Experience and the Foundations of Perceptual Knowledge

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Abstract. In this paper, I provide new foundations for experientialism about perceptual knowledge, the view that all perceptual knowledge derives from experience. §1 introduces the basic template for experientialism about perceptual knowledge and considers how recent work on perceptual justification encourages giving special attention to less intuitive ways of filling in the template. §2 and §3 draw attention to ways of filling in the template that are more compelling, including versions from the history of epistemology that are still taken seriously elsewhere (e.g., in philosophy of mind and cognitive science). §4 spotlights one neglected kind of approach—*anti-Humean experientialism*—and highlights some of its attractive features. §5 concludes by noting how anti-Humean experientialism dissolves an influential problem for experientialism that originates in Sellars (1956).

Introduction

According to *experientialism* in the epistemology of perception, perceptual knowledge and justification for perceptual beliefs derive from *experience*. This paper focuses on the status of experientialism about perceptual knowledge, which holds just that perceptual knowledge derives from experience.

Experientialism about perceptual knowledge is worth considering directly, rather than as a special case of a thesis about justified perceptual belief. One reason is that not all epistemologists think that knowledge is a kind of belief. To such epistemologists, automatically giving priority to questions about justification in the epistemology of perception would be wrongheaded. Another reason is that historical epistemology contains interesting and lately neglected versions of experientialism about perceptual knowledge that do not focus on justification. Experientialism about perceptual knowledge can fare well, I will suggest, if understood in a way inspired by the history of epistemology.

With these ideas in mind, here is the plan. §1 introduces experientialism about perceptual knowledge in its basic form and considers how recent work on perceptual justification encourages giving special attention to unintuitive versions of it. §2 and §3 note that this focus obscures versions of experientialism that are more intuitively compelling, including versions from the history of epistemology that are still taken seriously elsewhere (e.g., in philosophy of mind and cognitive science). §4 spotlights one neglected approach I call *anti-Humean experientialism* and highlights some of its attractive features. §5 concludes by noting how anti-Humean experientialism dissolves an influential problem for experientialism that originates in Sellars (1956).

1. Experientialism about Perceptual Knowledge: A Template and Some Recent Incarnations

One can construct a view worth calling 'experientialism about perceptual knowledge' ('EPK' for brevity) in very different ways. To see why, consider the basic template for EPK:

The EPK Template: Perceptual knowledge is derived from experience.

If one takes a full sample of views from both the history of epistemology and contemporary epistemology, it becomes clear that all central terms in this template—i.e., (i) 'perceptual knowledge', (ii) 'derived from', and (iii) 'experience'—can be understood in importantly different ways. This section will explain how the template has been fleshed out in recent epistemology of perception, and the rest of the paper turns to some neglected alternatives.

The EPK Template and Recent Epistemology of Perception

Because recent epistemology of perception largely focuses on questions about justification (e.g., 'How does perception justify belief?'[1]), contemporary theorists are liable to fill in the EPK Template in ways that suit this focus.[2] Let's consider the results.

'Experience'. In pondering the epistemic powers of experience, recent discussions almost always consider the epistemic force of particular *perceptual experiences* that occur at a particular moment. Such experiences are typically imagined to be experiences as of (apparent) states of affairs—e.g., this light's being red—or constituents of such states of affairs (e.g., this light, its particular red hue). Such experiences are *mental episodes* with distinctively perceptual phenomenal character.

The prototypical examples of perceptual experiences so understood are short-lived conscious occurrences—*flashes of experience*, so to speak.[3] I will hence call these experiences *flashy*

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[1] To take one representative example, consider the section organization of Neta (ed.) (2014), which covers the epistemology of perception under the heading 'The A Posteriori: How Does Experience Justify Belief?' Both contributions under this heading prioritize questions about justification.

[2] For good examples, see the kinds of experientialism in BonJour (2001), Fumerton (1995), Hasan (2013), Huemer (2001, 2007), Pryor (2000), and Silins (2014), and also see the anti-experientialist arguments of Lyons (2008, 2009) and Siegel (2013), which retain this focus.

There is some difference between American versions of experientialism and British and UK-based versions. Campbell (2002), Logue (2018), Brewer (2011), and Martin (2002), for example, are at least as interested in knowledge as justification. They also have—or at least acknowledge as *primary*—an essentially world-involving conception of experience. But this difference turns out not to make a difference to the discussion below, which centers on features that are shared between these versions of experientialism.

Some partial exceptions to this UK/US divide are Mark Johnston (2011), who has a more British view, Duncan Pritchard (2012) and Susanna Schellenberg (2018), who have transatlantic views.

[3] Note that a 'flash' can persist for more than a moment. Thermonuclear blasts offer a nice example. A bomber pilot will experience a thermonuclear explosion for more than a moment.

experiences.[4] Flashy experiences can be ascribed by ordinary sentences like 'Smith saw the light flash' or 'Jones heard the fly buzz', which report *events*.[5] Given the focus on questions of justification, many recent epistemologists of perception emphasize non-factive ascriptions—e.g., 'It seemed to Jones that the light was flashing' or 'The fly seemed to Jones to be buzzing'. But in the good cases relevant to perceptual knowledge, subjects who enjoy such seemings will also be participants in the factive mental events reported by the simpler sentences above.

Flashy experiences have either *contents* or *objects* that are suitable for *matching* the contents of perceptual beliefs or the constituents of proposition-shaped entities (e.g., events or states of affairs, if not propositions).[6] On a simple 'content view', the experience reported by 'That light looks bright red' could be understood as sharing content with the sentence 'That light is bright red', where this content is *presented* in experience via a visual mode of presentation, which is what the 'looks' signals. Since this content could match the content of a perceptual belief, it could stand in a justificatory relation to it. Some defenders of the competing 'object view' may prefer to see the experience as having the *light itself* as an object, or as having the light's *particular quality of redness* as an object. While the experience so understood has no propositional content, its object will at least match a *constituent* of a singular proposition (e.g., an individual or feature), one that could also be a constituent of an event or state of affairs.

For present purposes, what is more important is that, on both views, perceptual experiences are prototypically flashy and are supposed to have flashy phenomenal character. As I will suggest in the next section, it is not at all obvious that the epistemologically or metaphysically fundamental kind of experience is flashy experience. I will suggest that giving a fundamental epistemological role to a different concept of experience—one related to Aristotle's concept of *empeiria*—offers a neglected model for experientialism about perceptual knowledge that has a range of advantages over currently standard models.

'Perceptual knowledge'. Recent epistemology of perception focuses on justified perceptual beliefs (*doxastic perceptual justification*), or on justification for the contents of such beliefs (*propositional perceptual justification*). This focus encourages a parallel focus on individual *bits of propositional knowledge* (e.g., your knowledge that this apple is red). Hence the old question of how (if at all) knowledge can be derived from experience becomes the narrower question of how S's knowledge that p can be derived from (flashy) experience.

This restriction of focus is not entirely innocuous, as we will see. Part of the reason is that it is not obvious that the structure of justification and the structure of knowledge are the same: while justification plausibly has a *rational* structure, it is less clear that knowledge, and especially *perceptual* knowledge, has such structure. Hence it is not obvious that the way that knowledge is derived from experience is the same as the way that justification is derived from experience. If so, it is not clear that we should assume that perceptual knowledge is best

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[4] In a similar vein, Johnston (2011: 172ff) drew attention to *attentive sensory episodes*, mentioning examples like *briefly smelling the coffee*. While we should not equate all flashy experiences with experiences that are both attentive and sensory, Johnston's discussion illustrates the kind of focus I am describing.

[5] See Gisborne (2010) on the semantics of perception verbs, which notes their similarities to verbs of motion.

[6] For a helpful overview and sampling of work on whether experiences have contents or objects, see Brogaard (2014).

understood using the model of the JTB+ analysis. A related reason to signpost is that historical epistemology did not limit its attention to propositional perceptual knowledge. It focused just as much on how *perceptual concepts* and *perceptual knowledge of objects* might derive from experience. Such knowledge is not clearly propositional: it is plausibly *sub*propositional.[7]

'*Derived*'. Given the focus on perceptual justification, contemporary epistemologists will be predisposed to understand 'derived from' in the EPK Template in ways related to the derivation of justification. In particular, it will be tempting[8] to assume that EPK entails that:

i. *Perceptual beliefs* derive justification from experience.

and also that:

ii. Perceptual knowledge qualifies as knowledge partly in virtue of (i).

On the current paradigm, then, perceptual knowledge must be 'derived from experience' in a *roundabout* way: a given state of perceptual knowledge is grounded in perceptual belief, which must in turn derive justification from experience by being justified by experience. This understanding of the way perceptual knowledge derives from experience differs considerably from the understanding that many historical defenders of the EPK Template had, which did not require perceptual knowledge to be based on reasons.

The resulting picture. When the terminological decisions I've described are made, the EPK Template will be specified in a very narrow way. Surprisingly, the resulting version of EPK *structurally* resembles an early 20th century conception of perceptual knowledge popular among logical atomists and logical empiricists, on which perceptual knowledge is ultimately *validated* or *confirmed* by a foundation of *sense experiences*.[9]

Contemporary epistemologists of perception are not logical empiricists and most would reject the conception of experience on which logical empiricism rested. But there is a more general shared idea that results from the choices mentioned above. It results from the conjunction of the following two claims:

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[7] See Moss (forthcoming) for helpful recent discussion.

[8] To take a representative example, see Hasan and Fumerton (2022)'s discussion of the structure of 'justification or knowledge' (to quote the first sentence). See also Huemer (2001), Silins (2014), BonJour (2001), Fumerton (1995), and Hasan (2017), who all seem interested in perceptual knowledge too, just less so, and also think that it is epistemically founded on experience, even if it involves further conditions (e.g., truth and causal linkage). Pryor (2000: 521) is also helpfully explicit about what I assume is the most widely held thought: 'My primary concern will be questions about perceptual justification rather than questions about perceptual knowledge. This is because the connections between justification and knowledge are complicated. I believe that the account of perceptual justification I will be arguing for can be extended to provide an account of perceptual knowledge, as well. But I will not attempt to do that'.

[9] I say 'broadly' because there is a quasi-historical (or mythical) basis for the idea, which combines Kant's focus on the *quid juris* question about empirical knowledge with Hume's conception of experience. Neither Kant nor Hume would have accepted this combination of ideas. But some logical empiricists did (e.g., Ayer), and some traced the components back to these figures. Hence Kant is the presumed forerunner of the 'logical' part and Hume the presumed forerunner of the 'empiricist' part.

> **Flashy Mosaic**: All perceptual knowledge is derived piecemeal from flashy experiences.
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> **Justificational Derivation**: All perceptual knowledge is *justificationally* derived from experience in the following way: perceptual knowledge is piecemeal metaphysically grounded in perceptual beliefs that are justificationally grounded in flashy experiences.

Call the conjunction of these claims *Humeanism about perceptual knowledge*. This is not because Hume himself accepted this view. I propose the name because the idea is structurally reminiscent of ideas in metaphysics that are called 'Humean',[10] and also because it represents a conception shared between contemporary discussions and early 20th century ideas about perceptual knowledge that were Hume-inspired.

We will see in §2 that there are other perfectly good candidate meanings for 'experience' and 'derived'. §3 explains how these are compatible with strikingly different kinds of experientialism, like the kinds in Aristotle, Kant, and Locke. For these reasons, I think that recent focus on questions about perceptual justification has had the unwelcome effect of obscuring important regions of logical space for experientialists about perceptual knowledge to occupy.

2. Experientialism without a Humean Bias

2.1. *Experience Reconsidered*

Focusing on flashy experiences makes it tempting to assume that perceptual experience is just a collection of *sensory episodes*, as Hume believed. While there is no reason to think that these episodes are *sense impressions* of the sort Hume invoked, focusing too much on them conceals the availability of non-Humean and anti-Humean ideas about experience. If we begin with different examples of what can count as 'experience', we can construct a competing non-Humean paradigm for views that are clearly versions of EPK, but which receive surprisingly little attention in mainstream epistemology of perception.

To appreciate the thought, it is useful to reflect on the notion of experience in play in folk and scientific conceptions of *learning*. Consider how the word 'experience' is used in the following definitions of learning:[11]

> Oxford English Dictionary: 'To acquire knowledge of (a subject) or skill in (an art, etc.) as a result of study, **experience**, or teaching....'[12]

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[10] In particular, Humean supervenience (see Loewer (1996)). The resulting picture of knowledge is also analogous to Humeanism about laws (see Hicks et al. (2023) for a current survey).

[11] See Schneider (2024: 785-786) for a long list of definitions in psychology, many of which use 'experience' in the range of senses to which I am drawing attention. For discussion of whether these are epistemologically sound proposals about learning, see Sylvan (ms).

[12] Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "learn (v.), sense I.1.a," July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/2134016862.

> 'Learning is an increase, through **experience**, of problem-solving ability.' (Washburne (1936))
>
> 'Learning is a process by which relatively permanent changes occur in behavioral potential as a result of **experience**.' (Anderson (1995))

It is natural in all three cases to take 'experience' to pick out something that is *temporally stretchy* and *temporally structured*. Experience is something that unfolds within an in-principle extendible expanse of an agent's mental life.[13] I will call the broad sort of experience in play here *massy experience*, because when the word 'experience' is used for experience so understood, it is used as a *mass noun* (like 'space' or 'water') rather than a *count noun* (like 'explosion' or 'speck').

Aristotle's word for massy experience was *empeiria*. It is translated as 'experience' in the following passages from *Posterior Analytics* and *Metaphysics*:

> [F]rom perception there comes memory, as we call it, and from memory (when it occurs in connection with the same thing), **experience**.... And from **experience**...there comes a principle of skill and of understanding—of skill if it deals with how things come about, of understanding if it deals with what is the case. (*Posterior Analytics*: II.19; bold added)
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> [T]he animals other than man live by appearances and memory, and have but little of **connected experience**; but the human race lives also by art and reasonings. And from memory **experience** is produced in men; for many memories of the same thing produce finally the capacity for a single experience.
>
> **Experience** seems to be very similar to science and art, but really science and art come to men *through* **experience**; for '**experience** made art', as Polus says, 'but inexperience luck'. (*Metaphysics*: Book A, Section 1; bold added)

Something more like *empeiria* than Hume's 'lightshow' of impressions was present in Locke.[14] Note that Locke uses 'experience' interchangeably with 'observation', and subsumes both *sensation* and *reflection* under 'experience' so understood:

> Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas:—How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the MATERIALS of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from **EXPERIENCE**. In that all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself. **Observation** employed either about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds perceived and reflected on by

[13] I say 'in principle extendible' because, while waking life can be cut short, it can also conceivably continue indefinitely.

[14] I borrow the suggestive term 'lightshow' from Johnston (2011), who used it as a metaphor for perceptual consciousness more generally.

> ourselves, is that which supplies our understandings with all the MATERIALS of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge....[15]
>
> [W]e have as many and as clear ideas belonging to spirit as we have belonging to body, the substance of each being equally unknown to us; and the idea of thinking in spirit, as clear as of extension in body; and the communication of motion by thought, which we attribute to spirit, is as evident as that by impulse, which we ascribe to body. **Constant experience** makes us sensible of both these, though our narrow understandings can comprehend neither.[16]

Unlike Hume, who reduced experience to a momentary bundle of impressions, Locke foregrounds massy experience. Massy experience is also plausibly fundamental for Kant.[17]

According to what I will call *Aristotelianism about experience*, the more metaphysically and epistemologically fundamental notion of experience is a temporally protracted massy notion, not a momentary count notion (like the notion of an *impression*). EPK can be combined with Aristotelianism about experience. Aristotle's epistemology illustrates this fact, and Kant's does as well. Locke's epistemology may also be an illustration. It is at least plausible that Locke falls closer to Aristotle than to Hume concerning the metaphysics of experience, even though Locke like other modern empiricists rejects Aristotle's conception of science as an enterprise of Reason.

There is no good reason for a contemporary epistemologist of perception to *stipulatively prejudge* the decision between Aristotelianism and Humeanism about experience in favor of a more Humean conception. Both should at least be dialectical options. Yet if we take Aristotelianism about experience seriously as an option, it is not obvious that the features of the prototypical notion of experience noted in §1 are essential features of experience.

There are three reasons to mention. One is that, granting Aristotelianism about experience, it is misleading to focus too much on particular sensory episodes, even if these are elements *in* experience. For the epistemologically fundamental kind of experience is more than just a collection of such episodes. The second is that, assuming Aristotelianism about experience, it is misleading to focus too much on *sensory* episodes and their phenomenology, because there is also cognitive and practical experience. The third is that, assuming Aristotelianism about experience, it is misleading to focus so much on *states* and *episodes*, because the *fundamental* form of experience is *processual* (or at least belongs to the realm of *becoming*).

Aristotelianism about experience could be false, and I don't claim to defend it here. But it shouldn't be ruled out by definitional fiat. More generally, it should be possible for the defender of EPK to hold a non-Humean or anti-Humean view of experience.

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[15] Locke (1690: II.1.2); boldface added.

[16] Locke (1690: II.3.19); boldface added.

[17] This reflects the transformation of certain Aristotelian themes in Kant, via his picture of experience as a unity of rational *form* and sensory *matter*. See Gobsch and Land (forthcoming) for a compendium of recent work on the revival and reinterpretation of Aristotelian themes in Kant.

2.2. *Reconsidering the Derivation of Perceptual Knowledge*

There is surprisingly little discussion in epistemology of the distinction between derived and underived knowledge, considered on its own terms. Part of the reason is that the JTB+ tradition encourages replacing this distinction with an apparently different distinction—namely, the distinction between foundational and non-foundational justification. Moreover, because it is typically assumed that the foundational/non-foundational distinction for justification coincides with a distinction between *non-inferential* and *inferential* justification, the question of how to understand derived knowledge is further eclipsed by the narrower question of how to understand the structure of the rational basing relation.

There is no reason to impose these choices on EPK. In fact, there are strong reasons to resist doing so. One reason is that perceptual knowledge has its own internal structure that does not obviously align perfectly with the structure of justification. Following Dretske (1969), we can distinguish between primary and secondary perceptual knowledge. This distinction corresponds to a 'by' relation that holds between states of perceptual knowledge. Note that sometimes a person sees X *by* seeing Y. For example, typical cognizers can see that a person is angry *by* seeing that their face is contorted thus-and-so. It is unclear that the 'by' relation here is an *inferential* relation or more generally a *rational* relation. Yet one could hold that such knowledge of emotion is *derived* even if it is non-inferential and non-rational. This view fits well with denying that mindreading is a fundamental source of knowledge on a par with perception.

A second reason to resist equating the underived/derived distinction for knowledge with the distinction between non-basic and basic justification is that the former is not obviously a *normative* distinction, but the latter plausibly is a normative distinction. The fact that some justification is basic and other justification is not can plausibly be understood as an example of a more general fact about the architecture of normativity.[18] It is analogous to the fact that some value is *intrinsic* and some value is *extrinsic*, or the fact that some moral principles are *fundamental* and others are *derived*. But the fact that some knowledge is underived is naturally understood as reflecting a more general fact about the architecture of *mind*, not the architecture of *normativity*. This is why all defenders of EPK in the history of epistemology take clear stands on the rationalism vs. empiricism divide (a divide which has nothing clearly to do with normativity, *pace* Korsgaard (1996)).

2.3. *Reconsidering the Metaphysics of Perceptual Knowledge*

The reasons to break with mainstream epistemologists on the way that 'knowledge' is used in the epistemology of perception are less striking. I will myself focus on perceptual knowledge of facts. But three points are worth bearing in mind.

The first is a consequence of points in the previous subsection. We should not assume that, in asking about the foundations of perceptual knowledge, we are asking (or asking only) about the structure of epistemic normativity. If normativity turns out to be intimately relevant to the

[18] See Sosa (1980a,b) and Fumerton (2022) on this point.

status of EPK, this would be surprising. If the architecture of mind turns out *not* to be intimately relevant to the status of EPK, that would be even more surprising. The relevant use of 'perceptual knowledge' should reflect these observations: hence it should not be *presupposed* that perceptual knowledge is a kind of justified belief.

There is a second caveat to add about 'perceptual knowledge', which also reflects the intimate connection between the status of EPK and questions about mental architecture. The second caveat is that we should not presume that the *only* thing to which 'perceptual knowledge' should be taken to refer is knowledge of facts. When Locke claimed that 'our knowledge' is derived from experience, he was not just talking about factual knowledge. He was talking about the origins of some *subpropositional* phenomena—most notably, of *concepts*. While it has become very unusual to use 'knowledge' to refer to anything concept-like in epistemology,[19] the term continues to be used in this way in cognitive science.[20] Rightly so, one might think, if Locke's shifts between claims about the foundations of knowledge and claims about the foundations of concepts are epistemologically defensible.

A third caveat concerns the relationship between experience and perceptual knowledge. The caveat is that we should not assume that experience is a world apart from perceptual knowledge. Some historical epistemologists, like Aristotle and some epistemologists in the Nyāya school of Sanskrit epistemology (e.g., Vātsyāyana), accept versions of EPK on which it is a form of *bi-level* epistemology, where *reflective knowledge* is grounded in *animal knowledge* (cf. Sosa 1991) and the fundamental form of animal knowledge is perception. While these versions of EPK are less ambitious than empiricist versions, they are possibilities worth considering, especially as views about the architecture of cognition.

3. Non-Humean Options for Experientialists about Perceptual Knowledge

With these alternative readings of the EPK Template in view, we can appreciate some neglected regions of dialectical space available to anyone moved by the basic intuitions behind EPK but unmoved by Humeanism.

These regions of dialectical space can be mapped by reflecting on the available ways of rejecting the two parts of Humeanism about perceptual knowledge. Call *non-Humean* any view that rejects either Flashy Mosaic or Justificational Derivation, *modestly non-Humean* any view that rejects at least Flashy Mosaic, and *anti-Humean* any view that rejects both theses and also accepts Aristotelianism about experience.

There is a wide range of ways to be non-Humean, since there are very different conceivable reasons for rejecting each plank of Humeanism about perceptual knowledge. I will consider a simplified taxonomy and then explore (§4-§5) the implications of developing EPK in an anti-Humean form. Anti-Humean forms have underappreciated advantages over other experientialist and non-experientialist views, as we will see.

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[19] The closest thing is work on know-how and skill, though it is controversial how concepts relate to know-how. Skill has been put to interesting use by a few epistemologists of perception, most notably Markie (2006).

[20] See, e.g., the title of Spelke et al. (1992). Note also, on a different but related point, Chomsky (1986)'s use of 'knowledge' to refer to knowledge of syntactic rules and structures.

There is not space here to do justice to the full range of logical possibilities. I will be considering only non-Humean views that are versions of EPK. This restricts the possibilities considerably. Note that both planks of Humeanism about perceptual knowledge make universal claims to the effect that *all* perceptual knowledge derives *in a specific way* from experience. One could reject these theses just because one rejects EPK, and not for specifically non-Humean reasons. Because I set aside this possibility, the options to consider all hold that at least some perceptual knowledge derives from experience in a non-Humean way. One can then distinguish versions of non-Humeanism that hold that *all* perceptual knowledge is non-Humean, and versions that hold only that *some* is non-Humean. For brevity, I will also restrict attention to the former views.

Suppose for the sake of argument then that all perceptual knowledge is non-Humean in some way. Some simple possibilities to consider are then:

> (*1: Pure Non-Modest Non-Humeanism*) All perceptual knowledge derives non-justificationally from flashy experiences.
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> (*2: Pure Modest Non-Humeanism*) All perceptual knowledge derives somehow from experience, but not at bottom from flashy experiences.
>
> (*3: Pure Anti-Humeanism*) (2) + Aristotelianism about experience + rejection of Justificational Derivation.

While there are many different ways to hold these views, I will make the discussion less abstract by focusing on versions inspired by the history of epistemology.

A nice example of (1) is suggested by one way of developing the old idea, suggested by Theaetetus in the *Theaetetus*, that to know that p is to see that p. I call this the *presentational conception of knowing* (Sylvan 2025), because it is a view on which knowing that p is grounded in the fact that p's being *presented* to the mind (not necessarily *visually*).[21]

When a fact is presented to the mind, it is tempting to think that the mind stands in an *acquaintance relation* to it. Acquaintance provides full intellectual satisfaction, as Fumerton (1995) puts it. Indeed, being acquainted with a fact is arguably more satisfying than anything that could ever be provided by justification for believing that this fact obtains.

Even if the presentational conception does not apply to all knowledge, it is a seductive idea about *perceptual* knowledge. There are reasons to be wary, however. Note that not all perceptual knowledge is on a par: some is *basic* (e.g., perceptual knowledge of *color*) and other *derived* (perceptual knowledge of *emotion*). Consider how Dretske (1969) usefully distinguished between *primary* seeing, in which one sees that x is F just by seeing x and its F-ness, and *secondary* seeing, in which one sees some further fact *by* seeing that x is F. Plausibly, *seeing by* is not grounded in justification, though it can provide justification. Let's call *naïve*

[21] For helpful discussion of the notion of presentation, see Bengson (2015). For discussion of the pervasiveness of the presentational conception in the history of philosophy and a defense, see Antognazza (2015, 2024) and Ayers (2019).

presentationalism about perceptual knowledge the view that all perceptual knowledge, including secondary perceptual knowledge, is explained by acquaintance. This view's implications for some secondary perceptual knowledge are counterintuitive. I think this fact favors a more robustly non-Humean view.

Consider two examples of secondary perceptual knowledge: a typical cognizer's seeing a whole by seeing some parts (which psychologists call 'amodal completion') and a typical cognizer's seeing emotions by seeing facial expressions. When a cognizer sees that there is a whole by seeing its parts—e.g., sees that there is a whole person sitting behind a desk, rather than a half-person, by seeing the person's upper half—they are only *acquainted* with the parts, not with the whole. Why, then, say that the cognizer *sees* that there is a whole person? It is easy to give a non-presentationalist explanation: since perception is not acquaintance, acquaintance with a (whole) fact is not required to see that the (whole) fact obtains. It is less obvious how to answer this question within the bounds of the presentational conception.

In the case of emotion, it may feel to a typical cognizer that they are acquainted with another person's emotions just by seeing their face. But consider complex emotions, like jealousy and spite. Presumably typical cognizers don't have an *innate* capacity to recognize these emotions. This makes some perceptual knowledge of emotion look more like an *acquired skill*, not something given by acquaintance. And for some atypical cognizers, most perceptual knowledge of emotions is acquired, not innate.

Hence 'perceiving' emotions does not seem essentially to be a matter of acquaintance. In cases without acquaintance, it could exemplify perceptual learning and qualify as *bona fide* perceptual knowledge. So, for some cases, perceptual knowledge would appear not just to be grounded in immediate presentation of truths. It would appear to result from developing knowledge over the course of experience (where 'experience' here is used as a mass term).

These reflections bring out the merits of versions of EPK that accept Aristotelianism about experience. Aristotle's version of EPK has a nice explanation of the second kind of example. For Aristotle, learning from experience amounts to developing certain skills through lived experience. Hence Aristotle's view explains a lot of secondary perceptual knowledge, by treating it as resting on acquired recognitional capacities.

Other anti-Humean views could explain both kinds of cases. Note that if, like Aristotle, one identifies massy experience with lived experience, one can say that massy experience provides perceptual knowledge by offering a method for extracting lessons from life. While this view gives a nice explanation of acquired secondary perceptual knowledge, many cognizers have some innate recognitional capacities that also provide secondary perceptual knowledge. When a cognizer first employs such capacities to recognize an F (say, a *3D object*) by seeing some other features, this is sometimes not a case of learning from lived experience.

This observation suggests that we should not identify all massy experience with lived experience. Recognizing a 3D object could still be a *development* in massy experience, however, if massy experience is understood as a form of *mental life* rather than *embodied practical life*, and if the

'development' at issue is not *growth*, but just a process. Hence one could adopt a view that is less empiricist than Aristotle's but similarly anti-Humean.

Kant's epistemology of perception is an example of such a view. Like Aristotle, Kant takes experience to be processual (and also active), with a structure that reflects the exercise of other mental capacities. But unlike Aristotle, Kant does not assume that the structure of experience is developed by living life. Instead, some of the structure of experience is fixed by unacquired capacities. Kant understands these capacities as *a priori*. Less reasonably, he also takes them to be *non-natural*, because in his transcendental idealism these capacities are metaphysically prior to nature itself!

One needn't make all of Kant's choices. One can, for example, take the *a priori* capacities that structure experience to be innate capacities with a natural history. Locke's epistemology here provides an alternative model. While for Locke all the materials of thought are 'furnished' by sensory and reflective input, Locke assumes that there is a range of unacquired capacities (e.g., capacities for *abstraction*) that can be applied to these materials to yield experience as of an objective world. In this respect, Locke's view is also anti-Humean.[22] Locke and Kant primarily differ on the explanation of *why* these capacities are unacquired, in line with a naturalism vs. non-naturalism divide.

All these views are worth exploring further. To make the discussion more concrete, I will now outline in more detail my own anti-Humean form of experientialism, which benefits from various of the insights in Aristotle, Locke, and Kant. Having a narrower view outlined will make it easier to bring out some interesting payoffs of anti-Humean experientialism.

4. An Anti-Humean Experientialism

4.1. *An Anti-Humean Metaphysics of Experience*

Like 'consciousness', 'experience' can be used to express several importantly different concepts.[23] Recent epistemology of perception focuses only on one of these concepts—namely, the notion of *an experience*, understood as a mental episode with colorful phenomenal character.[24] I think this is at least unhelpful, and perhaps a serious philosophical mistake. In

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[22] 'Anti-Humean', again, in the technical sense defined above. But see Buckner (2024) for discussion of how all the British empiricists, including Hume, appealed to some unacquired cognitive capacities, by accepting what he calls the DoGMA mental architecture (Domain-General Modular Architecture). Hume's inventory of basic capacities is just more austere (and more consistently empiricist) than Locke's. Aristotle has a view of this kind. He appears to hold (see the quotes above) that the capacities of sensation, memory, and imagination are unacquired capacities, and that the capacity for abstraction is developed via the application of these capacities. In this respect, his view seems more austerely empiricist than Locke's, which helps itself to abstraction (see Uzgalis (2022: Section 2.2)).

[23] Hence this section to be similar in certain ways to Block (1995)'s discussion of different concepts of consciousness (e.g., access consciousness, phenomenal consciousness). If one were to identify consciousness and experience, they would be the same project. But this is not obvious. So it is worth thinking about the mongrel character of 'experience' in its own right.

[24] Even the most detailed contemporary philosophical examination of different senses of 'experience'—Hinton (1973)—focuses only on 'experience' used as a count noun (thus the title *Experiences*). There are some 20th century works that highlight the massy notion—see especially Hamlyn (1978)—but they have been ignored by recent epistemologists of perception.

this subsection, I will regiment some other uses of 'experience' and use this regimentation to make precise a kind of anti-Humean ontology of experience that does justice to insights about experience in Aristotle, Locke, and Kant.

There are two ways of using 'experience' as a mass term that I want to distinguish, which both highlight neglected concepts of experience. One is illustrated by the intriguing construction 'in experience', sometimes used evocatively by phenomenologists and phenomenologically inspired philosophers. This construction treats experience as analogous to *space*—it is the mental space in which experiential events and processes unfold. While this idea may sound merely metaphorical, there are influential ways of making it more precise in cognitive science. *Global workspace theories* of consciousness like Baars (1997)'s provide an empirically detailed way of cashing out the idea. One might also appeal to *working memory* to cash out the idea.[25] I will be neutral between such proposals. The point to highlight is that there appears to be a genuine phenomenon here that these proposals are illuminating, which we can usefully call *experiential space*.

An ostensibly similar but different concept is highlighted by constructions like 'in my experience'. Such constructions often refer to *lived experience*. But there is a more general concept lurking, formed by analogy with *time* rather than space. 'One's experience' in this sense picks out a *subjective timeline*. When philosophers use the term 'mental life', they often seem to be talking about experience in this sense. Mental life is not identical to experiential space. It is something with temporal dimension *in* experiential space.

Both ways of using 'experience' as a mass term express useful concepts. These concepts provide the scaffolding for the ontology of experience I will sketch. They are not the only neglected concepts of experience to highlight. I will presently mention two others. But the others are usefully explained by reference to the first two, which is why I mention them first and have presented massy experience as fundamental.

Two other useful concepts pick out things that *unfold* in experiential space and on the subjective timeline of mental life. The first is a general concept that subsumes the semantic values of progressive forms of verbs of experience like 'see' and 'hear' (e.g., 'seeing', 'hearing'). One could call this *experiencing*, though this is a little awkward; the way psychologists use 'perception' is a somewhat less awkward way of capturing the phenomenon. 'Experience' in this sense picks out the conscious process of perceiving that takes place in experiential space and on the subjective timeline. I will call this *experiential processing*. Experiential processing has temporally extended constituents—*stages* of experience. These are *experiential episodes*.

These concepts make it possible to render Aristotelianism about experience much more determinately. Recall that a key implication of Aristotelianism about experience is a negative claim: namely, that flashy experience is both metaphysically and epistemologically non-fundamental. In the remainder of this subsection and the next subsection, I offer one way of explaining why this negative claim is true.

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[25] See Carruthers (2017) for a helpful philosophical discussion.

The first part of the story is simple: it just amounts to identifying flashy experiences with stages of processes in experiential space, on the subjective timeline. It is plausible that flashy experiences understood in this way are non-fundamental. Consider what is going on when flashy experiences 'occur' and why it is going on. What is going on is (part of) a process in experience. Why does this process unfold as it does? It manifests some experiential processing—i.e., some underlying *experiencing* that one is 'doing' (though not *voluntarily*). This processing unfolds in one's subjective timeline. It just goes unnoticed, because one's attention is directed elsewhere by the processing. For this reason, it may feel wrong to locate it in experiential space. But I see no good reason not to say instead that it is located in a presently unobserved region of experiential space.[26]

It hence seems possible to analyze flashy experiences in terms of processes in experience. I think this is a promising way of developing the metaphysical thesis of Aristotelianism about experience. While I don't claim to defend this metaphysics of experience here, I will show that it has epistemological advantages, so that the epistemological claim of Aristotelianism about experience can also be vindicated.

4.2. *An Anti-Humean Account of Experiential Processing*

Let's deepen the foregoing story by considering experiential processing a bit more. To some contemporary philosophers of mind and cognitive science, and to epistemologists of perception inspired by them, it will be tempting to insist that experiential processing is entirely *subpersonal* processing—i.e., it is not processing *by the subject* of experience, but rather by unconscious *subsystems*. But while it is clear that experiential processing is not typically observed by the subject and is not voluntary, these are not sufficient reasons to say that it is entirely subpersonal. And there are competing reasons to say otherwise.

One reason is that the experiences a person 'has' reflect the way that *this person* experiences things, not just of the way that *parts* of this person experience things. Indeed, it is not clear that parts of a person experience things at all. One could just say instead that subpersonal processing is part of the causal explanation of the person's experiential processing.

The history of epistemology offers various ways of making these suggestions more precise. I find Kant's metaphysics of experience especially illuminating, though the basic ideas I want to take from it could be developed in Aristotelian and Lockean ways too. Kant explains how we experience the world in terms of the activity of some of our fundamental mental capacities. While this activity is typically unobserved and non-voluntary, it is the activity of *our* capacities, and it counts as something we are 'doing' in a broad sense.

Kant has his own transcendental idealist account of what activities and capacities are involved here. He suggests that experience is a *synthetic* activity that involves the application of *understanding* and *imagination* to *sensation*. But one needn't accept these transcendental

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[26] Note that the global workspace theory of consciousness, as well as theories of working memory, can be used to make this idea more precise; see again Baars (1997) and Carruthers (2017). One might also add to these theories the idea that, while one does not have *observational* self-knowledge of this processing, one does have *agential* self-knowledge of it. Kant plausibly had this idea.

idealist details to like the basic story. Aristotle and Locke invoke different capacities (e.g., memory, abstraction…) and do not use the idealist-leaning term 'synthesis'. But they agree that the use of such capacities by a person is part of what explains the structure of their experience. And if one is wary of resurrecting historical epistemology, note that it is not only historical epistemologists who might help fill in the details here: some work in the foundations of cognitive science provides stories of recognizably the same kind.[27]

These further ideas facilitate further development of the analysis of flashy experience from the previous subsection. In addition to saying that flashy experiences are process-stages in experiential space and time, we can also say that they are developments in experience that reflect the experiential processing of the subject of experience, where this processing manifests various of their mental capacities. If one isn't a fan of the kind of faculty psychology that Aristotle, Locke, and Kant practiced, one could specify these capacities by reference to cognitive psychology, which after all is not only in the business of describing subpersonal operations—it also limns person-level phenomena like *attention* and *memory*.[28]

4.3. *An Anti-Humean Account of Perceptual Knowledge*

How does experience provide knowledge? Rather than reconstruing this question as a normative question about how perceptual beliefs are justified, we can take it at face value as a 'how' question, similar to the question of how to build a chair from this wood. It is a descriptive question in the *metaphysics of epistemology,* not a normative question in the ethics of belief. For this reason, it is not difficult to construct a metaphysics of perceptual knowledge on top of the anti-Humean metaphysics of experience from the last section.

How experience provides perceptual knowledge is by being a *way of building perceptual knowledge*. In the case of primary perceptual knowledge of facts, this building proceeds in the following two stages. The first stage generalizes Russell (1912)'s acquaintance model for foundational knowledge. Take the case of logically simple facts of the form <*x is F*>. One's perceptual knowledge of the fact that some object has some feature (e.g., this thing is cubical) is built from experience of the object, experience of the feature, and experiential attribution of the feature to the object.[29] But, contra Russell's acquaintance foundationalism, this is not the end of the epistemic explanation, just the beginning.

The second stage of the explanation is provided by the way an anti-Humean metaphysics of experience answers more fundamental how-questions like 'How do you experience *objects*?', 'How do you experience *features*?', and 'How do you experientially *attribute* features to objects?' In each case, the anti-Humean experientialist will give an answer that invokes an *experiential process* that manifests capacities of the experiencer in the space and time of massy experience. As I said in the last section, it is unobvious *what* capacities these are. I remain

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[27] See for example Spelke (2022), whose account of the 'origins of knowledge' is ostensibly an empirically testable analogue of Kant's transcendental psychology.

[28] See Schellenberg (2018) for example.

[29] I take the notion of *attribution* from Burge (2010, 2022), and like Burge take it to be different from *predication*: perceptual attribution is best expressed by a demonstrative phrase like '*this F*'.

neutral here. Perhaps some historical philosopher got this right—perhaps Kant—but epistemologists are well-advised also to look at work at the foundations of cognitive science.

Notably, the second stage of the story can also be used to explain other forms of perceptual knowledge than perceptual knowledge of *facts*. Besides perceptually knowing facts, we perceptually know objects and features. We can also perceptually acquire *concepts* and knowledge of abstracta like *rules*. These other forms of knowledge can be explained using the second part of the account just described.

It is not clear that an analogue of the second stage of the story is always necessary in these other cases. While we do experience objects and features, we don't experience concepts. But we can acquire concepts from experience. For this reason, anti-Humean experientialism has wider reach than acquaintance foundationalism, which seems to be an overgeneralization from the case of knowing facts, objects, and features. The greater generality of anti-Humean experientialism is a wider advantage over experientialist epistemologies of perception that terminate epistemic explanations in flashy experiences.

4.4. *Is this Experientialism?*

Some epistemologists may wonder whether the story just developed is a version of experientialism. Given that its epistemic explanations do not end with flashy experiences, and would rather appear to end with exercises of capacities, isn't the account just a relative of Sosa's virtue epistemology or Goldman's reliabilism?

In answering this question, a shared theme in Aristotle and Kant is worth mentioning.[30] For Aristotle, *activity* is more fully real than (*mere) potentiality*. Kant transformed this idea from Aristotle's metaphysics into an idea in a new experientialist epistemology: the *actualization* of our cognitive powers *in experience* is what explains perceptual knowledge.

Virtue epistemology and reliabilism put potentialities and their properties first. They then understand *occurrent* states like seeing that p just as manifestations of epistemic potentialities, where the latter and their reliability do the real work. For Sosa (2015), competences are a special case of *dispositions*, while for Goldman (1979) the reliability of a process type is understood in terms of *propensity*. In both cases, it is the hidden virtues of potentialities that do the explanatory work.

Anti-Humean experientialism is, like Kant's epistemology and Aristotle's metaphysics, *activity-first*, not *potentiality-first*. This difference may seem minor, but it explains why experience has epistemic explanatory power on my view but is epistemically epiphenomenal on reliabilist and virtue-theoretic views, as we will presently see further.[31]

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[30] On the theme I am about to discuss from Aristotle and the way it was transformed by Kant, see respectively Marmadoro (2014) and Kosman (2013), on the one hand, and Longuenesse (1998) and Ginsborg (2022: Section 1) on the other.

[31] Others have taken this difference to be very important. The transition from Cook Wilson to Ryle in Oxford Realism hinged on this difference: Ryle's key move was to replace Cook Wilson's *occurrent* epistemic primitive of *apprehension* with a range of dispositional concepts. Just as Ryle's epistemology follows behaviorism in making

4.5. *Some Advantages of Anti-Humean Experientialism*

Why take anti-Humean experientialism seriously? A significant reason is that it has the virtues but not the vices of four dominant paradigms in the epistemology of perception—namely, orthodox (Humean) experientialism, perceptual rationalism, process reliabilism, and virtue reliabilism.

Like orthodox experientialism, it does justice to the intuition that experience is the source of perceptual knowledge, and the more general intuition that *consciousness* is an indispensable force in the epistemology of perception. But it offers deeper epistemic explanations. Here it pays to distinguish flashy experiences, massy experience, and experiential processing. Views that stop the regress of empirical justification in flashy experiences are *shallow* and leave one with the question of *how* experience provides knowledge. The standard story is not very satisfying: it amounts to insisting that presentational phenomenology has epistemic force. This is implausible, given that presentational states can fail to justify if they reflect flawed processing.

This problem for orthodox experientialism is one reason why there has been a considerable movement toward endorsing what Siegel (2017) calls the *rationality of perception* (which I am calling 'perceptual rationalism').[32] This story helps explain both how 'behind the scenes' processing modulates the epistemic powers of experience, while also crediting some of this processing to the subject (in particular, to their rational capacities). But there is not sufficient reason to accept the rationalism of this approach, and the doubt it casts on the intrinsic epistemic power of consciousness.[33]

For the anti-Humean experientialist can accept the good without the bad parts of this picture. They can hold that there is *experiential* processing by the subject, but not *rational* processing. They can also say that this processing *just is* subjective structuring of 'experience' in massy senses. This fact explains how processing fixes the epistemic powers of experience, but it is also consistent with holding that experience has these powers *intrinsically*.

For related reasons, anti-Humean experientialism has advantages over another increasingly popular externalist approach, which Lyons (2009) dubbed 'zombie epistemology'. According to Lyons (2009), the epistemic force of experience owes to the reliability of the non-rational *subpersonal* processing that is the ancestry of experience. This view, which is a version of *process reliabilism*, implies what I will call *epistemic epiphenomenalism*, on which the conscious aspects of experience play no epistemic explanatory role. Anti-Humean experientialism provides a much happier alternative to zombie epistemology, for reasons that are similar to why it provides a happier alternative to perceptual rationalism.

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the conscious mental life of the epistemic subject irrelevant, so too, arguably, do virtue epistemology and reliabilism.

[32] See Jenkin (2020, 2022, 2023) for the state of the art in this paradigm.

[33] Siegel does allow that experience might have some 'baseline' epistemic power. But she cannot allow that this is an intrinsic property of experience.

There are other (broadly) reliabilist approaches that avoid some of the counterintuitive implications of zombie epistemology—namely, virtue-theoretic approaches like Miracchi (2017)'s, on which competences of cognitive agents are what explain perceptual knowledge. As Miracchi (2017) develops it, this approach is a non-experientialist epistemology of perception, in the same large externalist family as reliabilism.[34]

Unlike reliabilism, this approach does not straightforwardly lead to a kind of zombie epistemology. Since agency has its own phenomenology, something phenomenological is doing explanatory work on this view. But note that on this approach, it is only because epistemic agents make *competent use* of experience that experience justifies, where competence is partly fixed by reliability. Experience is epistemically inert until reliably exploited. Anti-Humean experientialism avoids this implication while also doing justice to the idea that the subject's capacities play an epistemic role (though without understanding them as *practical* capacities). Experience of one kind just is an exercise of mental capacities.

5. How Anti-Humean Experientialism Sidesteps the Sellars Dilemma

I will conclude by emphasizing a further advantage of anti-Humean experientialism, which is that it sidesteps a persistent problem for experientialist theories first raised by Sellars (1956), eponymously known as 'the Sellars Dilemma'.

Although recent Sellars-inspired dilemmas target experientialist theories of *justification*,[35] Sellars (1956)'s primary concern was with the possibility of deriving perceptual *knowledge* from experience. *Justification* only clearly becomes relevant late in his argument, when he claims that knowledge is a 'standing in the space of reasons' (1956: Section 8, §36). Part of my response to Sellars's dilemma rests on the thought that this claim is false and misleading.

Sellars (1956)'s fundamental dilemma is straightforward,[36] and is expressed best early in his very long paper. Rather than offer a scholarly discussion of Sellars, I will consider a simple generalization of the dilemma he presents in discussing some logical empiricist theories (Sellars (1956: Section 1, §2-§6)):

1. Experience is either non-cognitive or cognitive.

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[34] While Miracchi (2017) puts her virtue-theoretic approach in opposition to experientialism, the two are not obviously inconsistent. Here it is useful to note that some interpreters of Kant (e.g., Schafer (2021a)) present Kant's epistemology as one that explains mental life in terms of the exercise of 'virtues' (what I've been calling, and Schafer (2021a,b) also calls, *capacities*). Even if Kant is a 'virtue epistemologist' in this way, it is also clear that experience is a central organizing concept for Kant: it is only *in (possible) experience* that the relevant epistemic capacities are manifest. If experience is *itself* an agent-level activity of which subjects have implicit agential awareness, then one might think that grounding empirical knowledge in the exercise of epistemic capacities *just is* grounding it in a kind of practical experience.

[35] See, e.g., Bergmann (2006) and Lyons (2008). Cf. Siegel (2013), whose arguments are not explicitly Sellars-influenced, but fall in the same genre as the explicitly Sellars-influenced arguments in Bergmann and Lyons.

[36] A more complicated argument can be reasonably ascribed to Sellars on the basis of additional assumptions that accumulate throughout his paper but that are notably not present in the earliest statement of the dilemma. For an intricate scholarly presentation of Sellars's argument, see deVries and Sachs (2024). I am just focusing on what I take to be the most important philosophical puzzle in Sellars (1956).

2. If experience is non-cognitive, it cannot be more than a mere necessary condition for perceptual knowledge, and therefore cannot be a foundation of perceptual knowledge.[37]

3. If experience is cognitive, it cannot be the foundation of perceptual knowledge, since it would then already *be* perceptual knowledge.

4. Therefore, experience cannot be the foundation of perceptual knowledge.

The main difference between this argument and Sellars's is that it replaces the 'sensing', which was Sellars's focus in this part of the paper, with 'experience'.[38]

Note that, if Sellars's reasoning is well-motivated, it would seem to generalize further to all *givenist* theories of knowledge, which propose foundations for knowledge not constituted by anything epistemic. We could, for example, replace 'experience' with 'intuition' to get a dilemma for a givenist form of *rationalist* epistemology. While much of Sellars's paper was concerned with empiricism, he was clear about the generality of his argument, noting that it applies to what he calls 'dogmatic rationalism' (a Kantian phrase) as well as empiricism in the second paragraph on the first page.[39]

The argument may appear limited in a different respect, however. (4) does not straightforwardly imply the falsehood of *experientialism* (or, if generalized, *intuitionism*), because it only says that experience is not a *foundation* for perceptual knowledge, not that experience does not *provide* perceptual knowledge. But I will assume that, if experience 'provides' knowledge in the sense that would make experientialism interestingly true, it would be a foundation for knowledge. It does not follow that experience is a 'given', however: foundations and givens should be distinguished.

How does anti-Humean experientialism sidestep the dilemma? It is thanks to its metaphysics of experience: an anti-Humean metaphysics of experience draws attention to neglected reasons why two of the key premises of the argument might fail, and to neglected reasons to worry that the argument persuades only by equivocating on '[non-]cognitive' and 'experience'.[40]

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[37] By 'mere necessary condition', the premise is implicitly contrasting *grounds* with necessary conditions. *Enabling conditions* may also be included, depending on how they are understood. For discussion see Sylvan (2020).

[38] Though Sellars himself does not offer this generalization, he would have accepted the letter of it. The generalization is potentially misleading about the lessons he wants to draw, because he would also have accepted some of the points I will make in objecting to the argument about the nature of experience. But he would *not* have thought that these points help revive *foundationalism* about perceptual knowledge.

[39] Sellars's wording creates the impression that his lessons are broadly Kantian. But Kant could only agree with Sellars's conclusions if he sided with coherentism rather than foundationalism, and with non-experientialism rather than experientialism. As I noted in the previous section, Kant's epistemology can rather be taken as neglected kind of experientialist foundationalism—not empiricist, to be sure, but not therefore *coherentist*. (I use 'foundationalism' here broadly, in a way that would include foundherentism.)

[40] One might go farther and argue that even (1) fails if Aristotelianism about experience is true. (1) might seem unquestionable because it is an instance of excluded middle. But while it may seem a last-ditch move to question the Sellars dilemma on the grounds that excluded middle fails, Aristotelianism provides a non-negligible reason to reject (1). Assuming Aristotelianism about experience, 'experience' in more than one of its important senses belongs to the realm of *becoming*. It hence falls in a twilight zone between the determinately cognitive and the

Once these reasons are uncovered, the argument is not sufficiently persuasive to present a serious obstacle to experientialism about perceptual knowledge.

Let's first consider premise (2). If we focus on flashy experiences and consider their non-cognitive *protégés*—e.g., *sensations*—(2) is compelling. Mere sensations plausibly play no more than a *technological* role in the development of empirical knowledge, by being inputs to experiential processing.[41] But (2) is not compelling if we consider massy experience or experiential processing itself.

Firstly, the *workspace* of experience is not mere technology for producing perceptual knowledge. It is the *medium* of perceptual apprehension. To claim that it is mere technology for gaining perceptual knowledge would be like claiming that canvases and paint are mere technology for producing paintings. Yet, notably, the workspace of experience is not a cognitive state or the kind of thing that could be knowledge. This is analogous to how canvases and paint are not themselves paintings.

Secondly, and more importantly, *experiential processing* is not mere technology for producing perceptual knowledge. It is the *mental work* that converts sensation into apprehension. To claim that it is mere technology would be like claiming that the act of painting is mere technology for producing paintings. Yet, notably, experiential processing is not a cognitive state or the kind of thing that could be knowledge. This is analogous to how the act of painting is not itself a painting.

For these reasons, if we reject Humeanism about experience and instead accept Aristotelianism about experience, we should reject some relevant readings of (2). Yes, there is a relevant reading on which (2) is true. The most salient kind of flashy experience, namely a *momentary state of phenomenal consciousness*, cannot be a *foundation* for perceptual knowledge: it is instead a *building block*. So, if by 'experience' one means a moment of flashy experience, (2) is true. But there are other natural candidates for what could be relevantly meant by 'experience'. It is true but misleading to say that these things are 'non-cognitive'. True, they are not cognitive states or cognitive processes. But they are also not *merely* non-cognitive, like sensations. The good reason to think that something 'non-cognitive' cannot be a foundation for knowledge is just that something *merely sensory* cannot be a foundation for knowledge. Perception is more than sensation but less than cognition, on a natural view.

A parallel range of reflections apply to premise (3) and suggest a related but different lesson. While I just presented anti-Humean experientialism as offering a conception of experience that is perceptual *rather than sensory or cognitive*, one could develop the view in a different

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determinately non-cognitive. One can, however, preserve excluded middle but still benefit from the underlying phenomenon here by noting that, while *empeiria* is non-cognitive, it is *almost* cognitive (or, alternatively, that while it has become cognitive, it *was once* non-cognitive).

[41] Cf. Sylvan (2020) and Lyons (2009). While the arguments in Sylvan (2020) may appear pro-Sellarsian, §6 notes the possibility of retaining a more-than-technological role for non-epistemic perception in a theory of *coming to know*, in line with the view developed here.

direction, more in line with Aristotle's response to Plato in *Posterior Analytics*.[42] Presented in this way, the main point for the anti-Humean to emphasize is that (3) is false. It is true that, in a broad sense of 'cognitive', experience is already cognitive. But it does not follow that it is already knowledge, or presupposes knowledge. It also does not follow that it requires justification. On Aristotle's view, experience is a cognitive precondition for standing in the space of reasons rather than, as Sellars thought, a standing in the space of reasons. One can clearly have experience without having the capacity to justify. One cannot have the capacity for experience without the capacity for knowledge. But that is not because experience *is* knowledge: it is because it *grounds* knowledge, as experientialism claims.

It is hard to choose between these anti-Humean responses, and I won't decide here. But if one has trouble deciding, there is also a less committal response: namely, that when the premises of the argument are read in their most plausible versions, the argument becomes either invalid or unsound due to equivocation.

To establish this conclusion, parts of the other two responses can be used without making final pronouncements about the (non-)cognitive character of experience. Recall first that the most plausible reading of (2) is one on which 'non-cognitive' really means 'merely non-cognitive'. But if (2) is read in this way, (1) and (3) would need to be made more perspicuous as follows:

> 1*. Experience is either merely non-cognitive or not merely non-cognitive.
>
> 3*. If experience is not merely non-cognitive, it cannot be a foundation for perceptual knowledge, since it would then already *be* perceptual knowledge.

But (3*) is implausible for the reasons noted above. Hence the plausible versions of (2) and (3) cannot be jointly true.

The same conclusion can be reached by focusing on the plausible reading of (3): (3) is plausible when 'cognitive' is read strongly, to mean 'is knowledge or knowledge-entailing'. 'Cognitive' in this sense picks out *completed cognition*, assuming for the sake of argument that processes of cognition are only 'completed' by affording knowledge. But then (1-3) would need to be rephrased as follows:

> 1**. Either experience is completed cognition or it is not completed cognition.
>
> 2**. If experience is not completed cognition, it cannot be more than a necessary condition for perceptual knowledge, and therefore cannot be the foundation of perceptual knowledge.

But (2**) is implausible. Hence the plausible versions of (2) and (3) cannot be jointly true.

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[42] For discussion, see especially Fine (2014), who stresses the importance of *proto-cognitive* states for solving Meno's paradox. Fine also draws attention to other forgotten options in the history of epistemology that merit reconsideration (e.g., the Epicurean appeal to 'prolepses'). Note that on the Aristotelian response I am considering, Sellars's dilemma is in effect treated as a disguised version of Meno's paradox; hence the tools for solving Meno's paradox are available for answering the dilemma.

For these reasons, I conclude that the Sellars dilemma does not provide a sufficiently persuasive case against experientialism about perceptual knowledge. Anti-Humean experientialism offers a comprehensive answer.

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