

# 11 Intuition in Philosophical Inquiry

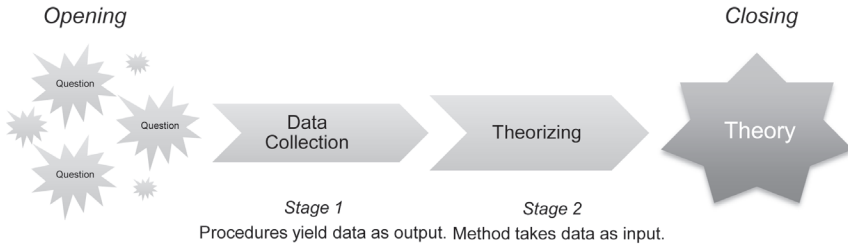
*John Bengson*

What role, if any, do “seemings” play in philosophy? Clarifying the relevant type of philosophical inquiry will enable us to pinpoint what epistemic contributions “seemings” could make thereto. It will also reveal what turns on the question—nothing less, I propose, than the very possibility of philosophy. However, the answer I develop appeals not to seemings but rather to intuitions conceived as a particular type of *presentation*—a “consciousness of seizing upon” how the world is, as Husserl put it.<sup>1</sup> After distinguishing presentations from seemings, I prise apart two kinds of presentational phenomenology, eventually arguing that the “contentful” sort is poised to do the needed epistemic work.

## 11.1. The Structure of Philosophical Inquiry

Philosophy can be undertaken in a practical mode, as a means to some social, political, or ethical end. It’s also possible to philosophize in an aesthetic mode; perhaps this is how to think of those who engage in philosophical activity just because they find it elegant, arresting, or awe-inspiring. Still other modes are possible. A pluralistic commitment to the legitimacy of these different options is fully compatible with viewing philosophical inquiry as often rightly undertaken in a *theoretical* mode.

This is a species of a genus, theoretical inquiry: reflection aimed at the provision of a theory. While often a messy business in practice, such inquiry can be modeled as a process structured around two stages.<sup>2</sup> The first centers on the gathering of relevant considerations, or data, that must somehow be handled when addressing the questions that open inquiry. The second involves constructing a theory that adequately addresses those questions. The two stages are intimately connected insofar as the outputs of the former are the inputs to the latter. Together, they represent the transition from the opening of inquiry, concerning a set of questions, to its closing.



In what does such “closing” consist? In theoretical inquiry, undertaken for its own sake, a fitting end is making an intellectual improvement, in the form of an epistemic achievement such as justified belief, knowledge, or understanding. These constitute success or excellence at theoretical inquiry, and so are among its proper goals. Of course, not every epistemic achievement is an ultimate proper goal: one that resolves theoretical inquiry in a fully successful way, reaching the point at which, to put it simply, there is no more work to be done. For example, although justified belief or ordinary knowledge regarding an answer to a philosophical question—for example, What is knowledge? Is existence a property? Does consciousness affect behavior?—may leave inquirers feeling satisfied, neither state by itself guarantees the sort of comprehensive and systematic illumination needed to complete the job. After all, both can be gained on the basis of rote memorization, which pairs with obliviousness to the answer’s rationale, explanation, or broader fit in the web of the world; and both may incorporate muddle of various sorts, as when one only hazily grasps a key concept in the answer known. In either case, inquiry isn’t finished.

Suppose, however, that inquirers were to achieve *understanding* of their target, in the sense of fully grasping a theory that is accurate (correct), reason-based (positively supported), robust (answers a multitude of questions about the domain), illuminating (explanatory), orderly (systematic), and coherent (internally and externally). Call such a theory “successful.” If a philosophical theory qualifies as such, then it handles the data in a manner that fosters understanding with respect to the questions—regarding topics such as knowledge, existence, consciousness, truth, beauty, God, and morality—giving voice to genuine philosophical perplexity. This is no small feat. Plausibly, fully grasping a theory that is successful in this sense would ensure the sort of comprehensive and systematic illumination that renders it fitting for inquirers to call it a day. Their curiosity, wonder, or puzzlement would be appropriately relieved thereby.<sup>3</sup>

## 11.2. The Possibility of Philosophy

That is, of course, just a sketch of the basic contours of philosophical inquiry, its two-stage structure and epistemic *télos*. Despite being schematic

in certain respects, the sketch is both informative and fecund. Among other things, it enables us to sharpen a longstanding Big Question about philosophy itself: *How is philosophy possible?* For the sketch positions us to view this question as querying either

- i. the character and source of philosophical data (at stage one), or
- ii. the prospect of a method of theorizing (at stage two) capable of turning out successful philosophical theories.

In effect, we can see the Big Question as asking whether we have the tools for the job: do we have intellectual states by whose exercise philosophers can, however fallibly, gather data and develop theories that adequately handle those data?

Appeals to intuition in metaphilosophy are naturally read as proposing an affirmative answer to this question. To reach for intuition in this context is to advance the hypothesis that it is suited to shoulder the epistemic burdens at each stage of philosophical inquiry (data collection and theorizing).<sup>4</sup> Eventually I'll spell out my preferred way of thinking about intuition. For now, let me briefly comment on what this hypothesis says about the two stages.

First, data collection. Very roughly, philosophical data are pre-theoretical claims that inquirers have good reason to believe. For example, that Gettier's Smith has a justified true belief but lacks knowledge, or that an alien creature could undergo mental activity while lacking an organ possessing the physical features characteristic of the human brain, or that it is wrong to harvest the organs of an innocent person to save the lives of five others, or that it is unjust to privilege the contributions of men over the perfectly identical contributions of women—these are candidate data in epistemology, philosophy of mind, normative ethics, and feminist philosophy, respectively. These candidates have been gathered through reflection on thought experiments. General claims regarding the supervenience of the aesthetic on the non-aesthetic, transitivity of identity, essence of singleton sets and their members, or moral status of persons are also widely treated as data. Such data do not magically appear in ready-made lists, but must be collected. Sometimes this is done via perception, introspection, linguistic judgment, testimony, or statistical analysis of surveys. While such empirical sources plausibly yield data describing facets of the actual world (e.g., data registering discrimination based on race, gender, or sexuality), it's far from obvious that they alone can supply the sort of data required to anchor successful inquiry across the philosophical landscape. After all, many important philosophical topics have two features encouraging recognition of data with a non-empirical source: they are at least partly *modal*<sup>5</sup> or *normative* in character, and are often not *about* anyone's immediate environment, current psychological states, use of language, or lay opinions. Insofar as we

have intuitions about what is possible or necessary, essential or non-essential, right or wrong, good or bad, these suggest themselves as resources when collecting the sort of data philosophers need. The hypothesis stated earlier embraces this suggestion.

Second, theorizing. At the heart of this second stage of inquiry is a method whose function is to take the data as inputs and to yield a successful theory as an output. At a minimum, such a method will instruct theorists to handle the data—that is, *accommodate* and *explain* them—through a series of claims each of which is, in turn, given an adequate *defense*.<sup>6</sup> Many familiar defenses, such as various iterations of the Consequence Argument for incompatibilism about free will, or prominent ethical justifications of vegetarianism, take the form of arguments. These are regularly built out of modal or normative premises regarded as true, perhaps obviously so, or supported by further arguments whose premises have this feature. Other defenses may be more direct—as per (a common interpretation of) traditional defenses of classical logic, according to which they treat its core principles as self-evident rather than the conclusions of arguments. Whatever its form, to be adequate a defense must provide positive epistemic support for a given claim: a reason for belief. Such a reason needn't be dialectically persuasive, capable of rationally convincing an opponent. Nor must it be indefeasible, or even conclusive. Still, it needs to be good, being not only undefeated but also strong, in the sense that it would not be easily defeated by competing considerations, and its possession implies the possession of at least some evidence. The hypothesis articulated earlier effectively states that intuition fits the bill.

I've suggested that if intuition is to help answer our question about the possibility of philosophy, it should slot in to inquiry's two-stage structure in the right ways. The "should" indicates that the hypothesis that it does so must be *earned*, not presumed. One way to make progress towards this end would be to develop and refine this hypothesis, showing that it satisfies the criteria of a good theory by handling data about the epistemology of our two stages in a way that promotes understanding of the enterprise (philosophical inquiry) they compose. This is my primary goal in what follows.

### 11.3. Data Regarding the Epistemology of Philosophy

An adequate theory of a given domain must handle the data regarding that domain. When it comes to the epistemology of philosophical inquiry, these data include observations about the epistemic practices of philosophers engaged in philosophical discussion and debate at the two stages of inquiry. These practices are many and varied. While any attempt at a comprehensive list is bound to be controversial, it is safe to say that any plausible effort will cite practices such as reflection on thought experiments and critical scrutiny of general claims or principles. I will focus on this pair,

though my remarks plausibly extend to many other epistemic practices, such as assessment of relevant inferences (i.e., determining what follows from what) or conceptual ethics.

Reflection on thought experiments and general principles facilitates both the collection of data at inquiry's first stage and the defense of theoretical claims at its second. (Section 11.2 cited a few examples.) Our responses to hypothetical scenarios and candidate principles are not invariably based on reasoning through multi-premise arguments. Often the verdicts strike us as immediately clear or obvious. Nor are they usually the products merely of vision, audition, olfaction, gustation, or somatosensation. Yet, in such cases, we find ourselves in possession of knowledge, or at least justified belief. That isn't to say we never proceed cautiously; we sometimes withhold judgment. But in many cases, we take a stand, and regard our responses as suitable bases for a very high level of confidence.

Having called attention to a few key epistemic practices in philosophy, highlighting the central role played by our responses to thought experiments and general principles, we are now ready to take the step of identifying some of the data that an adequate theory of these practices must handle. A few have already been mentioned; a bit more thought reveals several others. It will prove helpful to compile a list:

- D1. When engaging in these practices, it often strikes us that this, that, or the other thing.
- D2. These responses are conscious states or events.
- D3. These responses occur straightaway, in the absence of any consciously mediated transition from the presumed truth of one set of claims to the truth of the verdict that strikes us as true.
- D4. These responses may prompt us to endorse the verdict, though we may instead withhold judgment (e.g., from caution, or because we lose the temptation to affirm a given response).
- D5. These responses are sometimes reactions to highly unusual or fantastical scenarios, far removed from any actual situations that we've faced, or to principles whose scope of application encompasses situations we could not encounter.
- D6. These responses sometimes conflict with our antecedent views, and so to what we are antecedently inclined to think about the topic.
- D7. These responses are regularly taken to justify the beliefs they prompt, provide evidence for those beliefs' contents, and put their subjects in a position to know those contents.
- D8. In many cases, we regard it as appropriate to possess a very high level of confidence in these beliefs.
- D9. We are often unable to identify a set of considerations, independent of our responses, that provide a correspondingly strong rationale for these beliefs.

D10. While these beliefs are sometimes achieved with little effort, they are also sometimes the result of substantial reflection or analysis.

This list is not meant to be exhaustive. Nevertheless, it identifies a number of important data that an adequate theory of the relevant epistemic practices is called to accommodate and explain.<sup>7</sup>

To get a feel for how to proceed from here, consider an *inferentialist* theory of these practices: when collecting data and assembling theories in the course of philosophical inquiry, we acquire justified belief or knowledge of philosophically significant claims by performing inferences from a stock of warranted background beliefs, where inference is a certain kind of normatively evaluable mental transition.<sup>8</sup> This theory sticks to components—beliefs and inferences—that are familiar. However, it is an open question whether they enable the theory to handle all the data enumerated earlier (and other pertinent data). It is not simply that inferentialism is silent about the responses described in the first six data, D1—D6, which it thereby fails to either accommodate or explain. Its central thesis is also difficult to square with several of these data: the idea that we infer our verdicts from our background beliefs appears to point in the opposite direction from the observations that those verdicts are not consciously mediated (per D3) and are sometimes novel (per D5) or revolutionary (per D6). Inferentialism also looks ill-suited to handle the observations about justification, evidence, and knowledge in the remaining data. For example, inductive and abductive inferences do not typically support the high level of confidence described in D8. The point is not decisive. But it becomes concerning when combined with D7, which tells us that our conscious responses are regularly treated as adequate epistemic bases, and D9, regarding our inability to identify independent considerations that might provide the indicated support.

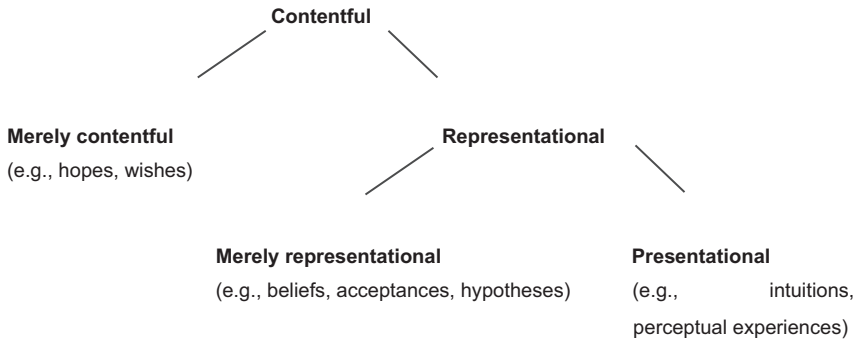
Of course, it is open to inferentialists to supplement their theory with additional claims that handle the data. Alternatively, inferentialists may provide strong reasons to think that some or all of the putative data I've enumerated are not really data or needn't be accommodated and explained.<sup>9</sup> While I welcome efforts to take these steps, it seems to me doubtful that either strategy will succeed. I am more optimistic about an intuition-based approach, to which we turn next.

#### 11.4. An Intuition-Based Theory

While there are many ways to develop an intuition-based theory of the relevant epistemic practices, my preferred version combines four main theses. The first tells us what an intuition is:

**Quasi-Perceptualism:** Intuitions are a specific type of presentational state, a species of contentful state that does not merely represent the world as

being some way, but also *presents* it as being that way. (The diagram below portrays these taxonomical divisions.) Such a state has several characteristic features: it is *conscious*, *non-factive*, *gradable* (it can be more or less clear, vivid, hazy, or obscure), *baseless* (it is not consciously formed, by a subject, on the basis of any other mental states), *fundamentally non-voluntary* (it happens to one), *compelling* (it inclines one to belief), and *rationalizing* (its content shows up as to-be-believed).<sup>10</sup>



The next three theses apply to all presentational states. The first focuses on justification:

**Presentationalism:** A thinker is justified in believing that *p* on the basis of a presentational state—such as intuition—with content *p* because in having that state, it is presented to the thinker that *p*. Such justification is both defeasible and gradable: it is greater to the extent that the corresponding presentation is clear and vivid, and it is lesser to the extent that the presentation is hazy and obscure.<sup>11</sup>

Another addresses evidence:

**Content Is Evidence:** The content of a presentational state—such as intuition—belongs to a thinker’s body of evidence because it is the content of a presentational state. Such evidential status is once again both defeasible and gradable.<sup>12</sup>

The last confronts the possibility of knowledge:

**Naïve Realism:** When a presentational state—such as intuition—with content *p* is non-accidentally correct, hence able to serve as a source of knowledge that *p*, this is so because the state is constituted by the (possibly mind-independent) fact that *p*.<sup>13</sup>

Elsewhere I endeavor to clarify and substantiate each of these theses, along with several other claims about the nature and epistemic status of intuition—for example, concerning intuition's relation to epistemically fecund social practices, place in disagreement, and role as a sense-maker.<sup>14</sup> What I wish to emphasize here is that these four theses are well-positioned to accommodate and explain all the data enumerated earlier.

To appreciate this, notice that the first thesis, Quasi-Perceptualism, not only renders it likely that the initial six data are true; it also helps to explain why those data hold. For suppose that participants in the relevant epistemic practices have intuitions that are presentational in the sense described by the Quasi-Perceptualist thesis. This would make sense of the fact that subjects experience conscious strikings (per D1 and D2) that, while occurring without conscious mediation (per D3), could but need not prompt beliefs (per D4), perhaps even beliefs that are novel (per D5) or revolutionary (per D6).<sup>15</sup>

The remaining three theses—Presentationalism, Content is Evidence, and Naïve Realism—accommodate and explain the data about justification, evidence, and knowledge in D7 and D8. Together, the four theses help to make sense of D9, regarding our inability to identify independent considerations that provide the requisite support for our verdicts. And when the four theses are supplemented with a plausible claim about the etiology of presentational states, they also handle D10. The claim is this:

**Effort:** While some presentational states—including some intuitions—require very little preparation, others may occur only in the wake of considerable mental effort, including sustained attention to and careful analysis of various questions, claims, and scenarios.

While my use of this etiological claim to accommodate and explain a datum about philosophical inquiry may appear somewhat novel, the claim itself is old. A severe version is endorsed by Plato, who required ten years of advanced mathematical training, plus more experience and education besides, to properly “see those very things one cannot see except with the mind.”<sup>16</sup> In the mid-20th century, A. C. Ewing emphasized in *Reason and Intuition* the comparatively prosaic point that

Even where intuition is not backed by any explicit process of inference, . . . intuition is not a quasi-miraculous flash of insight standing by itself and not essentially connected with any thought-process at all. Intuition presupposes at least a partial analysis of the situation or a selecting of certain aspects of it, a process which presumably takes some time and may be more or less gradual, and it is certainly affected deeply by our previous experience and thought. What we see immediately may be the



result of a careful survey or long experience of the whole situation or the whole system involved.<sup>17</sup>

Though the labor at issue is often framed in individualistic terms, its social-historical dimensions are at least equally important. As Frege observed in the *Grundlagen*,

Often it is only after immense intellectual effort, which may have continued over centuries, that humanity at last succeeds in . . . stripping off the irrelevant accretions which veil [a topic] from the eyes of the mind.<sup>18</sup>

While individual thinkers can give it their all, success is often contingent on the best efforts of those whom they follow.

In what do such efforts consist? As with any psychological state, one may have an intuition in better or worse cognitive conditions. We can think of the good conditions as determined by characteristic features of the state, specified by reference to its success. For example, a characteristic feature of perception is that an important range of its instances require normal lighting conditions for their success; consequently, such lighting will be among the good conditions in the case of perception. Similarly, insofar as a characteristic feature of intuition is that the success of an important range of its instances requires

- mastery of relevant concepts,
- attentiveness to germane distinctions,
- alertness to pertinent instances of vagueness, ambiguity, under-specification, context-sensitivity, pragmatic effects, and the like,
- sensitivity to the potentially distorting influence of affect or cognitive bias,
- familiarity with relevant facts (e.g., non-moral ones when addressing moral questions),
- acquaintance with relevant qualities (e.g., colors, felt pain),
- intellectually virtuous reflection (e.g., calm, careful, attentive, open-minded, sober), and
- the intention to uncover the truth,

such will be among the good conditions in the case of intuition. Such conditions play several important theoretical roles, described by the following thesis:

**Good Conditions:** A presentational state—such as intuition—is regulated by good conditions for its operation, specified by reference to the state's success. Satisfaction of all these conditions implies that it

is constituted by the relevant fact (per Naïve Realism). Deviance from them is a potential defeater or attenuator. Awareness of them positions thinkers to correct, detect, and avoid errors or omissions.

The effort to which Effort refers is essentially a matter of working—individually and collectively, over time—to realize the good conditions. Those who join are on track to intuit responsibly.<sup>19</sup>

### 11.5. Presentations vs. Seemings

Quasi-perceptualism, which affirms that intuitions are presentational states, seeks to improve on the idea that intuitions are seemings. The latter classification is not particularly helpful, as “seeming” can be said in many ways (as J. L. Austin, Roderick Chisholm, Frank Jackson, and many others have emphasized).<sup>20</sup> To give just one example, “It seems to S that p” is true merely if one is inclined to believe that p—as when one truly utters “It seems that the formula is indeed a theorem” after slogging through a highly complicated proof.

One might insist that something else, or more specific, is meant by “seeming.” This is George Bealer’s strategy:

When you have an intuition that A, it *seems* to you that A. Here “seems” is understood, not in its use as a cautionary or “hedging” term [e.g., to designate an inclination to believe], but in its use as a term for a genuine kind of conscious episode.<sup>21</sup>

Bealer goes on to tell us what the relevant “genuine kind of conscious episode” is *not*: it is neither a belief, nor guess, nor hypothesis, nor hunch, and so forth. We are also given a few examples. But little is said about it itself. The relevant type of seeming—whatever it is—remains an unexplicated primitive. For instance, Bealer and other proponents of the seemings theory of intuition (such as Joel Pust and Michael Huemer) do not identify any of the type’s characteristic features, or systematically locate it in a broader taxonomy of mental state types. (By way of contrast, Quasi-Perceptualism does both of these things.) Consequently, the seemings theory is unilluminating: it is unable to handle relevant data. Although it affirms the facts about subjects’ responses in D1 and D2, it fails to explain them. Nor does it make sense of why those responses have the features specified in D3, D4, D5, and D6. While an unexplicated notion may offer a neutral starting point for subsequent investigation, it fails to deliver theoretical understanding of its target.<sup>22</sup>

To be clear, my intention is not to deny a connection between intuitions and the language of “seeming.” I recognize the legitimacy of uttering “It

seems that p” when one has an intuition. (Alternatives include: “It strikes me that p,” “It’s obvious that p,” “It’s clear that p,” “Plainly, p,” “p is evident,” or simply “p.”) But the legitimacy of this way of talking does not support the seemings theory. It’s simply to allow that the language of “seeming” is diverse and inclusive.

Some proponents of the seemings theory might interpret this D&I view of “seeming”-talk to license viewing Quasi-Perceptualism as a friendly elaboration of the seemings theory: some seemings are just presentational states. I’m not completely hostile to this perspective. However, it’s worth noting that there appear to be specific differences between presentations and conscious seemings. Two stand out.

First, although many mental states that merit the label “seeming” represent the world as being the way it would be were their contents true, they do not always *present* those contents as true. That is, seemings needn’t be presentational states. The point applies even to seemings that qualify as instances of a “genuine kind of conscious episode.” To fix attention, consider Ernest Sosa’s observation that when one *feels attracted* to assent to a proposition p, one is in a conscious state that can be truly expressed by uttering “It seems to me that p.”<sup>23</sup> (If inclinations to believe can be truly reported with this form of words, as noted earlier, I see no reason to deny that felt attractions to assent can be as well.) But one may feel attracted to assenting to some claim without it being presented as true. A susceptible listener responding to a charismatic speaker who professes that nature demonstrates God’s greatness might feel attracted to assenting to this proposition even if the listener does not then have the intuition that it is true; the listener does not possess a mental state that presents it as being so.

Second, it seems fair to say that whatever a conscious seeming is, it is *explicit* in the sense that its content is available, at the moment it occurs, as the content of a conscious thought fully articulable by its subject. In other words, if one enjoys a genuine conscious episode in which it seems to one that p, then one is able at the time to formulate explicitly—out loud or in one’s head—the way things seem: that p.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, presentations are sometimes *implicit*: one need not be able at the time to formulate explicitly—out loud or in one’s head—the way things are presented as being. Just as one might have a visual experience but not at that moment be able to articulate fully what was presented in one’s visual consciousness, one might have an intuition but not at that moment be able to articulate fully what was presented in one’s intellectual consciousness. The implication is that what is presented may not be one and the same as what seems true.

An example may help to bring this out. A moral philosopher might have an intuition that presents a given action as negatively valenced in a particular way. Unfortunately, she struggles to articulate the way; at the moment, it eludes her. What *seems* true is that the action is morally problematic—this

content is, right then and there, available for her to think and say. But she suspects that her intuition's content is more specific. So she sets herself the task of pinpointing the negatively valenced normative feature that her intuition ascribes to the action. Impermissibility? No, too strong. Disvalue? No, too weak. Later that evening, when perusing Richard Price's *Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*, she lands on it: the conduct is *unfitting*. This, she realizes, is what she intuited.

The basic point should be familiar: it is one thing to experience or intuit something, and another thing entirely to be able to formulate it explicitly. It is a virtue of Quasi-Perceptualism, which understands intuitions as presentations (which are sometimes inexplicit) rather than seemings (which are explicit), that it clarifies and explains this datum.<sup>25</sup>

### 11.6. Presentational Phenomenology

I've distinguished presentations from seemings. While I've identified several characteristic features of presentational states, those features do not (individually or jointly) amount to an analysis of presentationality. This is a phenomenological property, concerning what it is like for a subject to be in such a state. What is presentational phenomenology?

There are in fact several candidates for the label "presentational phenomenology." Susanna Siegel's treatment of visual experience highlights one species of the genus:

It seems manifest to introspection that visual phenomenology presents spatial properties (such as being nearby or in front of the perceiver), color properties (or properties closely related to colors), and shape and luminance properties.<sup>26</sup>

Focusing also on visual experience, Scott Sturgeon suggests that the same goes for bearers of such features:

What it's like to enjoy visual experience is for it to be as if objects and their features are directly before the mind.<sup>27</sup>

Let's use the expression "objectual presentation" to cover this species of presentational phenomenology, understanding "object" broadly to include such things as properties and relations, as well as individuals.

Jim Pryor identifies another species when describing

the peculiar "phenomenal force" or way our experiences have of presenting propositions to us. Our experiences represent propositions in such a way that it "feels as if" we could tell that those propositions are

true—and that we’re perceiving them to be true—just by virtue of having them so represented.<sup>28</sup>

Pryor’s suggestion is *not* that experiences present contents such as propositions to us in just the way that they present color or shape properties. Some mental states present contents in a different manner: what is presented, or present to mind, is its being the case that *p*, where *p* is a content such as a proposition. The content is presented as true (holding, obtaining, the case, so, etc.). Siegel provides a helpful illustration:

Suppose you see a cube, and it looks red and cubical. Here your experience presents it as being the case that there is a red cube before you. Contrast a hope[:] in hoping that there is a red cube in front of you, it need not be presented to you as being the case that there is a red cube in front of you.<sup>29</sup>

Although the perceptual experience and hope both somehow relate you to the content *there is a red cube before you*, only the former presents this content as being the case. Quasi-Perceptualism asserts that intuitions are like perceptual experiences in just this way: they, too, present their contents as true. For instance, an intuition with the content *a person persists after bicycling in the rain* presents this content as being the case. Call this second species of presentational phenomenology “contentful presentationality.”<sup>30</sup>

I have identified two species of a genus, presentational phenomenology, clarifying which is ascribed to intuitions by the theory presented in Section 11.4. Are there any other species? According to Elijah Chudnoff, who takes both intuition and perceptual experience to possess presentational phenomenology,

What it is for an experience of yours to have presentational phenomenology with respect to *p* is for it to both make it seem that *p* is true and make it seem as if this experience makes you aware of a truth-maker for *p*,<sup>31</sup>

where a truth-maker may be a property, relation, or individual—some “chunk of reality that makes it true that *p*.”<sup>32</sup> This proposal is evocative. But I do not think it unearths a third species of presentational phenomenology. In fact, I doubt that it provides a theoretically adequate description of any type of presentational phenomenology. My skepticism is motivated by concerns about each conjunct.

The first conjunct understands presentational phenomenology in terms of seemings. Per Section 11.5, this renders it not only theoretically unilluminating (since the notion of seeming remains an unexplicated primitive)

but also mistaken (since conscious seemings are not always presentational but are always explicit, whereas presentations are always presentational but potentially inexplicit).<sup>33</sup>

As for the second conjunct, I harbor two reservations. First, the demand that subjects have in mind putative truth-makers excludes many ordinary moral intuitions. That it's right to protect your children from lethal danger, wrong to recreationally slaughter other people, fitting to repay kindness with kindness (but not unkindness with unkindness)—intuiters often feel in the dark about the “chunk of reality,” if any, that makes the contents of these intuitions true.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, familiar intuitions about Gettier cases, causal preemption scenarios, deviant causal chains, normative supervenience theses, the law of noncontradiction, or the transitivity of identity famously leave wide open what, if anything, makes their contents true (even putatively). Second, the second conjunct's demand for seeming-awareness<sup>35</sup> overreaches. Suppose you have the intuition that anything green is a determinate shade of green, or that infinite magnitudes are larger than finite ones, or that it's blameworthy to violate a moral requirement absent excuse. Does it—indeed, must it—thereby seem to you as if you are *aware* of any relevant *objects*, such as green, infinity, or blameworthiness, that might plausibly serve as these contents' truth-makers? It may be that your intuition involves thinking about or cognitively attending to such things. But it is far from clear that it involves seeming to be aware of them in a manner relevantly similar to the way that perceptual experience makes it seem as if you are aware of colors and shapes, which goes well beyond mere thinking or cognitive attention.

One possibility is that neither conjunct is to be read strictly or literally, and Chudnoff's proposal simply aspires to conjoin the two species of presentational phenomenology I've identified. This is a natural way to interpret Chudnoff's comment (issued in response to my distinction between the two species) that, as he sees it, “perceptual experiences *both* present propositions as being true to us, *and* present objects and features to us.”<sup>36</sup> However, Chudnoff immediately remarks, “I am using ‘presentational phenomenology’ to pick out the second property”; this is followed by the suggestion that experiences “have the first *because* they have the second.”<sup>37</sup> I doubt the remark, which is difficult to square with Chudnoff's demand for a seeming that *p* (recall the first conjunct of his proposal, discussed in the previous three paragraphs); moreover, the idea that the second property captures a notion of presentational phenomenology applicable to intuition is questionable for (*inter alia*) the reasons offered in the preceding paragraph. Regarding the suggestion: importantly, it commends an alternative to the theory articulated in Section 11.4, which gives pride of place to contentful presentationality. Let me now succinctly raise two objections to Chudnoff's suggestion that we instead view its objectual sibling as occupying the privileged position.

The first is a variant on Frank Jackson's "many property problem."<sup>38</sup> Consider the following sequence. Your initial experience presents it as being the case that a red sphere and a green cube are on a surface before you. The two objects then change colors. Your subsequent experience presents it as being the case that a green sphere and a red cube are on a surface before you. Here is a claim about this sequence: in the two experiences, the same objects and properties are present to mind, though different contents are presented as being the case. If this claim is correct, as seems plausible, it tells against the suggestion that contentful presentational phenomenology can be fully explained in terms of objectual presentational phenomenology.

The second objection is epistemic. I'll approach it indirectly, by first commenting on the interaction between the main elements of my position. Though neutral with respect to objectual presentationality, Quasi-Perceptualism asserts that intuition displays contentful presentationality. Presentationalism, Content Is Evidence, and Naïve Realism put this assertion to epistemic work. In doing so, they explain the distinct epistemic profiles of contentfully presentational states, such as perceptual experience and intuition, on one hand, and imagistic states, including states of imagination, whether sensory or intellectual, on the other. This might be thought unachievable by a set of epistemic theses focused on phenomenology. But Quasi-Perceptualism's attention to contentful presentationality positions them to manage the feat. To illustrate, notice that an imaginer who deliberately forms a vivid mental image of a multi-colored balloon and imagines that it is hovering before her is relevantly different from a perceptual experiencer to whom it is presented that there is a multi-colored balloon hovering before her. The two subjects may enjoy identical visual images (involving redness, blueness, yellowness, circularity, etc.), perhaps thereby seeming to undergo the same objectual presentations (of the corresponding qualities); but the imaginer lacks the relevant contentful presentation—it is not presented to her as being the case that there is such a balloon—and so lacks, according to Presentationalism, the perceptual experiencer's justification for corresponding belief. A similar contrast shows up in the intellectual case. A subject capable of rich geometrical imagination might achieve a vivid mental image of two triangles which agree in two sides and the enclosed angle; unable to discern what follows, but instructed by a teacher to ponder various options, she entertains the idea that any two such triangles are congruent. Contrast an intuiter to whom it is actually presented that any two such triangles are congruent: as we say, she just "sees" that this is so, when she reflects on it. The imaginer and the intuiter may enjoy identical imagery (involving lines, angles, etc.), perhaps thereby seeming to undergo the same objectual presentations (of lines, angles, etc.); but the former lacks the relevant contentful presentation—it is not presented to her that any two such triangles are congruent—and so, according to

Presentationism, lacks the latter's justification for corresponding belief. An approach narrowly focused on objectual presentational phenomenology would arguably need to do gymnastics to make sense of the epistemic difference. (This is the second problem, promised earlier, facing such an approach.) By contrast, the epistemic difference is smoothly handled by an intuition-based theory that privileges contentful presentational phenomenology, taking it to be the epistemic star.<sup>39</sup>

### 11.7. Conclusion

We began with a question about the role of “seemings” in philosophical inquiry. This question is connected to a larger one concerning the possibility of philosophy, which (on my sharpening) queries whether we have the intellectual capacities to succeed at each of the two stages of inquiry: data collection and theorizing. The question targets

- i. the character and source of philosophical data (at stage one), and
- ii. the prospect of a method of theorizing (at stage two) capable of turning out successful philosophical theories.

Attending to some of the epistemic practices in which philosophers partake at both stages enabled us to uncover a series of relevant data. If an intuition-based theory highlighting presentations (rather than seemings) that possess contentful presentational phenomenology (rather than the objectual sort) handles these data in an illuminating manner, as I've proposed, then we've taken steps to earn the answer, initially floated as a hypothesis, that intuition so-constructed is poised to help.

I say “taken steps” because much work remains. After all, skeptics about intuition are legion; they cannot responsibly be ignored. Though I've offered resources to respond to some of their objections, the foregoing leaves many of their questions unanswered. Likewise for a range of others querying (say) the explanatory basis of the theses I've proposed. This is hardly surprising. Here, as elsewhere in philosophy, progress does not lead us near the end but only farther from the beginning.<sup>40</sup>

### Notes

- 1 Husserl (1913/1982, 9).
- 2 This two-stage model is not intended to describe the *temporal phases* of instances of theoretical inquiry as they occur on the ground but rather to represent the basic *structure* of such inquiry: its core components and their configuration.
- 3 This section briefly summarized ideas I've developed with co-authors in *Philosophical Methodology: From Data to Theory* (Bengson et al. 2022; chapter one elaborates and defends our claims about the structure of philosophical inquiry,



- while chapters two and three furnish an account of philosophical data). Except for a couple of footnotes below that reference this joint work, subsequent sections of this chapter express my own views.
- 4 Though they do not employ this particular framing device, I submit that it offers a charitable reconstruction of the positions endorsed by Bealer (1996 and 1998), Bonjour (1998), and Pust (2000), among others.
  - 5 I use “modal” to cover a range of intensional as well as hyper-intensional phenomena: necessity, possibility, counterfactual dependence, grounding, essence, structure, and so forth.
  - 6 Additional criteria charge theorists with the tasks of *explaining* those claims and *integrating* them with our best picture of the world (e.g., the deliverances of our best science and mathematics); when, but only when, two or more theories do roughly equally well with respect to these other desiderata will the method instruct theorists to *highlight theoretical virtues* such as simplicity. Throughout, I focus on defense because this is where intuition is poised to make an epistemic contribution at inquiry’s second stage. For elaboration of the criteria I’ve listed, plus defense of the claim that their satisfaction delivers the features of understanding enumerated earlier, see Bengson et al.’s (2022, ch. 5) presentation of the Tri-Level Method.
  - 7 For example, additional data include that the responses sometimes lack the phenomenology of desire (e.g., the “hedonic aspect” described by Sinhababu 2017, section 2.2), may occur in the absence of a felt inclination to endorse their contents, resist certain sorts of normative assessments, and are often not about *us*—for instance, our linguistic practices or psychological states, whether actual or counterfactual—but instead concern non-linguistic, non-psychological matters. I lack the space to canvass the full range of core data here, though Section 11.6 presents the opportunity to discuss another datum (concerning inexplicitness).
  - 8 Such transitions may involve “the offline application . . . of cognitive skills originally developed in perception,” as in Williamson’s (2013, 309) version of inferentialism. Other versions are suggested by Harman (2010) and Biggs and Wilson (2021). There are numerous ways to develop an inferentialist theory; my brief remarks in the text focus on a neutral version that can be fleshed out in various ways.
  - 9 The option to reject a datum or forgo its accommodation and explanation protects against excessively conservative theorizing, while the demand for strong reasons discourages over-zealous revisionism (see Bengson et al. 2022, ch. 3).
  - 10 Bengson (2015a, sections 2–4).
  - 11 Bengson (2015a, section 5).
  - 12 Content Is Evidence is an alternative to the psychologicist view that intuition itself—the mental state—is evidence (see, e.g., Weatherson 2003; Alexander and Weinberg 2007; Goldman 2007; Alexander 2010; Mizrahi 2012, 2013; Boghossian 2020; Moffett 2023; for criticism, see Williamson 2007, ch. 7). At the same time, Content Is Evidence rejects the idea that contents are evidence independently of any connections to a thinker’s mental states, and so preserves the main motivation for psychologism.
  - 13 Bengson (2015b).
  - 14 Bengson (2015c) and Bengson et al (2020 and forthcoming).
  - 15 Quasi-perceptualism also accommodates and explains the other data mentioned in Note 7, which are challenging for broadly doxastic theories of the responses described in D1–D6.

- 16 *Republic* 511a. Burnyeat's (2000) discussion of Plato's position is edifying. Descartes (1628/1985) articulated some of his own lofty demands in *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, explaining how "we can make our employment of intuition . . . more skilful" (Rule IX).
- 17 Ewing (1941, 35). He writes a few pages later (*Ibid.*, 39), "the more we have studied a subject and thought rationally about it, using our powers of inference, the more likely we are to be in a state of mind in which we shall intuit rightly. A person is not likely to have new, clear, true, and fruitful intuitions in regard to a subject if he has made no study of that subject." See Koksvik (2013) and Chudnoff (2019) for recent examples and helpful discussion of the mental effort involved in some cases of intuition.
- 18 Frege (1884/1950, vii).
- 19 The remarks in the text address concerns about intuiting being a free for all (*cp.* Weinberg 2007; Backes et al. forthcoming, section 6; *cp.* Wright 2010). I lack the space to address other skeptical worries here. Bengson (2020, sections 3–5) critically discusses several recent challenges to the intuition-based theory outlined here (*cp.* Bengson 2013a, 2014a, 2015a, 2015b).
- 20 Bengson (2014b, section 3.2) offers a summary and relevant citations.
- 21 Bealer (1992, 101–102). *Cp.* Pust (2000, ch. 2) and Huemer (2007, section 1), among others.
- 22 Recall the features of theoretical understanding enumerated in Section 2.1. The criticism of the seemings theory advanced in the text can be extended to treatments of intuition that rely on unexplicated notions of the "feeling of rightness" (Thompson et al. 2011; Clavien and Fitzgerald 2017) or "pushiness" (Koksvick 2021), which do not furnish theoretical understanding.
- 23 Sosa (2007, ch. 3). Others have suggested that the same is true of temptations to believe: they are genuine kinds of conscious episodes, and they are truly reported by "It seems that p." (Throughout I use double quotes where, strictly speaking, corner quotes are required.)
- 24 The point applies to a complex seeming, or collection of seemings, with multiple contents; if those contents all seem true, then all are articulable in the manner described.
- 25 Another virtue is normative. For example, distinguishing presentations from seemings has the potential to place Presentationalism outside the scope of objections challenging the epistemic import of seemings (e.g., some of the objections to phenomenal conservatism advanced by Markie 2006; Sosa 2007; Hawthorne and Lasonen-Aarnio 2021).
- 26 Siegel (2010, 52).
- 27 Sturgeon (2000, 24). Pautz (2007) uses the term "item" in a way similar to my broad use of "object."
- 28 Pryor (2000, 547).
- 29 Siegel (2010, 48), though she does not distinguish contentful from objectual presentationality. Bengson (2013b, sections 2–3) draws this distinction before providing arguments helping to confirm it.
- 30 To appreciate that it is distinct from the first species, suppose you willfully form a vivid mental image of a green leaf and imagine that it hangs before you. Imagination presents you with colors and shapes, but it does not present it as being the case, or true, that there is something hanging before you. This is a case of objectual presentationality without contentful presentationality.
- 31 Chudnoff (2013, 38; *cp.* 2011, 2012, 2020).

- 32 Chudnoff (2013, 18). I attempt to reconstruct the various elements of Chudnoff's characterization more carefully in Bengson (2014b).
- 33 In recent work, Chudnoff (2020, 106) has replaced "seem" in the first conjunct of his proposal with "represents." This update may evade the criticism in the text, but at a cost, since representation does not imply contentful presentational phenomenology. This observation precipitates the epistemic objection described at the end of this section.
- 34 Chudnoff acknowledges this point, yet seems oddly unconcerned by it (2013, 106–107). Elsewhere he suggests that "presentational phenomenology and its objects can be difficult to describe" (2013, 60). For sure. But this doesn't quell the worry that we sometimes enjoy intuitions possessing presentational phenomenology with respect to a given moral proposition, but from the subject's perspective the truth-maker of that proposition is missing.
- 35 In recent work Chudnoff (2020, 106) has replaced "make it seem as if this experience makes" in his proposal's second conjunct with "is felt as making." As far as I can tell, this update only serves to intensify the objection I'm about to raise.
- 36 Chudnoff (2011, 630n16).
- 37 *Ibid.* Siegel's (2010, 48) treatment of the red cube example also suggests commitment to the idea that objectual presentationality suffices for contentful presentationality: "when such a property cluster (redness, cubicality, and being nearby) figures in visual perceptual experience, the experience presents it as being the case that a red cube is nearby."
- 38 Jackson's (1975) argument targeted an adverbialist theory of perceptual experience. Since that is not my target here, replies to Jackson's argument are not replies to the variant developed in the text.
- 39 In a rich and challenging discussion of presentationality, Deutsch (2019) allows that "perceptual experiences and intuitions share" the features listed in the Quasi-Perceptualist thesis plus the further feature (inexplicitness) spotlighted in Section 5, but he worries that those features and associated examples "do very little to convey what Bengson means by describing a [type of] mental state as 'presentational'" (633). He concludes that presentation is a "mystery" (634), adding that we lack reason to deny that belief is also presentational (Section 2), in which case being presentational is not "content-justifying" (637–640). However, the features I've identified distinguish presentation from belief: the latter type of state has many instances lacking one or more of them. More importantly, Deutsch's critique fails to adequately engage the full range of elucidatory efforts in my original essay (2015a, sections 2–4), comprised of diverse illustrations, applications (e.g., to cases of intellectual illusion, hallucination, and blindsight), contrasts (e.g., between presentation and imagination, as well as inclination, attraction, and temptation), and intuitive glosses (e.g., in terms of one familiar use of "having the impression" as opposed to "being under the impression"—puzzlingly, Deutsch (637) dismisses this distinction "as a hair that is too fine to split"). The preceding discussion enriches that multifaceted treatment by directly examining the phenomenology of presentation. It thereby responds to Deutsch's call to "give [the] terminology of 'presentations' a clear meaning" (645) while addressing his further, introspection-based worry that "there is *nothing* 'it is like' to have the Gettier intuition [or any other] philosophical intuition" (638), since "perceptual experiences are rich with phenomenal detail [which is "keyed to . . . mode"] and are phenomenally structured [which is "keyed to representational content"] as well," whereas "[t]here simply is no phenomenal detail or structure to intuitions" (640). To the contrary,

intuitions enjoy both detail and structure: what it is like for a thinker to intuit *Smith lacks knowledge* is quite different from what it is like for her to wonder whether this is so; the former also differs from what it is like for her to have an intuition with another content, such as *wanton torture is wrong* or *nothing can explain itself*. At any rate, a state needn't be phenomenally similar to perceptual experience in every respect in order to be like perceptual experience in enjoying contentful presentational phenomenology. It is this commonality that (*pace* Deutsch) renders both “content-justifying,” per Presentationalism.

- 40 I am grateful to participants in the NYU Mind & Language seminar on metaphilosophy, and especially to Crispin Wright for his illuminating comments on an early version of this paper. I also benefited from questions at a colloquium hosted by Ruhr-Universität Bochum, as well as input from Thomas Grundmann and the editors of this volume.

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