has ostensibly "seen" that her keys are on the table—insofar as she has the sense data of her keys and the sense data of the table simultaneously as her gaze was directed toward them—she has not **attended** to this sight and is thus epistemically neutral with regard to the proposition "the keys are on the table." In such a case Lizzie is presented with this proposition but does not have the impression that the proposition is true.

One may contest this point by arguing that in such a case there is no presentation occurring—that Lizzie has seen nothing if she has not attended to it; in other words, one could claim that what Lizzie is doing is not 'true seeing.' But this is at odds with both the subjective

¹³ Ibid., p. 717.

phenomenology and other empirical phenomena. Call the mental activity in the *Spacey Seeker* case "mental activity *A*." There are two ways that one could object to calling mental activity *A* 'true seeing': one could say that mental activity *A* is not presentational (and thus does not count as presentational mental activity), or one could say that 'true seeing' (or the paradigmatic visual experience) consists of "attending to" in conjunction with some mental activity *A*.

The first route seems entirely unconvincing. Even if attention is removed from the picture, the characteristic features of presentations are still present: information of the same type enters the visual sensorium and has the potential to inform further mental activity. In a case like the *Spacey Seeker*, Lizzie is still presented with but merely unresponsive to this information. To say that there is no presentation occurring at all is simply wrong.

Though the second response seems initially more plausible, it also fails. If the paradigmatic visual experience is "attending to"¹⁴ plus mental activity *A*, then one must investigate and describe mental activity *A* in order to have a precise account of the visual experience.

But mental activity *A* (which occurs in the case of the *Spacey Seeker*) seems a lot like the phenomenon of blindsight. Blindsight is a phenomenon observed in the cortically blind (which is to say, people whose blindness is caused by damage to the visual cortex of the brain). Of particular interest in such patients is that the eye itself and the ocular nerves which connect the eye to the brain are still functional. This means that the eye is still receiving and transmitting sense data, even though the subjects are not aware of it. Though cortically blind patients do not have the subjective experience of seeing, they are able to react to stimuli as if they were able to see.¹⁵ There are some subtleties here about different types of blindsight, but the general idea is that patients who experience blindsight have visual information affect their behaviours without this visual information becoming conscious. This is similar to what is occurring in the *Spacey Seeker* case because information enters the brain of the blindsight patient but does not reach the level of consciousness or awareness. There are obviously some differences insofar as that

¹⁴ One might also wish to replace "attending to" with "being conscious of" in this paragraph. I adopt this language mostly to draw parallel with the *Spacey Seeker* example, though I believe it still captures the essence of what is going on during blindsight.

¹⁵ For more on the phenomenon of blindsight, see Gastone G. Celesia, "Visual Perception and Awareness: A Modular System." *Journal of Psychophysiology*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2010, pp. 62–67.

information cannot enter the level of consciousness in the blindsight patient, but this potentiality is unimportant for the analogy.

Between blindsight and the *Spacey Seeker* one can extract a working definition of mental activity *A*: "visual information entering the mind without its becoming conscious." So if one allows for the equation of "becoming conscious of" and "attending to," one is left with a definition of mental activity *A*: "visual information entering the mind without its being attended to." But remember the definition of seeing was supposed to be mental activity *A* plus "attending to." So it becomes clear this circumlocution has done nothing at all—describing mental activity *A* without making reference to sight is impossible, and any definition of mental activity *A* is formally equivalent to 'seeing without attending to.' So to say that something like blindsight does not count as 'true seeing' is *ad hoc* and untenable. These cases suggest that it is better to conclude attention is not a necessary part of the paradigmatic visual experience, and that the paradigmatic visual experience is instead what I have been calling mental activity *A*. It was in fact mental activity *A* that was the presentational mental activity all along, and is the subject of the current investigation. For this reason I am motivated to call mental activity *A* 'seeing' and will refer to it as such throughout the rest of this section. That said, because seeing can occur with or without attention, I will refer to seeing as 'seeing without attending to' or 'seeing with attending to' as the discussion requires.

So with this in mind allow me to finally return to Bengson's description and show why "having the impression" is not a necessary part of presentations *qua* presentations. Although Lizzie and the blind-seer both see, they see without attending to. Because they are not attending or cannot attend to their seeings, neither is capable of forming conscious beliefs about the content of their sight. Thus it does not make sense to say that either has the impression that the content of their sight is true. Importantly, even if the content of their sight informs behaviour, it does so at the level of the unconscious or subconscious mind. Because both having and being under the impression require that one is aware of some content, both of these activities occur at the level of the conscious mind. Therefore even if Bengson's criteria are capable of distinguishing presentational mental states from merely representational mental states, it is only the conscious versions of these states to which these criteria apply.

But as I have just shown, there are at least two ways that one can see without being conscious of (i.e. the *Spacey Seeker* and blindsight), and I think it is not controversial to assert that there are more such examples in the visual as well as the auditory, olfactory, gustatory, proprioceptive, vestibular, and somatic senses. That examples exist even in intuition as well remains to be demonstrated, and this point will be dealt with somewhat in the subsequent sections. In any case, that there are unconscious "merely representational" mental states is also uncontroversial; "believing without attending to" is an everyday phenomenon and probably the most common mental activity there is.¹⁶ This means that there is a category of presentations that are unconscious as well as a category of representations that are unconscious. So again, even if Bengson's criteria do distinguish between conscious presentations and conscious beliefs, they cannot apply to unconscious presentations and unconscious representations and therefore cannot apply in any generality to presentations *qua* presentations and representations *qua* representations.

§ 4 Presentations as Directional

Despite this lacuna in Bengson's account, this discussion has made the path to understanding presentational mental activity much more navigable. What a phenomenology of presentations must actually do is explain the activity analogous to seeing without attending to (i.e. the presentational activity) and distinguish this activity from 'believing without attending to' (i.e. the representational activity). I maintain that this distinction can be made by analysis of the bare phenomena of presentation and representation alone in lieu of the introduction of attention. The key which unlocks this strategy is the concept of the **direction** of mental activity.

For mental activities which contain propositional content, the concept of direction helps to elucidate the source of the content, or whence the mental activity has its origins. The relationship between the directional **from** and an epistemic grounding will be explored in detail in the next section, but it is sufficient for now to simply say that the content of a mental activity

¹⁶ To understand what is meant by 'believing without attending to,' reflect on the proposition "there are twelve inches in a foot." Though you certainly believed this before you read it, it was not before your conscious mind and you were not attending to it. Some authors call this phenomenon **latent belief**, and contrast it with **occurrent belief**. Though I think this distinction both accurate and useful, it is not strictly necessary to develop my account of presentations and thus I will do no more than mention it.

reflects a reality contained in the location from which it originates. The other aspect of the mental activity that direction captures is its end, or **toward**¹⁷ what the activity is directed. This can be in the form of either an agentive recipient or a non-agentive location upon which the content is impressed. In order to completely determine the direction of a mental activity one must therefore describe both the 'from' and 'toward' aspects of the activity. To support this definition with and to provide the foundation for the subsequent sections I will analyze the direction of three distinct mental activities: presentation, representation, and imagination.

Bengson claims that presentation is characterized by being non-voluntary and baseless. I agree, and assert that because of these two characteristics a subject passively receives presentations. There is neither a sense in which I can "turn off" my eyes nor a sense in which I can "turn off" my rational eye. Because of this the will plays no part in the mental activity of seeing or of intuiting, or generally of presentation.¹⁸ The direction of the mental activity of presentation is **toward-subject**. The easy question is "what is the presentation 'from' if it is 'toward'-subject?" The answer is that it is from the universe. The very notion of a presentation is that it contains content; and anything which can be predicated as content is contained in the universe. According to the two-part definition of direction that I have given, the direction of presentation is **from-world-toward-subject**.¹⁹

Representations on the other hand are active on the part of the subject (even if unconscious). There is some element of the will involved when the subject accepts or believes a proposition (or if the representation is unconscious, when the subject continues to accept or believe upon becoming aware of it). The direction of the mental activity of representation is therefore **from-subject**. Again, the obvious question is "what is the representation 'toward' if it is 'from'-subject?" The answer here is slightly more subtle, but broadly speaking, it is always 'toward' the universe. Representation, however, being active, can have its direction altered by the subject. It might be more specifically directed (e.g. toward my father to whom I am speaking,

¹⁷ The use of "end" suggests a similarity with *telos*. This is not entirely accidental. The concept of direction is in some sense aimed at discovering the purpose of the mental activity, and so thinking of direction in these terms is completely reasonable.

¹⁸ Though the will certainly does play a role in the process of understanding the content of the sensorium.

¹⁹ For fear of treading too much into a theological territory, I will leave this issue here by saying that it is not really that surprising that the universe should have some agentive properties—after all, you and I are part of the universe and we have agentive properties.

toward the chalkboard on which I am writing, &c.) depending upon how the content is represented. But no matter the specific target of representation, it is vacuously true that it is directed toward the universe, since anything toward which it could be directed is something which the universe contains. If one wishes to remain with the two-part definition, the direction of representation is **from-subject-toward-world**.

The reason that both aspects of direction are necessary is because the concept can be applied to mental activities beyond presentation and representation. Consider the phenomenon of **spontaneous imagination**, or the unprompted creation of novel concepts and syntheses thereof. As the content of imaginations appear before the rational eye they are evidently toward-subject. But the will is unquestionably involved in producing that content and thus imaginations are also from-subject. While it is possible to convey or communicate the contents of one's imagination via representational activities, the imaginations themselves cannot be shared between subjects. So the subject at either end of imagination is the same. Thus imaginations can be classified as **from-subject-toward-subject**.

Based upon the foregoing, it would be natural to posit the existence of a fourth activity occupying the direction of which is **from-world-toward-world**. While I think this is completely reasonable, it would take some serious work to argue that such an activity is mental, since the mind in question for the previous three activities is the subject on either end of its direction. It would thus apparently not be of the right species for my concept of direction to apply, and so I will abandon further discussion.²⁰

It is worth pointing out that the direction of a mental activity greatly informs the phenomenology of an experience. By experience, I simply mean subjective mental activity possessing content. Two such activities possessing the same content but distinguished by their direction correspond to two completely different experiences under normal circumstances. It is quite easy to differentiate between one's imagination of a square and one's actually seeing a square, because a subject is (under ordinary circumstances) aware that the imagination is subject

²⁰ To posit this fourth activity as mental requires one to further flesh out the concept of the universe I introduce above. If one understands the universe as God, then it is possible to attribute more subjective properties to It. Under these assumptions, I think it would be fair to say that the set of from-world-toward-world activities would just be "events" in the sense of "something that takes place." But to dwell on these things too much again leads one into the territory of theology and probably belongs to a work other than this.

to his will and that he could imagine it otherwise. The 'feeling' of actually seeing a square is completely different from this, one is aware that one is subject to the contingencies of the external world. It is worth remarking, however, that not all circumstances are normal and as a philosopher I am especially concerned with the abnormal circumstances. Consider for instance the things one experiences while dreaming. In a dream, the content of one's experiences seem to come from outside of one's mind, and it is difficult to tell, while dreaming, that one is indeed dreaming.²¹ This is why dream skepticism has been so gripping a hypothesis from Augustine's *Confessions* to the Wachowskis' *The Matrix*. But whether or not the sensory or intuitive experiences one has while dreaming count as true instances of their corresponding conscious phenomena, dream actions can be distinguished from their conscious counterparts by observing that the manifold of dream-experience is generated entirely by the dreaming mind.²² This subtlety is important for the more in-depth discussion of dream skepticism given in the second chapter.

Even when the mental phenomena are subjectively indistinguishable they still possess different directions and thus are in fact different from each other. The same is true even when there is no subjective awareness of or attention paid to the mental activity under scrutiny. Therefore with the concept of direction there is an external criterion that can be applied to distinguish between various types of contentful mental activities. But perhaps more important than allowing one to distinguish mental activities which possess the same content is that the concept of direction can be deployed to explain why some mental activities are the sort of thing capable of justifying belief and others are not. In particular why intuition and sense perception can justify belief while imaginations and dreams cannot.

²¹ Ernest Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology*, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 17. Sosa actually suggests that it is impossible to determine that one is dreaming while one is dreaming because the act of determination is itself not possible while dreaming—one rather dreams that one determines. This subtlety is rather important to his argument but less so to mine.

²² Of course, echoing the previous, it is not necessarily possible to draw this distinction in the first person, while dreaming.

§ 5 The Epistemological Advantage

The essential advantage of this rather complex framework for understanding presentational belief is that it clarifies why presentational beliefs—in particular those given by intuition and sense perception—are candidates for knowledge, while others—spontaneous imaginations, for example—are not. If P is the content of some presentational state, the reason a subject is *prima facie* justified in representing P is precisely that in doing so he is in some sense responding **symmetrically** to his experience of the presentation whose content is P . There is no such symmetry in the case of a spontaneous imagination.²³ This symmetry is essential to the character of presentational beliefs. To abuse a metaphor, when one is struck that such-and-such must be the case, one is justified in 'striking back' in equal fashion. Following Bengson, the justification one enjoys in this case is only *prima facie*; there are many places for error in judgement or defeating considerations to enter, as I shall soon discuss. For now, I conclude:

Proposition I (re-presentationalism):

Given that the action of presentation relates some universe U to some subject S by the content of that presentation P , S is *prima facie* justified in re-relating himself to the universe U by the selfsame content P , or re-presenting P to U (i.e. believing or accepting that p).

The natural responses to such a proposition are questions as to how strong the justification is. Since the proposition applies presentational beliefs (which include both sensory and intuitive beliefs), the answers to questions along these lines should also sensibly apply in either case. In particular, any factors that influence the strength of justification should be present in both sense perception and intuition. Therefore it is reasonable to examine the features common to both and

²³ If I conjure images and stories in my head, and invent characters about whom I can make claims, I will certainly form beliefs, but will in no sense generate meaningful knowledge. But when I write "Johann is 1492 years old" after imagining something to this effect, I have put something in to the universe which you are now capable of experiencing through visual or auditory presentation, and of representing in belief. When I decide, however, that Johann is in fact only 1487 years old, it will undermine both the truth value and the justification of your belief, because I am the source or grounds for that belief. This is to be contrasted with statements like "squares have four right angles," which are necessarily true (i.e. independent of the whim of any particular subject). I claim that statements like these are grounded by 'the universe' as above, or God as the Universal Subject, or some such thing.

determine if they play a role or should play a role in strengthening or weakening the justificatory power of the presentational experience.

One of the features which Bengson and I both claim that presentations possess is phenomenological **gradability**.²⁴ The criteria according to which a presentation can be graded include vividness, forcefulness, clarity, and other such things. This is no doubt easily granted in the case of sense perception; the clarity of my visual experience lessens when I remove my glasses and improves when I put them back on. Though there is no tool in analogue with my glasses for intuition, the principle can be extended. Another situation in which the grade of a presentation can decrease is when one's attention is directed elsewhere. With perceptual experiences, as with intuitions, if one can carefully examine the content of those experiences one will consequently be more clear than if one was, as in the case of the *Spacey Seeker*, distracted or hasty. The grade of a presentation, formulated in this way, affects the justificatory force of the presentation in an obvious way. The clearer or more vivid the seeming, the more weight it will carry in the formation of belief. In Bengson's words, "the gradability of presentations may ground a corresponding gradability in *prima facie* justification,"²⁵ which is precisely what was desired. With a bit of formalism:

Lemma I (gradability):

The strength of the justification *S* has in believing or accepting *P* by virtue of Proposition I is proportional to the phenomenological grade of the presentation relation.

Again, though, this justification is only *prima facie*. Given that an upshot of Proposition I is that this justification is immediate and non-discursive, there is no action needed on the part of the subject other than simply having an intuition to receive the full justification for whatever proposition one intuits. Furthermore, the character of intuitions is non-sensory, i.e. rational and intellectual. Intuitions thereby qualify as a source of *a priori* justification.²⁶ Being a source of *prima facie* justification though, this allows the possibility that the content of an intuition is not *ultima facie* justified. Thus the grade of the justification awarded by the grade of the presentation

²⁴ Bengson, *Op. cit.*, p. 721.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 743.

²⁶ According to any reasonable definition of *a priori* and *a posteriori* at least.

is important only insofar as one considers countervailing reasons to reject the intuition, or in other words, is open to the possibility that intuitions can be erroneous. I have already given one example in the *Headstrong Hericlitean* of a subject electing to form a belief counter to his intuition, so it seems that the possibility of error should remain open if the theory is to correctly describe actual belief-formation processes. This is perhaps surprising given the historical prevalence of the notion that '*a priori* justified' and 'certain' are one and the same; this is certainly the impression one has from reading Plato or Descartes.

§ 6 Error in Intuition

So what sorts of considerations are capable of overriding the justification that intuition provides? The answer to this question is that such considerations are many. On the one hand, there is the obvious answer that any countervailing reason can count against an intuition. In the *Headstrong Hericlitean* case, testimony plays this role, but one can imagine many things that would make one consider his intuition untrustworthy: pre-existing beliefs, a lack of confidence in one's intellectual abilities, thoughtful reflection on the concepts at hand, &c. But these are all subjective considerations; considerations that the subject in whom the intuition occurs is responding to. In a manner of speaking, these are all psychological rather than philosophical considerations. To illustrate the difference, consider the following case:

Opposed Ontologists

Suppose Dr. Smith and Dr. Jones are both learned philosophers debating the nature of reality. Dr. Smith has the intuition that the universe is deterministic, and Dr. Jones that it is indeterministic. Both claim to have a very clear intuition (i.e. of a high grade), and neither is convinced by the other's paper in defense of his intuition; they are always able to object to one point or another.

In this case, neither philosopher has a strong enough subjective reason to reject his intuition. But they cannot both be right, nor can they both be wrong. In other words, something must be interfering with the process of intuition that introduces error despite a subjective unawareness of this fact.

The most obvious source of error, and one suggested by the similarity with perception, is illusion. The Müller-Lyer illusion, for example, consists of one's seeing lines of the same length as different. Even when made aware that the lines are in fact commensurate, one is often unable to elect to see them as such; the content of the visual presentation remains the same. Eventually, once one is familiar enough with the illusion one will recognize the lines as being the same length, but this is a second-order cognitive activity and not one which is a part of the presentational activity. This sort of illusion has a very strong analogy in intuition. Consider the axiom of unrestricted comprehension in mathematics: "for any predicate ϕ there is a set whose members satisfy ϕ ."²⁷ At first glance, this axiom seems true, since one would expect that given a predicate, one can collect all of the objects satisfying that predicate, especially when the objects are limited to something simple like sets—it is one of those things that simply presents itself as being true once the requisite definitions are understood. But this axiom is manifestly false as it implies Russell's paradox.²⁸ Like the Müller-Lyer illusion, even when the falsity of the axiom is demonstrated one cannot help but intuit that for any predicate ϕ there is a set whose members satisfy ϕ ; the second-order recognition of its falsehood is not a part of the process of intuiting. Even when well-familiar with the axiom it still maintains its truthful appearance, just as the lines of Müller-Lyer appear to be different lengths. There are plenty of explanations that one can give as to how intellectual illusions are possible (just as there are plenty of explanations for optical and auditory illusions). Though I wish to avoid speculation here, one of the simplest explanations is that some concepts (like that of "set" and "predicate") are more complex and subtle than the understanding can grasp 'all at once,' so the mind is vulnerable to err when these types of concepts are involved. But the reason for intellectual illusion is not as important as the existence where this discussion is concerned; all that must be demonstrated here is that such illusion does occur.

The second source of error in intuition is a lack of attention. Such scenarios are reminiscent of the *Spacey Seeker* case. Though Lizzie would not testify to having seen the keys on the table, they were there, and her eyes did pass over the table. She merely failed to attend to

²⁷ Bengson, *op. cit.*, p. 719.

²⁸ Let R be the set of all sets who are not members of themselves. Then R is a member of itself R if and only if R is not a member of itself. There are many avenues to the resolution of this paradox but all of them involve the rejection of the axiom of unrestricted comprehension.

the presentation at hand and hence did not notice that her keys were indeed on the table. Likewise a lack of attention can prevent one from intuiting the truth (or falsehood) of propositions which would otherwise be obvious. This is probably most common in mathematical computation, where, for example, one might hastily see something like " $44 + 66 = 100$ " and mistakenly endorse it. Errors of this kind are such that, when pointed out, one will typically notice the mistake one has made, will no longer have the intuition (or lack thereof) which caused the mistake to be made in the first place, and will be able to see the cause or reason that inattention gave rise to the error. It is much the same for errors of inattention in the empirical senses. As soon as Lizzie is made to realize her keys are on the table she will notice that she was not looking at the area where they were very carefully, and so on.²⁹ A similar second-order error is that of misrecognition. When a passerby on the street is mistaken for an old friend, for example, it is only upon closer inspection that the truth is revealed. But if a belief is formed on the basis of this misrecognition, it will be in error for the time it is possessed. In particular if no closer inspection is able to take place, this belief will persist in its error for some time. The analogue in intuition is a misrecognition of concepts. An example of this in the moral sphere might be in one's mistaking "wrong" and "evil." Arguably, an action can be wrong—insofar as there are (morally) better alternatives available—without thereby being unqualifiedly evil. But sometimes in these cases the wrongness of the action strikes one so profoundly that one mistakes this appearance of wrongness for evilness. Moreover, this misrecognition can be so powerful that it requires extensive philosophical argument to establish the distinction which caused the error in the first place (as might be the case with the concepts of wrong and evil).

But it seems like none of the sources of error discussed thus far properly explain what is going on in the *Opposed Ontologists* case, where two people experience mutually contradictory intuitions despite paying close attention and being well-acquainted with the necessary concepts. I think that this case (and its many real-world analogues) is explained by the existence of intellectual **hallucinations**. A hallucination consists in having an experience which is subjectively identical to a presentation but which is in reality an imagination; this is usually framed as the perception of stimuli which are not present. Sensory hallucinations are a

²⁹ Errors of this kind frequently occur in auditory sensation as well, where one might mistakenly hear one's name or the name of a close friend in a distant conversation.

well-documented and extensively studied phenomenon in empirical psychology, and are a familiar source of error for many philosophical thought experiments.

That hallucinations can be wholly cognitive or intellectual is suggested by the existence of so-called "command hallucinations." These are hallucinations which consist in the subject experiencing a voice which directs them to act in a certain way. Command hallucinations are noteworthy because they can occur both as an auditory hallucination, i.e. as a subjective hearing—which is sensory—or as a cognitive hallucination, i.e. as a subjective 'inner voice,' which is of a purely perceptual, intellectual character. That a hallucination can be of a purely intellectual character makes possible the existence of intellectual hallucinations (that is to say, hallucinations of intuition). Since command hallucinations are intimately connected with belief, in particular the subject's beliefs about the voice giving the command, this gives even more credence to the idea that they are meaningfully involved with the intellect.³⁰ Though the existence of command hallucinations is not itself sufficient evidence for intellectual hallucinations, that command hallucinations are conceptually articulated and informed by belief does gesture toward this phenomenon. The investigation of intellectual hallucinations, however, is something which is much more difficult than the investigation of sensory hallucinations. Since it is impossible for a third party to verify or corroborate the contents of the intellectual sensorium, it seems that the only way to establish that an intellectual hallucination is occurring is to be convinced (through philosophical argument) that the proposition intuited is false, impossible, or contradictory. Therefore even if intellectual hallucinations are a common source of error they are not able to be subjectively recognized (after the fact) the way other types of error are.³¹ Nevertheless I think that the general phenomenon of 'seeing something which is not really there' explains what is going on for one of the subjects in the *Opposed Ontologists* case, and that this type of error is responsible for much of the dichotomous disagreement in philosophy.

³⁰ A. Beck-Sander, et al. "Acting on Command Hallucinations: a Cognitive Approach." *The British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, vol. 36, no. 1, 1997, pp. 139–48.

³¹ It is worth pointing out that this is also the case with sensory hallucinations, absent the presence of other people; one might be able to, for a drug-induced hallucination, reflect and realize that one was seeing things which were not actually there (in the past tense). But this sort of reflection is only possible for temporary hallucinogenic states. If they are caused instead by damage to the brain or illnesses of the psyche, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to recognize hallucinations as such.

§ 7 Distinguishing Intuitions and Perceptions

According to this directional framework though, both intuition and sense-perception are alike in being presentational, which is to say they are alike in being contentful mental activities with the direction from-world-toward-subject. This means, as I have already argued previously, the phenomenology of an intuition is very similar to the phenomenology of sensory experience. It also means, as I shall develop shortly, the epistemology of intuition is very similar to the epistemology of sensory experience. But in order to understand why intuition serves a role in philosophy which is distinct from that of perception,³² which is the task of the next chapter, one must distinguish these mental activities from each other.

The first and most obvious way that intuition is unlike perception (and that the different modes of perception are unlike one another) is in the sort of justification which each provides. Intuition is, properly speaking, an *a priori* faculty; the justification given by intuition is *a priori*, and intuition counts as a faculty of reason for this purpose. Sense perceptions, on the other hand, are empirical; the justification they give is *a posteriori*. (This is why intuition is given a privileged epistemic position over the senses, since it alone among presentational activities is capable of giving to the consciousness *a priori* knowledge.)

Another important distinction arrives upon noticing that the faculties which correspond to the acquisition or production of presentational mental activities are qualitatively different in sense perception and intuition. The faculties of sense are made possible by physical, material organs:³³ the eye for visual presentations, the ear for auditory presentations, the nervous system for proprioceptive presentations, and so on. Furthermore, sensory presentations are caused by physical and chemical affectations of the corresponding organs upon the brain (the existence of hallucinogenic drugs evidences this point well).³⁴ By contrast, intuition does not have this

³² In particular, why intuition is not just 'another type of sensory perception' or a 'nth sense' but is rather elevated to a foundational status in epistemology.

³³ Physical or material in this sense is meant to describe something which possesses both extension and mass (i.e. the eye both takes up space and is composed of matter). More generally only one of these characteristics is necessary for something to be considered physical, and even more generally something which is able to be explained (in actuality or in potentiality) by natural science.

³⁴ An additional consideration here is the use of electrical shock to create hallucinations of various types, as in Kajimoto, Hiroyuki "Illusion of Motion Induced by Tendon Electrical Stimulation." *2013 World Haptics Conference*

physical component. Even if one identifies the brain as the conduit for thought it clearly does not analogize with the physical senses properly; there is no 'intuition receptor' of the brain which receives proposition-data and presents it to the mind. This is of course because propositions do not propagate through physical space the way that light, sound, smells, &c. do. Rather, the ability of sensory information to carry concepts and activate cognitive faculties is auxiliary or secondary; this is precisely what is illustrated by the *Spacey Seeker* case in the previous section. Though Lizzie undoubtedly has the image of the key and the image of the table and their compresence presented to her by her eye, she does not draw the conceptual link between the key and its image and thus cannot be said to have the thought that her keys are on the table. Even when propositions are embedded in physical space by the use of language and symbols, it is not as though they are carried by the impressions made by such symbols. In the *Spacey Seeker* case, one can find a way in which the activity of sight is divided into two separate sub-activities: the presentational and the cognitive. By subtracting the cognitive element of seeing the true nature of visual presentations is revealed. But such a subtraction is not possible for intuition. One could just as well imagine that Lizzie saw the arrangement of symbols " $1 + 2 = 3$ " written on the table and in her haste to find the key thought nothing of it. This would be another example of seeing without cognizing. On the other hand, it is incoherent to imagine Lizzie grasping the proposition " $1 + 2 = 3$ " and thinking nothing of it, as grasping the proposition " $1 + 2 = 3$ " involves thinking of it. It is impossible to find an example of intuiting without cognizing.

This difference could be explained by appealing to the function of the eye; the eye alone does not do any cognitive processing, it merely conveys visual information free of interpretation. Intuition, on the other hand, is conducted only by the rational eye or the faculty of the understanding. Thus it is inextricably linked to cognition. It is impossible to have a concept-free or cognitively inert intuition because an intuition presupposes the activation of cognitive faculties; intuition is itself a cognitive activity.³⁵ Without a cognition of the concepts involved an intuition would be comparable to reading a sentence written in a language one does not speak. It

(*WHC*), 2013, pp. 555–558 (in this case kinesthetic), or in Kumar, Gogi, et al. "Olfactory Hallucinations Elicited by Electrical Stimulation via Subdural Electrodes: Effects of Direct Stimulation of Olfactory Bulb and Tract." *Epilepsy & Behavior*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2012, pp. 264–268 (here they are of smell).

³⁵ It is another issue entirely whether intuitions (and somewhat by extension thoughts) are therefore necessarily linguistic.

neither makes sense to say such a sentence was read nor to say an uncognized intuition was thought. It is worth pointing out that this is completely consistent with the idea that there are unconscious or subconscious intuitions and intuitions that have not been fully attended to (just as there are unconscious or subconscious sensations and sensations that have not been fully attended to). Much of the cognitive activity of day-to-day life occurs at the subconscious level (for example, ironically enough, the recognition of objects in the visual field).³⁶ Therefore it does not seem very radical to suggest that there are analogous activities where intuitions are concerned.

The non-conceptual nature of sensory presentations means that the content which is able to be delivered by the senses is drastically different from the content which is able to be delivered by intuition. By "content which is able to be delivered" I mean the objects of presentations as they exist in the world. The objects of sensory presentations are precisely that—physical objects or phenomena caused by those objects. Intuition, on the other hand, conveys propositions and other logical objects. There are many reasonable and natural concerns regarding the dualism that this separation of the physical from the cognitive seems to presuppose. In fact, this has historically been one of the more controversial aspects of intuition as a reliable or valid ground of knowledge. Precisely because the objects of intuition are wholly logical, they are immune from the sorts of verification and falsification that the empirical sciences subject themselves to. Further, in a case of conflicting intuitions, there is no independent verification possible. Because intuition possesses this non-physicality it has completely different failure modes from the physical senses. While visual presentations might be unreliable because the eye is malfunctioning, there is no analogue with intellectual presentations: it is only a cognitive defect which can generate error in intuition. These cognitive defects can of course take many forms; a misapprehension of concepts and a misrecognition of thoughts both result in a subject having a mistaken intuition but in very different ways; a more substantive discussion of this point is given in a later section as it requires the epistemology be fully developed to treat correctly.

³⁶ I claim that this recognition is subconscious because when I look out my window and see the image of a tree I do not thereby have the conscious thought "there is a tree outside" but nonetheless would be able to, when prompted, avow such a belief without taking another look outside (though I may for psychological reasons wish to).

The quintessential difference between sense perception and intuition is demonstrated by the existence of something like eyeglasses. Someone who is nearsighted has in his sensorium an unreliable and inaccurate picture presented to him by his eye. With the aid of glasses, he is able to actively improve the quality of presentations available to him.³⁷ Compare this to the practice of using blinders (though typically for horses, sport shooters will wear them during competitions). This device does not so much improve the content which is presented to the subject, but rather by removing or making trivial some of the content on the periphery of the visual field it can help one to see more accurately by narrowing one's attention. This practice, the removal of parts of the sensorium also is able to improve one's cognitive functioning and especially to improve one's cognitive perception (i.e. intuition and imagination). During the practice of meditative visualization the most important step is to close one's eyes. Doing so does not actively improve one's capability to imagine but rather by removing the complicated visual content presented by the eye it allows one to focus more on the creation of one's own images. While blinders can aid both the faculties of intuition and sense perception via the manipulation of the sensorium, there are no 'rational eyeglasses' which can actively enhance the content of the intellectual sensorium presented in intuition.

As rational eyeglasses are unavailable one might wonder how intuition can be refined or sharpened, if at all. The use of blinders in the previous analogy can shed some light on the role of attention in enhancing the apparent quality of presentations, and certainly there exist strategies for directing one's attention to better focus on the cognitive elements of consciousness. In addition to attention-related methods, the practice and exercise of the senses is capable of enhancing their capability. This is not necessarily due to a qualitative increase in the content delivered by the sensory organs, but more likely a harmonization of the sensory faculties with the cognitive faculties.³⁸ It seems reasonable to claim that the same sort of thing is possible with

³⁷ A hearing aid functions the same way for auditory presentations, but I am not aware of devices in analogy with the other senses.

³⁸ This is particularly evident in the case of something like reaction time, which although decaying naturally with age, can be improved through training: Samira Anderson, et al. "Reversal of Age-Related Neural Timing Delays with Training." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 110, no. 11, 2013, pp. 4357–4362. This is ostensibly an improvement in the cognitive dimension of hearing, insofar as the ability to recognize and react to auditory stimuli is cognitive. Intuition, on the other hand has only this cognitive dimension and so it is reasonable to assume that cognitive training methods are capable of enhancing the intuitive faculty in a similar way (aiding in recognition response times, for example).

intuition. In philosophy especially, the use of thought experiments or "intuition pumps" in dialectic is something very much taken for granted, but this practice is something which is possible only because there is a certain amount of familiarity with the practice that one acquires from a great deal of exposure. Intuition is also (contrary to the physical senses) something which one greatly improves with age precisely because of its cognitive nature. Even if a young child has exactly the same capacity, his ability to have meaningful intuitions is significantly lower than someone who simply has a wider base of knowledge and larger conceptual repertoire (i.e. has more objects which he can intuit). This is especially true in the moral realm, where even when children do have concepts of right and wrong those children cannot be trusted with moral judgements. Though there are many reasons for the practice one is that children simply lack the moral intuition to recognize right from wrong when faced with novel circumstances. Since intuitions are conceptually articulated, possessing (being aware of, understanding, knowing) more concepts means there are more things available to intuit.

This point naturally gestures at the final important distinction between intuition and the physical senses, one which turns out to privilege intuition greatly. In order to have a sense perception of some thing or another, one is required not only to have the correct faculties working properly but also that one is in the right place at the right time. In order to see the Eiffel Tower one must have been in Paris after the year 1889; in order to have heard Fichte lecture on "the vocation of man," one must have been in a particular classroom at the University of Jena in the summer of 1793.³⁹ The scope of things able to be perceived by the senses is thus extremely limited by the situatedness of the subject. Intuition insofar as it deals in concepts is not constrained by the particular situation of the subject. Theoretically speaking, any concept is capable of appearing in an intuition of any subject so long as the subject understands the definitions involved. Of course, there are many more practical limitations to intuition given that many concepts are far too complex to be understood 'at once' by most subjects; an intricate proof of the fundamental theorem of Galois theory or a teleological argument for the existence of God are not the sort of thing which can be intuited by normal subjects under normal circumstances. The upshot of this, though, is that if there are concepts which are simple enough they have the

³⁹ Johann Gottlieb Fichte. *The Vocation of the Scholar*. Translated by William Smith, Wikisource, 2013.

potential to be universally available to intuiting subjects. By contrast, no empirical phenomenon is universally perceivable. So if one is charged with grounding the knowledge of any subject, as is the project of epistemic foundationalism, it seems as though one is forced to rely on intuition since its content is uniquely capable of universalizing across all subjects.

Chapter II: Foundationalism

§ 1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to elucidate the purpose that intuition serves. Thus this chapter builds upon the first by applying the theory just developed to concerns about the foundation of **philosophical** knowledge. It is necessary to show that this theory of intuition can insulate relevant knowledge from skeptical concerns, and in doing so it should become clear that this is a role uniquely filled by intuition; other accounts of the foundation of philosophy cannot provide reasonable responses to the skeptics. But to begin this demonstration one must first come to a proper understanding of what philosophical knowledge consists of.

While I could provide a list of philosophical disciplines and subdisciplines that would align with the current academic practices in order to explain what counts as philosophy and philosophical knowledge, it is more revealing to provide a criterion or method of determining whether some piece of knowledge is philosophical. Following Kant and the late moderns, I contend that the project of philosophy is part of the project of **science**. By science, however, I do not simply mean facts empirically reasoned according to somewhat arbitrary methods of data collection and observation, but rather knowledge which is related, organized, and systematized into a coherent and rationally compelling whole.⁴⁰ Thus in addition to there being a science of physics and a science of chemistry, there is also a science of epistemology, a science of ethics, and so on. What distinguishes a philosophical science from other kinds of science, however, is its being *a priori*.

The philosophy which I am concerned with here is not merely about whether some action is right or some proposition is knowledge, but instead seeks the criteria for determining which actions are right or which propositions count as knowledge. Such universal considerations ensure that philosophical enquiries are *a priori*; no experience or set of experiences alone is capable of providing satisfactorily universal criteria.⁴¹ This universality which is characteristic of

⁴⁰ Immanuel Kant. *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*. Translated by Michael Friedman, Cambridge University Press, 2004. p. I.468.

⁴¹ This does not mean every philosophical proposition is completely *a priori* however, as judgements of aesthetics or rules of ethics can be applied to particular, empirical cases quite easily. Additionally, it may be from these empirical

philosophy is the cornerstone upon which any scientific philosophy is built. That one is even able to discover or create formulae that are universally applicable for disciplines such as ethics and aesthetics is itself a concession not so easily made. With this in mind, in order to conduct fruitful philosophical investigations at all one must first ground the science of science itself, or in other words, to ask how it is even possible to generate and organize bodies of knowledge in this manner.

§ 2 Intuition as the Foundation

In order to understand why, in the words of Fichte, "intellectual intuition is the only firm standpoint for all philosophy"⁴² it is important to contextualize such a claim within philosophy as a whole as well as within foundationalism in particular. To do so requires an understanding of classical versus modest foundationalism. According to foundationalism there is some collection of elementary or atomic beliefs which are non-inferentially justified upon which all other beliefs ultimately rest. Such a belief is called **foundational**. **Classical** foundationalism, which is the foundationalism of Fichte, Kant, and Descartes, maintains that these foundational beliefs are certain, self-evident, necessary, or otherwise infallible. The set of these beliefs can greatly differ in scope and size: some philosophers rest their entire epistemology on a single belief⁴³ while others allow non-inferential justifications of many kinds to bestow the property of foundational.⁴⁴ The alternative position is commonly called **modest** foundationalism. It is called modest usually because it does not require the infallibility of foundational beliefs and therefore typically allows a wider set of beliefs to count as foundational. A modest account usually frames the issue by arguing that certainty is not necessary for a belief to be a candidate for knowledge.⁴⁵

examples that the general universal principles are abstracted through other *a priori* means like induction or formal deduction.

⁴² Johann Gottlieb Fichte. *Science of Knowledge (Wissenschaftslehre)*. Translated by Peter L. Heath and John Lachs, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970. p. I.446.

⁴³ E.g. Descartes and his "*cogito ergo sum*." See René Descartes. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*. Trans. Donald A. Cress. Hackett Publishing Company, 1998.

⁴⁴ E.g. Aristotle and his *voûç*. See Aristotle. *De Anima*. Translated by Hugh Lawson-Tancred, Penguin Books, 1986. These days it is more controversial to suggest that Aristotle is a classical foundationalist. See e.g. Breno Andrade Zuppolini. "Aristotle's Foundationalism." *Revista Dissertatio De Filosofia*, vol. 44, 2017, p. 187.

⁴⁵ An historical example of modest foundationalism can be found in Thomas Reid. *Thomas Reid: Selected Philosophical Writings*. Edited by Giovanni Grandi, Imprint Academic, 2012. Modest foundationalism on the whole, however, is a position which has come into prominence much more recently.

Both types of foundationalism have historically been supported by the regress argument which first appears in Aristotle.⁴⁶ The argument goes as follows: knowledge must be grounded in some demonstration whose conclusion is the belief in question, and that such a demonstration—in addition to being logically sound—must contain premises whose contents count as knowledge. Thus if the premises of the initial demonstration are knowledge they must also be grounded in some demonstration whose premises are themselves knowledge, and so on *ad infinitum*. This gives rise to a quadrilemma. The first possibility is that this regress continues forever, and that, since reason cannot proceed through an infinite series of demonstrations, knowledge is not possible. Second, the regress terminates in some initial premises, these premises cannot be demonstrated, and hence these premises are not candidates for knowledge; thus no knowledge is possible. The third possibility is that at some point this regress becomes a circle, and hence that all knowledge is demonstrable (i.e. a demonstration can be furnished for any knowledge). The fourth possibility is that the argument is flawed, or "that not all knowledge is demonstrative: on the contrary, knowledge of the immediate [premises] is independent of demonstration."⁴⁷ This is Aristotle's own position, and it is a foundationalist one. But even accepting Aristotle's reasoning, there remain open two questions: first, whether the regress argument supports the classical or the modest foundationalist picture; and second, how any knowledge can be independent of demonstration at all.

To answer the second question, I would appeal to the first chapter of this paper. Earlier, I showed that presentational activities are capable of immediately grounding the knowledge of their contents. As discussed Proposition I, a subject is *prima facie* justified in responding to the presentational mental activity with a corresponding representational activity, i.e. belief. As presentations are the only activity which affords this symmetry, they are unique among the mental activities heretofore discussed in giving this justification. Imaginations cannot ground knowledge (except second-order knowledge about the content of the imagination) since the source of the content is the imagining subject, and beliefs (in particular, other knowledge) can ground knowledge but not foundationally. Thus it is perception, whether empirically in sense or

⁴⁶ Aristotle. *Posterior Analytics*. Translated by G. R. G. Mure, The Internet Classics Archive, 2009.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 72b18

intellectually in intuition, that can provide the immediately justified knowledge to satisfactorily resolve the regress quadrilemma.

As far as the type of foundationalism warranted by the regress argument, Alston argues that it is only modest foundationalism.⁴⁸ To do so he argues that classical foundationalism must both establish the existence of immediately justified non-inferential knowledge and the immediate justification of that immediate justification. In other words, classical foundationalism would have to guarantee that no argument was capable of defeating the immediate justification provided by the sensory experience or intuition. But as I have shown, both the senses and intuition are capable of error and thus this is an impossible task. So in summary, a modest foundationalism in which the foundational *a priori* knowledge is granted by intuition and the foundational *a posteriori* knowledge is granted by the senses.

But the immaterial and *a priori* nature of intuitions is something which is highly contested and the cause of much skepticism in philosophy. This manifests itself in what I call the objection of subjectivity. Though the objection of subjectivity is not wholly characterized by its protestation from the materialist or positivist angle, it is certainly informed and colored by these positions. BonJour neatly summarizes the objection: "*a priori* philosophical argument cannot tell us about independent *reality*, but only about our subjective ... *concepts*."⁴⁹ Though "argument" is the target of the objection it applies to non-discursive methods of justification as well, and hence intuition comes under attack. BonJour himself is sympathetic to the idea of intuition (or as he calls it, rational insight), and so he is also hostile to this objection of subjectivity. Despite this, he does not provide what I would consider a satisfactory response, arguing instead that the distinction between our concepts and the world (and hence the objection) simply does not make much sense. As I see it there are two more substantial responses that one can give, both of which are ontological in nature.

First, there is the idealist response, which can be seen as a *reductio ad absurdum*. This line would argue that *a priori* and *a posteriori* arguments (and also non-discursive methods of justification) are alike in that they 'are only about subjective concepts.' According to the idealist

⁴⁸ William P. Alston. "Two Types of Foundationalism." *The Journal of Philosophy*. vol. 73, no. 7, 1976. pp. 165-185.

⁴⁹ Laurence BonJour. *In Defense of Pure Reason: A Rationalist Account of a Priori Justification*. Cambridge University Press, 1998. p. 150.

picture, all experience—both sensory and intellectual experience—is mental, and hence reality itself is purely mental. There are many forms and variations that philosophers have made to this central hypothesis, but this is the primary commitment an idealist makes. The idealist response completely removes these concerns of subjectivity, or rather, it circumvents them. By rejecting the premise that the concern of subjectivity is limited to *a priori* arguments and justifications, the objector is forced into a skeptical scenario, and thus forced to doubt all knowledge of the supposed independent reality. But this would force the objector to abandon the belief that *a priori* arguments cannot give knowledge of independent reality. In order to have any further hope, therefore, the objector must furnish an argument against idealism. Thus the idealist position turns an epistemological question about the reliability of knowledge which is purely *a priori* into a metaphysical question about the nature of reality. It is a purely sociological fact however that those inclined to make the objection of subjectivity are not likely to be in favor of metaphysical idealism.

The realist response is much more likely to persuade someone who is inclined to the objection of subjectivity but comes at the cost of being more sophisticated. Thankfully both the objection of subjectivity and the realist response have deep roots in the tradition, and can be found together in the *Summa Theologica* of St. Aquinas. After formulating the objection,⁵⁰ Aquinas replies thus:

On the contrary, The intelligible species is to the intellect what the sensible image is to the sense. But the sensible image is not what is perceived, but rather that by

⁵⁰ Aquinas Develops the objection as follows:

"Objection 1: It would seem that the intelligible species abstracted from the phantasm is related to our intellect as that which is understood. For the understood in act is in the one who understands: since the understood in act is the intellect itself in act. But nothing of what is understood is in the intellect actually understanding, save the abstracted intelligible species. Therefore this species is what is actually understood.

Obj. 2: Further, what is actually understood must be in something; else it would be nothing. But it is not in something outside the soul: for, since what is outside the soul is material, nothing therein can be actually understood. Therefore what is actually understood is in the intellect. Consequently it can be nothing else than the aforesaid intelligible species.

Obj. 3: Further, the Philosopher says (1 Peri Herm. i) that "words are signs of the passions in the soul." But words signify the things understood, for we express by word what we understand. Therefore these passions of the soul—viz. the intelligible species, are what is actually understood."

Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica, Part I (Prima Pars) From the Complete American Edition*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Project Gutenberg, 2006. I, Q. 85, Art. 2.

which sense perceives. Therefore the intelligible species is not what is actually understood, but that by which the intellect understands.⁵¹

While not so plain as the idealist response, this also makes certain metaphysical claims (for Aquinas, these claims are stated and supported in many of the earlier articles in the *Summa*). First, that "intelligible species" represent an object which exists external to the subject. This means not only that the various properties that physical matter appears to possess by means of the senses (e.g. sweetness, hotness, blueness) exist as objects, but also that the various propositions grasped by the understanding in intuition have existence external to the subject. So there is a heavy burden undertaken by the realist in order to explain how this is possible; in short, how something like "good" or "an arbitrary triangle" can exist as an object outside of the mind of the subject without resorting to idealism. This is essentially the "problem of universals" as the medieval philosophers understood it. A plausible response on the part of the realist is commit itself to a sort of substance⁵² dualism,⁵³ according to which the universe consists of both physical and non-physical or abstract foundation. But there are plenty of other solutions to this problem which do not commit themselves to dualism and hence many ways to continue the discussion from there. In any case I have shown that the objection of subjectivity can be massaged into the problem of universals, which might be a more compromising ground on which to debate.

I think that both the idealist and the realist responses have merits, but it is also possible that the objection of subjectivity does not need to be taken seriously. Consider what is being advanced by the suggestion that no *a priori* justification can give knowledge of independent reality. Is not this claim itself both *a priori* and about independent reality? It certainly must be *a priori* insofar as it is universal, and it is about independent reality insofar as it pertains to the content (in this case, the knowledge) of a mind in general and hence of other minds. So unless the objector is committed to a solipsistic picture of the universe in which he is the only mind and only he can possess knowledge, he is speaking complete absurdities. If he continues to insist that the claim is not about independent reality, but is instead 'merely about the concept of

⁵¹ Ibid., I, Q. 85, Art. 2.

⁵² It is probably possible to reconcile this account with property or predicate dualism, but this is certainly not the position of Aquinas.

⁵³ It is also somewhat controversial to cast Aquinas' position (Thomistic Hylomorphism) as dualist, but these complications are not important here.

independent reality' and 'merely about the concept of knowledge,' he is only playing a game on words in which everyone loses. In this case any truth in philosophy is a mere accident of whatever definitions one chooses to accept for the concepts at hand. But since that choice depends primarily on *a priori* means (that is to say, on intuition), one would never be able to assert that any of one's true beliefs count as knowledge, no matter how internally consistent or perfectly coherent one's system of belief. Therefore the most reasonable response to the objection of subjectivity is to say that the claim is 'only about the concept of *a priori* justification' and assert that the objector has the concept wrong.

This method of responding suggests a much more general strategy for esteeming intuition as the highest authority in philosophy and the method on which all philosophy rests. This is what I would call the strategy of regress, insofar as it is analogous to but not the same as the regress argument of Aristotle above. Suppose that someone does not believe that intuition can produce knowledge. On what basis is that belief formed? It is *a priori* (again, as it is a claim about knowledge *sui generis*) so it is either discursively reasoned from some collection of premises and some logical rules, or it is intuited. If it is intuited, then the owner of the belief cannot count it as knowledge. But if it is not knowledge (and, in fact cannot become knowledge in a consistent theory), then it does not belong to the science of knowledge, or in other words, is not a part of philosophy (or at the very least, the philosophy with which I am concerned here). And the same can be said for the premises and logical rules by which the deduction occurs; either they are intuited or deduced, and if intuited, not knowledge, and consequently none of the arguments or conclusions drawn from those premises can count as knowledge either; in particular the original belief cannot count as knowledge. Such a claim is self-terminating because it is simultaneously attempting to disqualify certain types of beliefs from counting as knowledge while being itself among that type of belief. So suppose instead that someone accepts *a priori* means as a source of knowledge but holds that no *a priori* knowledge is foundational. Again one asks on what basis that claim is made. It is an *a priori* conclusion, and so must be justified through *a priori* means. But any *a priori* argument will inevitably rely on intuition to supply its premises or rules of inference if it is to avoid circularity. So if *a priori* knowledge is not foundational then the negation of *a priori* as foundational cannot count as knowledge, since it would then lack a

foundation. Again, this claim is self-terminating. Therefore there must be some foundational *a priori* knowledge, i.e. intuition must be one of the types of non-inferential justifications capable of granting knowledge.

One might imagine that this is a sufficient success for the foundationalist position, but I would push for more. Not only is intuition foundational, but among the types of foundational justification it serves an exalted role. First, intuition is the only way that one can acquire foundational *a priori* knowledge,⁵⁴ and thus philosophy, which is fundamentally an *a priori* project, is ultimately beholden to intuition. Second, all knowledge, even the knowledge non-inferentially justified by the senses, relies on intuition. This is clear when one notices that empirical knowledge is always mediately justified via the supplication of a premise along the lines of "sensory experience is a reliable ground for knowledge." But this is an *a priori* statement, since it is about sensory experience in general, and as I have just argued, any *a priori* statement must appeal to intuition as its foundation, whether immediately or ultimately. Thus even though the senses reliably provide immediately justified knowledge, the rigorous (i.e. philosophical) defense of this knowledge must appeal to intuition at some level. So I concur with Fichte, and reaffirm that "intellectual intuition is the only firm standpoint for all philosophy."

§ 3 Skeptical Concerns

If intuition is to serve as the foundation for philosophical knowledge it should be expected to withstand or repel skeptical objections. Though there are many flavors of skepticism, of particular current interest is dream skepticism and the related simulation scenarios. These scenarios are important to consider because with advancements in technological sophistication it seems less and less absurd to suggest that something like the "brain in a vat" is or can be made possible. Although I will focus mostly on the dream argument (as it ostensibly the most plausible way radical skepticism is introduced), I believe the key moves are sufficiently similar in the simulation scenarios as well.

⁵⁴ It is worth noting that it might be possible that one is born being aware of some true *a priori* propositions, or in other words that certain *a priori* beliefs are formed through memory of some innate knowledge. For Plato, all knowledge is of this kind.

The common formulation of dream skepticism simply states something like the following: while dreaming, one experiences phenomena much like when one is awake. Furthermore, while dreaming, one cannot (usually) determine that one is dreaming, and so behaves and acts as if one is completely awake and conscious. Thus, it is possible that, though one might be behaving and acting as though one is awake and conscious, that one is in fact dreaming. Therefore any beliefs whose justification requires one's being awake are defeated. The plausibility of dream skepticism aside, the consequences it wreaks upon knowledge are immense. If now I am currently dreaming, then I must doubt even the veracity of my senses, and in turn the majority of my knowledge. There are two options available should one wish to reground one's knowledge: the first would be to assert that there are things that one can know while dreaming, based on the dream-experiences; the second, that there are things that one can know while dreaming, independent of any dream-experience. This subsection will demonstrate the impossibility of the first course, then show that despite this there is a way that knowledge can be insulated against this flavor of skepticism. But before refuting dream skepticism it is necessary to understand precisely why it is a compelling objection. To do this I borrow from Ernest Sosa's lecture "Dreams and Philosophy."⁵⁵

Before continuing however it is worth noting that mine and Sosa's goals with respect to the claims of the dream skeptics are different. Sosa, as a reliabilist (or virtue epistemologist) wants to be rid of the possibility that he is dreaming, or in other words, to ascertain that he is awake and thus in possession of knowledge of various kinds. I, on the other hand, would prefer to secure knowledge against this possibility, or in other words, to find beliefs that are candidates for knowledge even in the case that I am dreaming.

The theoretically important aspect of Sosa's account of dreams is his assertion that dreaming is like imagining or fiction-telling. At the movie theater, Sosa gives as an example, one has real audio-visual experiences but has "switched off [one's] full cognitive processing"⁵⁶ through the suspension of disbelief. This action is a fundamentally epistemic action (or properly speaking lack thereof) on the part of the movie-going subject. Analogously, while dreams do consist of phenomenal experiences, they are not processed with the full epistemic resources of

⁵⁵ Sosa, *Op. cit.* pp. 1-21.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

the subject. The dreamer, however, is usually unable to actively influence which epistemic faculties he is engaging,⁵⁷ and thus can neither suspend nor exercise disbelief. The conceiving of dreams as fiction, or rather, as imaginations, allows one to apply the framework of direction to determine that dreams are properly from-subject-toward-subject.

Sosa demonstrates the epistemic work done by this conception by supposing that he is currently dreaming; in this dream he would then have a subjective mental activity containing the appearance of a hand. But "even if [he] had now been dreaming, which might easily enough have happened, [he] would not thereby have been thinking that [he] see[s] a hand, based on a corresponding phenomenal experience."⁵⁸ The subtlety here lies in the realization that the "corresponding phenomenal experience" that any dream-thoughts would be based on in this scenario is not an experience of 'seeing a hand' but rather of 'imagining a hand.' The epistemology and logic of the dream works in the same way that the epistemology and logic of a fictional story does while conscious. There are certainly claims to be made about the dream-experience just as there are claims to be made about the events of a fictional story; furthermore, these claims can be true or false depending on how they are justified.⁵⁹ Likewise the characters in dreams and in fiction can have dream-beliefs or fiction-beliefs based on their subjective mental activities. But beliefs formed by those subjects who are not characters in the fictional story on the basis of the events of a fictional story are just that: they represent reality only insofar as the story about which those beliefs are formed is a real story. The same is true of beliefs formed on the basis of imaginations or dreams. For imaginations and dreams in particular, all the content of experiences of this type is from-subject-toward-subject in the above sense. Even though the will is not consciously involved in dreaming the mind is ultimately imposing its own rules and logics independent of whatever occurs outside.⁶⁰ As with conscious imaginations

⁵⁷ It is possible for a lucid dreamer to determine how he epistemically interacts with the contents of his dream, but this is not entirely relevant to the skepticism case insofar as if one were lucid the dream skepticism would be defeated out of hand.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵⁹ For example, if I claim that Don Quixote dies while jousting giants in La Mancha, I would be wrong about the content of the story. Likewise if Don Quixote claims later that he jousts sheeps instead of giants, he would be wrong (mistaken, deluded, lying, &c.) about the contents of his imagination.

⁶⁰ Thanks to my friend Auteur for this considered objection and my friend Tess for the rebuttal.

the sensorium is capable of informing and influencing what one experiences⁶¹ without the direction thereby becoming from-world.

If one considers the extremal cases of the phenomena of dreaming and imagining to be lucid dreaming and vivid daydreaming, then the mechanisms in place become more transparent. In these cases, the subject has an awareness that the dream-experiences or imaginations are not properly speaking his own, insofar as the subject is aware that he is lying in bed or staring out the window. But despite this, the subject is able to process and interact with the manifold of the dream-experience or imagination in the same way that a fictional character does in a story. The subject thus has the phenomenal experiences of a character in his own fictions. This also explains why one might have a dream in the third person, or imagine one is someone else entirely, as the dream-subject is not to be identified with the subject who is dreaming. In an important sense, the dream-subject is just as generated by the dreaming mind as all of the content which appears before him.

There is still some room here for the objection that sensory experiences had while unconscious can influence the content of dreams and thus provide one with some kind of knowledge.⁶² To use an example from Barry Stroud, "a banging shutter might actually cause me to dream, among other things, that a shutter is banging. If my environment affects me in that way, and if in dreams I can be said to think or believe that something is so, would I not in that case know that a shutter is banging?"⁶³ The initial response to cases like this is that one is not in possession of knowledge in this case (and in the nearby Gettier cases). Understanding dreams as imaginations better allows one to determine precisely why no knowledge is produced here. Even while the dream-experiences are caused by corresponding events in the waking world, the similarities are purely coincidental; there is no necessary connection between the banging shutter in the waking world and the one in the dream—it could just as easily have happened that the banging shutter caused one to dream of a slamming kitchen cabinet. Furthermore, by inferring from the dream-experiences one is inferring from appearances or presentations that are generated by the dreaming mind, even when the mind is externally influenced. Again, even while

⁶¹ For example, to imagine a Chimera involves synthesizing from one's memories of lions, goats, and snakes.

⁶² E.g. Tore A. Nielsen. "Changes in the Kinesthetic Content of Dreams Following Somatosensory Stimulation of Leg Muscles During REM Sleep." *Dreaming*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1993, pp. 99–113.

⁶³ Barry Stroud. *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*. Clarendon Press, 1991, p. 15.

influenced by external events, concepts, or states of affairs, the content of imaginations (and hence of dreams) is from-subject. Thus according to the schema of re-presentationalism the dream-presentations do not have the correct direction to grant *prima facie* justification and so beliefs formed on the basis thereof will not enjoy the status of knowledge.

So in summary, according to the directional model of justification there is no way that the sensory (or pseudo-sensory) experiences of a dream can contribute toward knowledge while dreaming. But this still leaves open the possibility that one can have knowledge which is not based upon the sensory dream-experiences but instead on the experience of dreaming itself. What I have shown thus far is that most *a posteriori* knowledge is defeated by dream skepticism—that it is not possible to have empirical knowledge based on the faculties of sense if one is really dreaming. But *a priori* knowledge is not like this. What distinguishes *a priori* claims from *a posteriori* claims (among many other things) is that they are founded upon intuitions rather than sensations. Additionally, as discussed above, intuitions rely on non-physical or non-empirical faculties; ones belonging wholly to the mind and not to the more remote areas of the nervous system. Therefore if one can establish that the mind is as capable of intuiting certain propositions while dreaming as it is while awake, then one will have safeguarded those propositions against the dream skeptics.

The most plausible candidate for such a protected proposition is "experience is occurring." Whenever this proposition appears before the mind it is necessarily true, since its appearance before the mind is itself an experience. Thus if one intuits this proposition, whether one is asleep in a dream or awake and completely lucid, it will grant justification for the belief that experience is occurring, and thus one will have knowledge that experience is occurring. To counteract any potential objectors who would maintain that, during a dream, the 'experiences' of seeing, hearing, &c. are not true experiences but rather only imaginations thereof, one can modify the proposition to "intellectual experience is occurring" in order to weaken it. Even if there is no sensory experience taking place, or if what appears as sensory experience is not in actuality, one will still remain in possession of the knowledge that intellectual experience is occurring.

Intellectual experience is insulated in this way for two reasons. First, it is possible while dreaming to have a *bona fide* intellectual experience (e.g. an intuition) because the requisite faculties are all operational to the extent required for intellectual experience to occur. The fact that intuition is purely cognitive means that, unlike the physical senses, it is *prima facie* reliable whenever cognitive activity is occurring. Therefore even though all of the empirical senses are completely unreliable during a dream, and the sights and sounds of the dream cannot justify beliefs about the external world, intuition can. This is another reason why the realist response to the objection of subjectivity is attractive.⁶⁴

Second, the act of imagination is itself an intellectual experience. Therefore even an imagination of the proposition "intellectual experience is occurring" will result in a sufficient justification for the belief that intellectual experience is occurring to count as knowledge. This is an echo of the classic "I think, therefore I am"⁶⁵ of Descartes. A charitable reformulation of the argument implied by this phrase is as follows: the subject is a necessary precondition for thought to take place. Therefore if thought is taking place, the subject must exist. Thus the proposition "I think, therefore I am" is true of necessity whenever it appears before the mind. So, according to Descartes one is always justified in believing that one exists if one is thinking. Likewise if the proposition "intellectual experience is occurring" appears before the mind, whether it is intuited or imagined it becomes true of necessity. But if an imagination of the proposition "intellectual experience is occurring" can guarantee that intellectual experience is occurring, then as I have just argued, it is possible to have intuitions and thus to possess knowledge based on those intuitions.

So at the very least, the worst case of the skeptical scenario is avoided. Not only is knowledge possible, but it is further possible to defeat the skeptical scenario itself. An intuition to the effect of "this is not a dream-scenario" (or similarly, "this is not the brain-in-a-vat scenario," or any other scenario-defeating intuition) is capable of giving to its corresponding belief status as knowledge. Of course, this belief can be defeated by questions about the quality

⁶⁴ The idealist response to the objection of subjectivity is attractive not as a way to refute the skeptical concerns, but to subvert them instead. By making irrelevant investigations into the 'reality' of the content given by the empirical senses the dream scenario is less worrisome for the idealist. There are obviously other problems, like that of other minds, that the idealist must find a way to solve but as idealism is not in the height of its fashion I leave this discussion for a later date.

⁶⁵ Descartes, *op. cit.* p. 18.

or reliability of the intuition, but consider the belief to the contrary: is it really more likely that an intuition about the dream-scenario is true than one about the veracity of one's experience? Of course, to frame these questions in issues of probability is far from the purpose of the present investigation. On the other hand, to ask whether one can reasonably doubt that this is not real, given what I perceive as manifold intellectual and sensory reassurances that it is, is completely justified. Most skeptical scenarios are manifest not by one's having an intuition that they are the case, but are brought about in a speculative register, a qualified or hypothetical domain which does not seriously compel one to cognize the world as false, and one's knowledge as unreliable.

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⁶⁶ Not all the references given here appear in the footnotes.

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