

## *Epistemological Disjunctivism<sup>1</sup> and the Value of Presence*

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Abstract: Epistemological disjunctivists make two strong claims about perceptual experience's epistemic value: (1) experience guarantees the knowledgeable character of perceptual beliefs; (2) experience's epistemic value is "reflectively accessible". In this paper I develop a form of disjunctivism grounded in a presentational view of experience, on which the epistemic benefits of experience consist in the way perception presents the subject with aspects of her environment. I show that presentational disjunctivism has both dialectical and philosophically fundamental advantages over more traditional expositions. Dialectically, presentational disjunctivism resolves a puzzle disjunctivists face in their posture vis-à-vis skeptical scenarios. More systematically, presentational disjunctivism provides an especially compelling view of disjunctivism as an internalist view of perceptual consciousness by explaining the way perceptual presence manifests the subject's rationality in a distinct way.

Let's assume that subjects are, by and large, justified in their perceptual judgments. In ordinary situations, when I judge that there is a red cup before me, I do so with some type of epistemic warrant. *Reliabilists* ground this type of epistemic warrant in the reliability of perceptual judgment. By contrast, *experientialists* hold that subjective conscious experience contributes independently to perceptual justification and knowledge.<sup>2</sup> For experientialists, it is my experience of the red cup that somehow provides my justification for judging that there is a red cup before me. Call the epistemically meritorious character that experientialists attribute to conscious experience its "epistemic value".

Experience's epistemic value is at the heart of internalist approaches to perceptual justification and knowledge. While perception's reliability is not typically considered as subjectively available, conscious experience is or can be.<sup>3</sup> But the way experience is supposed to be epistemically valuable is notoriously complicated by the existence of misleading experiences, like illusions and hallucinations. Consider the way experiences include "good cases" and "bad cases": cases in which the subject is actually perceptually confronted with her environment, and

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth "disjunctivism."

<sup>2</sup> For experientialists, experiential consciousness is "undeniably epistemically enabling" (Tye 2009, p. 98).

<sup>3</sup> Pryor 2000, 2004.

cases where she is not, though indiscriminably so. The existence of these “bad cases” can appear to undermine experience’s epistemic value. How does an experiential episode contribute to perceptual justification or perceptual knowledge if, as far as the subject seems able to tell, the experience could be wholly misleading?

A recent, provocative approach to the problem of “bad cases” has come to be known as “epistemological disjunctivism”. For the epistemological disjunctivist, the possibility of “bad cases” does little to diminish the idea that conscious perceptual experience bears an especially strong sort of epistemic value. For the disjunctivist, the epistemic value of perceptual experience (1) *guarantees* the truth of propositions that can be believed on its basis (in John McDowell’s terminology, the value of experience does not “stop anywhere short of the fact” (1994, p. 29))<sup>4</sup>; and (2) is “reflectively accessible”, such that the subject is in some suitable sense *aware* of the truth of (1).<sup>5</sup> In an example: experiencing the red cup before me, the disjunctivist holds that I can rest assured that my corresponding judgment will be true; moreover, I can *know* this to be the case. Defined this way, disjunctivism has understandably been referred to as the “holy grail” of perceptual epistemology, since it promises to relegate to epistemic irrelevance the perennial problems associated with hallucination and illusion.<sup>6</sup>

My aim in this paper will be to present a new solution to a puzzle disjunctivists are typically taken to face.<sup>7</sup> Much like the holy grail of medieval lore, most philosophers of perception suspect the promise of disjunctivism to be illusory. After all, disjunctivism seems to amount to a straightforward *denial* of the problem of “bad cases”. If a subject can know that her

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<sup>4</sup> Here and throughout, this concerns perceptual beliefs and judgments that are *suitably formed*. Of course a subject can fail to appropriately exploit opportunities provided to her by experience.

<sup>5</sup> See Pritchard 2007, 2011, 2012. The combination of (1) and (2) constitutes a statement of disjunctivism’s *positive* claim, i.e. its characterization of experience’s epistemic value. Disjunctivism owes to its name to its more familiar *negative* claim, viz. that there is not a single account to be given of the epistemic value of “good” and “bad” experiences. I turn to disjunctivism’s negative claim in §4 below.

<sup>6</sup> Pritchard 2012, p. 1

<sup>7</sup> For versions of the objection, Dennis 2014; Madison 2010; Soteriou 2016; Silins 2005.

perceptual judgments will be true, then it seems she can know that her experience is not a hallucination. But *ex hypothesi* skeptical scenarios are construed such that the subject cannot know this. Accordingly, the problem is that disjunctivists seem merely to reject rather than to resolve skeptical scenarios. I call this puzzle disjunctivism's "dialectical infelicity problem" vis-à-vis skeptical scenarios. My aim in this paper is to show that there is a way that disjunctivists can solve this problem.

In resolving the disjunctivist's dialectical infelicity problem, the payoff of my argument will not be merely to improve disjunctivism's argumentative appeal—rather the upshot will be a re-evaluation of the philosophical substance of disjunctivism as a view of experience's epistemic value. As I will argue, at a fundamental level disjunctivism's dialectical infelicity problem arises because of the fact that even some prominent disjunctivists conceive of the view as a claim about the *strength* or *status* of experience's epistemic value.<sup>8</sup> Instead, I will argue that disjunctivism is best understood as a view of what experience's epistemic value *consists in*, namely the *presentation* to the subject of the very items of which she is thereby in a position to obtain knowledge. As I will suggest, understanding disjunctivism this way brings out a natural intuition that goes missing in competing versions: a perceiving subject is aware of being able to make true perceptual judgments because in experience objects are simply *there* for her, manifestly available for knowledge. Moreover, I will argue that appreciating experience's presentational character is critical to resolving the "dialectical infelicity problem."

I proceed as follows. In §1 I introduce the classic version of epistemological disjunctivism developed by Duncan Pritchard. In §2 I characterize Pritchard's disjunctivism as a species of what I call an "evidentialist" internalist epistemology. By contrast, in §3 I introduce my novel version of disjunctivism as grounded in a "presentational" internalist epistemology. In

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<sup>8</sup> See for example Pritchard 2007, 2011, 2012.

§4 I show how Pritchard's version of disjunctivism faces the dialectical infelicity problem, and I discuss the way presentational disjunctivism resolves this difficulty. In §5 I conclude by reflecting on the philosophical substance of the presentational approach to disjunctivism and what it means for disjunctivism as a type of internalism about perceptual epistemology.<sup>9</sup>

### *1. Pritchard-Style Disjunctivism*

The statement of disjunctivism in terms of (1) and (2), from which I started this paper, derives from Duncan Pritchard's influential exposition of the view. As Pritchard writes,

In paradigmatic cases of perceptual knowledge an agent, S, has perceptual knowledge that  $p$  in virtue of being in possession of rational support, R, for her belief that  $p$  which is both (1) factive (i.e. R's obtaining entails  $p$ ), and (2) reflectively accessible to S.<sup>10</sup>

From this passage, it is clear that Pritchard envisages a certain division of labor in the way the disjunctivist conceives of experience's epistemic value. Specifically, the knowledge-guaranteeing character of a disjunctivist conception of experience's epistemic value centers in (1). If it is a slogan that, for the disjunctivist, the epistemic value of experience does not "stop short of the facts", then for Pritchard this points to a more literal place that facts hold in a disjunctivist conception of experience's epistemic value. Specifically, perceptual experience is a factive state, which therefore entails the truth of a relevant proposition  $p$ . For example, a factive state pertaining to a tiger pouncing at me entails that there is a tiger pouncing at me. Now, for Pritchard it is clearly because experience's epistemic value *entails* the truth of perceptual beliefs that experience's epistemic value *guarantees* the subject an opportunity for knowledgeable belief (whether or not the subject manages to avail herself of this opportunity.)

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<sup>9</sup> Specifically, I address worries about reflective awareness famously introduced by Williamson 2000, and applied to disjunctivism by Haddock 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Pritchard 2012, p. 13 (variables altered, numbering added) In Pritchard's terminology, experience's epistemic value is the "rational support" it provides.

In turn, on Pritchard’s view the type of “reflective accessibility” articulated by (2) specifies merely the way the subject is in a subjective position to exploit the epistemic value of her experience for knowledge. On this account, the subject reflectively appreciates her possession of entailing grounds for  $p$ , and therefore appreciates her being in a secure position to knowledgeably judge that  $p$ . Accordingly, the heart of Pritchard’s rendering of disjunctivism centers on a specific explanatory connection between the epistemic value of experience and the beliefs it grounds, viz. a connection grounded in entailment.

<b>Product</b>	<b>Epistemic Value</b>	<b>Mode of Support</b>
Position to know that $p$	Perception is factive	Entailment of $p$

For Pritchard’s version of disjunctivism, it is important that perceptual experience relates subjects to *facts*, since it is perception’s factive character that grounds the way experience entails propositions.<sup>11</sup> However, it is controversial to claim that we perceive facts<sup>12</sup>, and more recently philosophers have suggested that disjunctivists can preserve Pritchard’s general model while avoiding the commitment that we perceive facts. On this view, disjunctivism can be grounded not in seeing facts, i.e. true propositions, but in seeing the truth-makers for such propositions (i.e. some set of objects and/or properties  $o \dots o_n$ ).<sup>13</sup> Since seeing is a relation, seeing  $o \dots o_n$  entails the existence of  $o \dots o_n$ . In turn, given that  $o \dots o_n$  are truth-makers for propositions like  $p$ , the existence of  $o \dots o_n$  entails the truth of propositions like  $p$ . Accordingly, even while seeing  $o \dots o_n$  is not strictly a factive state since it does not take facts as its objects, it nevertheless entails the truth of  $p$ . In Craig French’s terms, the idea that experience presents the subject with truth-makers

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<sup>11</sup> Pritchard 2012, p. 14

<sup>12</sup> This is related to the “basis problem” supposedly facing disjunctivism (Pritchard 2011; French 2016; Ghijzen 2015). A subject seeing a fact  $p$  may seem to entail the subject seeing *that*  $p$  obtains—but “seeing that  $p$ ” may seem to presuppose the knowledge of  $p$  that the subject is supposed to acquire *based* on perception. I do not think the version of disjunctivism developed in this paper faces the “basis problem”. [paper available upon request]

<sup>13</sup> Haddock 2011; French 2013, 2016. Craig French 2016 has advocated cashing out disjunctivism in a form of “thing seeing”, and Adrian Haddock 2011 has suggested a disjunctivist account of “seeing such-and-such”.

grounds a “quasi-factive” relation between experience and propositions, which suffices for disjunctivist purposes.

As French’s reference to “quasi-factivity” illustrates, while we can distinguish different disjunctivist accounts in terms of whether they characterize experience as fact-relating or truth-maker-relating, nevertheless Pritchard’s model captures something these accounts share in common. As printed in the table below, while truth-maker views deny Pritchard’s connection between disjunctivism and strict factivity, these views maintain Pritchard’s more fundamental gloss on the disjunctivist thought: the idea that experience’s epistemic value guarantees true perceptual judgments by *entailing* the relevant propositions.

<b>Product</b>	<b>Epistemic Value</b>	<b>Mode of Support</b>
Position to know that $p$	Perception is quasi-factive	Entailment of $p$

In the rest of this paper I will group together these various forms of disjunctivism as “Pritchard-style disjunctivism.” I will diverge from Pritchard’s focus on entailment, and suggest that a better version of disjunctivism centers on a different fundamental paradigm: presentation.

## 2. *Disjunctivism: Evidentialist*

As the centerpiece of an experientialist perceptual epistemology, the epistemic value of experience plays a pivotal role in internalist accounts of perceptual justification. Experience’s epistemic value is the support that experiencing subjects are supposed to have internalistically available such as to equip them to judge. In what does such internalistic support consist? To bring my version of disjunctivism into view, we should start from what is a broad consensus internalist answer to this question. On this consensus, experience equips the subject with a type of “evidence” for belief.<sup>14</sup> I will say that this idea marks “evidentialist” types of internalism.

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<sup>14</sup> Clearly a subject does not infer beliefs from her experiential evidence, nor does evidential support need to be “quasi-inferential.” But nevertheless it is supposed that conscious experience supports judgment by

To appreciate the structure of evidentialist internalism, consider a familiar internalist view:

**Dogmatism:** if it seems to *S* that *p*, then *S* has immediate *prima facie* justification for the belief that *p*.<sup>15</sup>

Defined in this way, dogmatism in effect exploits a central feature of an evidentialist conception of perceptual justification to treat the way experience comes in “good” and “bad” cases.

Specifically, the operative idea is that evidential support can fall short of guaranteeing the truth of the proposition it supports.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, for the dogmatist experience provides some evidence for belief—evidence that is sufficient for the subject to be justified in forming beliefs based on how things seem to her in experience. But such justification is always *prima facie*. In a “good case”, if things are as the subject’s evidence would make them seem, then the subject gains perceptual knowledge. But if things are not as they seem, as in the bad case, the subject was no less justified in responding to her experiential evidence. Rather, since the justification provided by her experiential evidence was *prima facie* and therefore defeasible, the subject merely fails to gain knowledge.

Of course, disjunctivism dissents from the dogmatist idea that perceptual justification is merely *prima facie*. After all, the Pritchard-style disjunctivist holds that in the good case experience’s epistemic value *entails* the truth of perceptual judgments. But while rejecting the dogmatist’s conception of perceptual justification as *prima facie*, Pritchard does not depart from the more fundamental paradigm of evidentialist internalism. On Pritchard’s view, the relevant

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providing the subject with a relevant type of evidence.

<sup>15</sup> I modify this statement from Ghijzen 2014, p. 196. Dogmatist views have been advocated by Pryor 2000, 2004; Huemer 2001, 2007; Chudhoff 2012, Tucker 2010, Brogaard 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Indeed, this very aspect of evidence provides an early perspective on why disjunctivism is not best understood within the evidentialist paradigm. It is part of the nature of evidence that it can fall short of ensuring knowledge (which of course does not mean that any body of evidence must fall short.) As such, the evidentialist disjunctivist will inevitably face questions how exactly it can be that experience’s evidential support can *guarantee* the truth of propositions. By contrast, presentation by nature is a confrontation with real items—accordingly the question of its support being inconclusive does not arise in the same way.

contrast is that dogmatists hold that evidence experience provides for belief is “*prima facie*” or “defeasible”, while for disjunctivists it is “indefeasible” or “conclusive.” Being “conclusive” and “indefeasible” are predicated of evidence: these qualifications characterize the way particular pieces of evidence locate on a spectrum of evidential support, specifically as located beyond a point where the obtaining of the evidential support entails the truth of the proposition supported. In this way, in Pritchard’s rendering the disjunctivist’s dispute lies not in what experience’s epistemic value consists, but rather in the *strength* or *status* of experiential evidence. By contrast, I will now introduce an alternative paradigm for an internalist perceptual epistemology, intended not to qualify a type of degree of evidence, but to replace evidence as the relevant mode of epistemic support.

### 3. *Disjunctivism: Presentational*

Perception famously has a presentational character. As Scott Sturgeon puts the point,

your visual experience [of a moving rock] will place a moving rock before the mind in a uniquely vivid way. Its phenomenology will be as if a scene is made manifest to you. This is the most striking aspect of visual consciousness. It’s the signal feature of visual phenomenology.<sup>17</sup>

Clearly perception’s presentational character is not that it presents one’s environment in a “uniquely vivid way.” While it is true that perception stands apart from thought in its qualitative character, the point is not that perception is a particularly striking show of color- and object-experiences. Rather, the central point is that perception does *present* its objects; that, unlike in thought, the objects of perceptual experience appear quite literally present to one.

If presentational character is an important feature of perceptual experience, C.D. Broad has noted an interesting aspect of the phenomenon:

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<sup>17</sup> Sturgeon 2000, p. 9.

It is a natural, if paradoxical, way of speaking to say that seeing seems to ‘bring one into direct *contact* with *remote* objects’ and to reveal their shapes and colours.<sup>18</sup>

As Broad notes, the presentational character of experience may seem in some sense “paradoxical.” Objects are *external* to us, yet in experience they seem “right *there*, available to us” (Valberg 1992, p. 4). The version of presentationalism at issue in this paper amounts to the idea of taking Broad’s paradox at face value. Perceptual awareness *appears* to present environmental items precisely because perceptual awareness *is* the presentation of such items. Experience consists of awareness in which the subject is presented with aspects of the environment, i.e. objects and (arguably) their properties, such that the relevant features are present to the subject.

Before moving to give my account of perceptual presence, I should briefly note that by understanding perceptual presentation specifically as a conception of experience’s *epistemic* value, there are other familiar associations with presentation to which I lay no claim. One such association is presentational *phenomenology*. Several recent philosophers have exploited presentation specifically as an aspect of perceptual phenomenology to answer questions about perceptual justification.<sup>19</sup> For my purposes, this is not the right notion since for these views it is experience’s merely *appearing* to present truth-makers for representational contents that provides the subject with justification for belief. That is, presentational phenomenology is not unique to

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<sup>18</sup> Broad 1952, pp. 32-3 (italics original.)

<sup>19</sup> As Elijah Chudnoff writes (2012, p. 25)

If an experience [...] justifies you in believing that *p*, it does so in virtue of realizing the property of having presentational phenomenology with respect to *p*.

Similarly, for John Foster, there is a “[*p*]resentational *feel* of phenomenal experience—the subjective impression that an instance of the relevant type of environmental situation is directly presented” (Foster 2000, p.12; italics original). For Michael Huemer experience bears a “forcefulness”, such that “[w]hen you have a visual experience of a tomato, it thereby seems to you as if a tomato is actually present, then and there” (2001, p. 77). For Jim Pryor experience provides “the feeling of seeming to ascertain that a given proposition is true” (2004, p 357).

cases of perception, but also can be true of cases like hallucinatory experience. Accordingly, such a notion of phenomenal presence can never guarantee the truth of judgments it justifies.<sup>20</sup>

My notion of presence also does not mark a *naïve realist* or *anti-representationalist* position, which is the idea that objects are presented in a way that makes them part of what metaphysically constitutes the experience in which they are presented. Characterizing the epistemic value of experience in presentational terms is a different issue. As has recently been pointed out (Genone 2014), naïve realism is at least partly to be understood in terms the idea that perception is not fundamentally a representational state.<sup>21</sup> By contrast, it is open for me to claim that epistemic value is best understood in terms of a type of representational content.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the position at issue in this paper must also be distinguished from the epistemological view that the objects of experience constitute so-called “objectual reasons” which perception provides the subject.<sup>23</sup> The idea of an “objectual reason”, on which this view centers, is that presented objects constitute *reasons* for judgment. This view is more specific than the presentationalism at issue here. My view is that the epistemic significance of experience can be understood through the notion of presentation, whether or not it is *reasons* that perception thus presents. As I will suggest, perceptual presentation constitutes a fundamental gloss on the link between experience and knowledge, which is something not captured by the notion of a reason as such.

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<sup>20</sup> As Chudnoff concedes (2013, p. 92; italics mine)

if a perceptual experience puts you in a position to know something about your environment, it does so because of *something other than or in addition to its [presentational] phenomenology.*

<sup>21</sup> “Not fundamentally” because there are many less fundamental senses in which naïve realists can accept representational contents.

<sup>22</sup> Indeed, I myself argue for such a representationalist version [paper available upon request]. See also McDowell 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Cunningham 2017; Kalderon 2011; Brewer 2011, ms. For a good discussion of such views, see Cunningham 2017.

What, then, is presentational disjunctivism? The key to this understanding of disjunctivism lies in a notion to which Pritchard-style disjunctivists frequently pay mere lipservice: the subject’s mode of “reflective access” to the epistemic value of her experience.<sup>24</sup> Recall the two clauses of Pritchard’s disjunctivism: (1) experience’s epistemic value guarantees the truth of her perceptual judgments; and (2) subjects can become *aware* of this epistemic value by having suitable “reflective access” to her experience. Pritchard-style entailment-based forms of disjunctivism focus on (1): entailment is an explanation of how experience’s epistemic value is supposed guarantee true perceptual judgments. But what about (2)? On my presentational view, it is only through a particular way of understanding (2) that we are in a position to understand (1), and to appreciate what it is that disjunctivism fundamentally tells us about perceptual epistemology. To state the relevant explanatory connection in a third table,

<b>Product</b>	<b>Epistemic Value</b>	<b>Mode of Support</b>
Position to know that <i>p</i>	Presence of $o \dots o_n$	Reflective Access to $o \dots o_n$

What is our “reflective access” to our mind? How do human subjects come to know the character of their conscious experiences? According to the answer that I will here follow<sup>25</sup>, such self-knowledge is simply internal to the conscious state itself. Compare the question how I know what I am presently thinking. Plausibly, such knowledge is partly constitutive of the act of thinking itself: there is no thinking a thought *T* that does not partly involve self-awareness of thinking *T*. The present proposal is that the same goes for the character of experiential states. In having an experience *E* I can become aware of features of my environment, but I also become aware of my features of my mind, namely having *E*. More specifically, accordingly to the view I have in mind this latter feature of conscious sensory experience is owed specifically to our

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<sup>24</sup> Pritchard does not detail his conception of “reflection”, merely indicating that his view requires a strong version. French explicitly sets reflective access aside (French 2016 p. 90, p. 100). Haddock 2011 and Stuchlik 2015 are exceptions, but neither provides the account I develop here.

<sup>25</sup> I cannot defend this conception of self-awareness in this paper that deals with disjunctivism more specifically. [papers in these areas available upon request.]

rational nature as thinkers. States that are constitutively self-conscious are proper to thought, and extend from there to our sensory states.<sup>26</sup>

Understood in this way, the way perceiving subjects enjoy “reflective access” to their experiences is critical in appreciating the way perceptual presentation grounds a version of disjunctivism. In experience, subjects are presented with the environmental features of which they are thereby placed in a position to gain knowledge: the chairs, tables, people around them, etc. Moreover, just in having such experiences, subjects are also *self*-aware that these items are presented to them in their experience. But then it follows that the relevant experiences are such that they simply could not be had should the relevant items not exist, or should relevant propositions about them be false. After all, in that case the relevant items could not have been presented in the way they are. Accordingly, perceptual presence guarantees (1) the truth of the perceptual judgments that the subject is positioned to make—and (2) that the subject can be aware of (1).

To further clarify, consider John McDowell’s expression of the same line of thought:

when all goes well in the operation of a perceptual capacity of a sort that belongs to its possessor’s rationality, a perceiver enjoys a perceptual state in which some feature of her environment is *there* for her, perceptually *present* to her rationally self-conscious awareness. If a perceptual state can consist in a subject’s having a feature of her environment perceptually present to her, that gives lie to the assumption that a perceptual state cannot warrant a belief in a way that guarantees its truth. If a perceptual state makes a feature of the environment present to a perceiver’s rationally self-conscious awareness, there is no possibility, compatibly with someone’s being in that state, that things are not as the state would warrant her in believing that they are, in a belief that would simply register the presence of that feature of the environment<sup>27</sup>

As McDowell sets out noting, the way for mature human subjects conscious experiences are self-aware gives content to the idea that capacities for such experiences belong to a subject’s rationality: the subject’s experience is a form of “rationally self-conscious awareness.” In turn, if the subject’s experiences can include “having a feature of her environment perceptually present to

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<sup>26</sup> This can serve as a gloss on Kant’s famous claim that the character of intuition is conditioned by the apperceptive unity that is proper to the faculty of judgment, the understanding.

<sup>27</sup> McDowell 2011, pp. 30-31; emphasis original.

her”, then this means that experience can ensure the truth of certain judgments. After all, the subject being in such an experiential state, in which certain environment features are *present*, is simply inconsistent with the falsity of these judgments.

Accordingly, we can now state the way in which conceiving of the epistemic value of experience through a presentationalist paradigm provides a non-evidentialist gloss on the disjunctivist view. In being self-conscious of being presented with features of her environment, the subject is aware of being in a position that ensures the truth of (appropriate) perceptual judgments. In contrast with Pritchard-style views, experience placing a subject in such a position is not a matter of the strength of the subject’s experiential evidence or, in Pritchard’s precise formulation, such evidence *entailing* propositions. Rather, it is a matter of the subject’s self-conscious awareness being such as to have objects manifestly presented to her. The subject’s awareness of standing in a perceiving relation to her environment is non-evidentiary.

So far I have distinguished my presentational disjunctivism from Pritchard-style evidentialist disjunctivism. But I have not yet provided grounds for preferring the presentational paradigm over Pritchard’s variant. Ultimately (§5) I will suggest that there is a fundamental way in which the presentational paradigm captures disjunctivism as a form of internalism about perceptual justification. But I will first turn to a more specific dialectical advantage.

#### *4. The Dialectical Infelicity Problem*

My discussion in this paper has so far focused on disjunctivism’s positive claim, viz. the disjunctivist’s positive conception of experience’s epistemic value. To bring out the present challenge to disjunctivism, I will now turn to its core negative claim, i.e. its treatment of the relevance of bad cases. Classically, disjunctivism’s negative claim can be stated as the denial of a thesis along the following lines:

**Highest Common Factor:** the epistemic value of experience (understood as subjectively accessible) in the good case cannot exceed the epistemic value of experience in the bad case.<sup>28</sup>

There are many ways of denying claims that philosophers have described as “Highest Common Factor” theses. However, we should here note that on the above claim the highest common factor concerns specifically the epistemic value of experience *as it is accessible to the subject*. This produces a problem. Perceptual experience equips a subject with an indefeasible, self-consciously possessed opportunity for perceptual knowledge. It would seem to follow that the subject thereby possesses indefeasible grounds for believing anti-skeptical propositions. After all, such propositions are straightforwardly entailed by the truth of perceptual judgments. But then it seems that the subject is capable of distinguishing her condition from the obtaining of skeptical scenarios. But *ex hypothesi* skeptical scenarios are such that the good and bad cases are subjectively indiscriminable.<sup>29</sup> This seems sufficient to suggest that disjunctivism occupies a dialectically poor position vis-à-vis the skeptic.

However, appreciating what I call disjunctivism’s “dialectical infelicity problem” requires discussing one more wrinkle, since the disjunctivist has a response available to the initial worry introduced in the previous paragraph. The disjunctivist response is that the common skeptical description of good and bad cases as “indiscriminable” relies on an implicit argument.<sup>30</sup> The implicit argument goes as follows. In a skeptical scenario, the subject in the bad case cannot

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<sup>28</sup> *Locus classicus* of this understanding of disjunctivism, McDowell 1982.

<sup>29</sup> In an attempt to answer the difficulty, Pritchard (2012, Part Two) introduces a distinction between “favoring” and “discriminating” epistemic support. Rational support may favor believing that *p* without allowing the subject being able to discriminate her position from cases where *p* is false. Applying this distinction to the problem, Pritchard suggests that the type of “introspection” involved in (2) does not allow a subject to *discriminate* between good and bad cases, although her experience *favors* knowledge of being in the good case. I am not sure I understand the way experience can favor anti-skeptical knowledge without requiring “discriminating” support (after all, the point of skepticism would seem to be that the hypothesis of indiscriminability appears to undermine any “favoring” support the experience does for propositions about the world). At any rate, my suggestion will be that the disjunctivist does not require Pritchard’s innovation.

<sup>30</sup> See John McDowell (ms.) for an exposition of the line of thought that follows. For other helpful discussions of the same point, McDowell 2010, p. 246ff; Soteriou 2016, Chapter 5.

know, based on her experience, that she is in the bad case. By contrast, the disjunctivist claims that in the good case the subject *can* know, based on her experience, that she is in the good case. How exactly do these claims seem in tension? The implicit argument bringing these two commitments in tension centers on the premise that if the subject in the bad case cannot know, based on experience, that she is in the bad case, then the subject in the good case cannot know, based on experience, that she is in the good case. Or again, if the subject in the bad case cannot rule out that she is in the bad case, then the subject in the good case cannot rule out that she is in the bad case, either.

According to the disjunctivist, this implicit argument should be rejected. In effect, the argument introduces an auxiliary premise to skeptical arguments to the effect that a subject's knowledge of the nature of her experience must be due to a *general* ability for self-knowledge, such that the capacity for self-knowledge is operative in the bad case just as it is in the good case. On the assumption of this premise, as experience in the good case allows the subject to know some type of facts *F* about the character of her experience, experience in the bad case must also put the subject in a position to know facts of type *F* about the character of her experience. But the bad case shows that *F* cannot extend to whether or not an experience is perceptual. Therefore, the subject in the good case cannot, on grounds of her experience, know that she is perceiving.<sup>31</sup>

Consider accordingly the auxiliary premise on which the implicit argument hinges:

**Auxiliary Premise:** If experience in the good case puts the subject in a position to know that she is perceiving, then this must be part of a general capacity for self-knowledge such as, contrary to fact, would apply to the bad case.

Understanding the dialectic vis-à-vis the skeptic this way, the disjunctivist's next move is to deny this Auxiliary Premise. For the disjunctivist, we can deny that experience in the bad case provides the same basis for self-knowledge as experience in the good case. Accordingly, in

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<sup>31</sup> For a dense but compelling exposition of this understanding of the dialectic by John McDowell, see McDowell (ms.), p. 7.

denying the Auxilliary Premise, the disjunctivist marks a distinction between the way the subject's capacity for self-knowledge operates in good and bad cases. Specifically, the disjunctivist seeks to suggest that what the subject in the good case can know about her experience is different (and "more", so-to-say) than the subject in the bad case. In particular, in the good case what the subject can know includes that she is in the good case, but in the bad case what the subject can know does not include that she is in the bad case. Accordingly, the disjunctivist is committed to the following

**Asymmetry Claim:** the subject in a bad case is not in a position to know that she is in the bad case, but the subject in the good case is in a position to know she is in the good case.

This is where I suggest the disjunctivist faces the "dialectical infelicity problem."

Consider: what non-question-begging ground can the disjunctivist offer the skeptic in support of the Asymmetry Claim, other than that her position requires this claim to be true? That is, what recommends the Asymmetry Claim over the Auxiliary Premise? As a first pass, the disjunctivist may hope to exploit the general shape of her view. Specifically, the disjunctivist may hope to transpose her negative claim from perception to self-knowledge. In the good case, experience ensures an opportunity for perceptual knowledge, even as *in the bad case* it does not. Just so, in the good case experience ensures an opportunity for self-knowledge, even as *in the bad case* it does not. Accordingly, the dialectical position for the disjunctivist might appear as follows. The Asymmetry Claim appears to flout the indiscriminability of the good and bad cases. However, this appearance merely trades on the same illicit assimilation of the good case to the bad case that the disjunctivist is in general concerned to deny, this time as experience supports self-knowledge.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> As John McDowell presents this point, the equal treatment of good and bad cases that disjunctivists consider problematic in general arises

But this reply is too quick. The reason is that where in the perceptual case the disjunctivist's negative claim picks up on a natural distinction between the good and the bad case, this is not obviously true in the case of self-knowledge. Consider some set of environmental properties  $G$ , like redness and so on. It is entirely natural to think that perception is a capacity to pick up properties belonging to  $G$ , and that in the good case properties belonging to  $G$  are plausibly available for knowledge, where in the bad case they are not. But contrast the set of mental properties  $F$ . The question concerning the nature of perceptual self-knowledge is precisely whether "is a perceptual experience" is a member of  $F$ . Indeed, the upshot of the bad case can plausibly seem that it is not. But then the disjunctivist seems to lack natural grounds for the Asymmetry Claim.<sup>33</sup>

Accordingly, this is the disjunctivist's "dialectical infelicity problem." Disjunctivism requires the idea that self-knowledge is asymmetrical between the good and bad cases, but we have not been given grounds to favor this view over the view that self-knowledge in two cases is symmetrical. Specifically, the very aspect of experience that is supposed to be subjectively accessible in the good case, i.e. that a state is *perceptual*, is the aspect that the bad case seems to show is not obviously within a subject's capacity to detect (based on experience alone).

Accordingly, the disjunctivist's best result seems a stalemate.

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[n]ot only in connection with [perception's] guise as a capacity for knowledge about one's environment, but also in connection with its guise as a capacity for self-knowledge – knowledge that one's experience is revealing an aspect of objective reality to one. (McDowell 2010, p. 246; cited at Soteriou 2016, p. 15)

<sup>33</sup> To illustrate, let a "bad case" be one of death or dreamless sleep, while a "good case" is one of ordinary waking consciousness. As these cases show, there is no *general* symmetry of self-knowledge in good and bad cases (Soteriou 2016, p. 3). Death and sleep are examples in which bad cases are situations such that you cannot know that you are in them, but good cases are such that you *can* tell that that you are in them, and that therefore you are not in a bad case. On reflection, however, these cases cannot provide a model for the disjunctivist. The issue is that these cases are described such as to include grounds for rendering the asymmetry intelligible. For example, being asleep is not in fact like being awake. But such an intuitive ground for asymmetry is precisely what the disjunctivist lacks: it is not clear that self-awareness of the "good" case is different from self-awareness of the "bad" case.

This is where I suggest that, in its reliance on a specific model of self-awareness, the presentational conception of epistemic value bears the unique value of resolving the “dialectical infelicity problem” for the disjunctivist. The central idea is that it is a subtle misreading to take the disjunctivist to *repeat* or *transpose* her core strategy of denying inferences from the bad to the good case, now concerning the way experience grounds self-knowledge. Rather, the disjunctivist’s strategy *at once* distinguishes bad from good cases—both as grounds for perceptual knowledge and as grounds for self-knowledge. The reason is that on the presentational paradigm experience’s epistemic value is conceived as intrinsically self-conscious, i.e. a single state intelligible only insofar as it provides grounds for perceptual knowledge *and* as grounds for self-knowledge. That is, the way a presentational state serves as a basis for perceptual knowledge itself resides in its nature as a basis for a relevant type of self-knowledge.<sup>34</sup>

Appreciating the “dual character” of a single state of perceptual presence allows the disjunctivist to provide the following more specific version of the Asymmetry Claim:

**Defectiveness Claim:** The badness of the bad case consists not merely in a defective condition with respect to the subject’s capacity to gain knowledge of her environment through perception. It also consists in a defective condition with respect to the subject’s capacity to gain self-awareness of her state. That is, the subject in a bad case is not in a position to know that she is in the bad case because her state exhibits a specific type of defectiveness vis-à-vis the subject’s self-knowledge. By contrast, the subject in the good case does not exhibit this type of defectiveness, and accordingly the subject is in a position to know she is in the good case.

What the Defectiveness Claim provides is a particular grounding of the Asymmetry Claim that allows the disjunctivist to overcome her dialectical infelicity problem. The grounding is that, given the foregoing, just as the bad case constitutes a malfunction of perception, so it constitutes a

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<sup>34</sup> Compare McDowell’s characterization of experiential grounds for self-knowledge and experiential grounds for perceptual knowledge as aspects of the exercise of a “single capacity” (McDowell ms., p. 8), such that “the potential for knowledge that the experience is one of perceiving [is] contained in the experience itself” (McDowell ms., p. 7).

malfunction of self-knowledge.<sup>35</sup> Consider a case where the subject appears to be presented with some item, but is in fact not. This is uncontroversially a defective exercise of the subject's perceptual capacities. But now, if the subject's capacity for self-knowledge is implicated in the very same aspect of this state, it must also be a defective exercise of the subject's capacity for self-knowledge. That is, it goes to the very heart of the disjunctivist view to see it as a mistake that we can picture the bad case as involving a subject's functioning capacity for self-awareness in abstraction from a functioning perceptual capacity. A subject cannot merely appear to be in a state of presence where this is a failure of perception but not of self-knowledge, since being in a state of presence is a single modification of a subject's self-consciousness. In the register of self-knowledge, the bad case will make it seem to the perceiving subject that she is in the same type of state as she would be in the good case. But this no different than that it seems to her that she is confronted with environmental realities, when she is not. The environmental realities are not there, and neither is she in a position that is like the good case.

This now allows us to appreciate the way the disjunctivist's original argumentative move can be "transposed" to the case of self-knowledge. Just as in the case of ground level perceptual knowledge there is no inference from the defective nature of the bad case to the nature of the good case, so the same inference fails insofar as it relates to self-knowledge. For the disjunctivist, the epistemic value of experience in the good case is such that, by the subject's own self-conscious lights, experience puts her in a position to gain knowledge of the environment. The existence of defective states of this type does not bear on the description of the good case, neither in its perceptual knowledge-granting nor in its self-knowledge granting aspects. Accordingly, indiscriminability is fundamentally asymmetrical between the good and bad cases, since the

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<sup>35</sup> In principle it is possible that the act of a single capacity is defective in one its aspects, but not in the other. But for the disjunctivist, states of perception are modifications of self-consciousness, rather than presence and self-awareness being two fully distinct aspects of a single act. A malfunction of perception is a malfunction of perceptual self-awareness.

indiscriminability involves a failure of self-knowledge in the bad case. Accordingly, the disjunctivist need not face a dialectical infelicity problem in her response to skepticism. Perhaps the “holy grail” of epistemology is after all a treasure worth chasing.<sup>36</sup> In any case, doing so requires the resources of the presentational version of disjunctivism.

##### 5. *Concluding Reflection: Self-Knowledge and Anti-Luminosity*

In this paper I have suggested a contrast between presentational and Pritchard-style evidentialist forms of disjunctivism. Moreover, I have suggested that presentational disjunctivism faces an advantage resolving the “dialectical infelicity problem”. In this last section I will conclude by briefly surveying the philosophically deeper significance of presentational disjunctivism in light of a popular argument first proposed in Timothy Williamson’s *Knowledge and its Limits* (2000) and since repeated elsewhere. I here address a version of Williamson’s argument specifically tailored to disjunctivism by Adrian Haddock (2011).

As I have argued, disjunctivism trades strongly on an intimate connection between conscious experience and self-awareness, since this connection grounds the subject’s awareness of the epistemic value of her experience. The aim of Williamson’s argument is to undermine the possibility of this connection, i.e. a form of self-knowledge that is intrinsic or internal to conscious states.<sup>37</sup> To arrive at this conclusion, the Williamson-style argument starts by posing

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<sup>36</sup> To see the appeal of disjunctivism as an anti-skeptical strategy, it is helpful to consider the fundamental way it diverges from neo-Mooreanism as a strategy (compare Pritchard 2008). For neo-Mooreans, anti-skeptical knowledge is *inferential* knowledge gained on grounds of empirical perceptual knowledge (on the model of inferences like “I know that I have a hand, therefore skepticism about the external world is false”). Disjunctivism offers a different conception, and a different diagnosis of skepticism. For the disjunctivist, perceptual fallibility merely renders philosophically obscure what in fact ordinary experience makes self-consciously available: namely that in experience objects are *present*, and that therefore skepticism is false. This means that anti-skeptical knowledge is in fact directly included in ordinary self-consciousness, rather than being knowledge that requires inferential reasoning from empirical grounds. For the disjunctivist, once the subject has undergone suitable “philosophical therapy” disabusing her of overreactions to perceptual fallibility, she can once again recognize ordinary perception for what it manifestly is: the presence of the world in her experience.

<sup>37</sup> Compare Williamson’s formulation of luminosity (Williamson 2000, p. 95)

that if a mental state is to count as knowledge, it must be subject to some reliability constraint. As

Haddock phrases the idea,

let us assume a certain sort of reliability principle for knowledge: for any times  $t$  and  $t + 1$ , where  $t$  and  $t + 1$  are any two times spaced only fractionally – say, one millisecond – apart, if at  $t$  one knows that something is the case, then at  $t + 1$  this very thing is the case.<sup>38</sup>

What is the idea here? The point is twofold: (i) knowing  $p$  requires suitable responsiveness to  $p$  being true; (ii) moreover, a capacity for such responsiveness must in some sense be limited in its sensitivity. Humans are simply not *perfectly* sensitive in detecting truths. As Haddock traces the implication of such a reliability constraint, it follows that where  $t$  and  $t + 1$  are some infinitesimally small fraction apart, if a subject knows  $p$  at  $t$ , then  $p$  is true at  $t + 1$ . And if she knows  $p$  at  $t + 1$ , then  $p$  is still true at  $t + 2$ , etc. Otherwise, the Williamsonian thinking goes, we would not credit a subject with a reliable capacity for detecting the truth of  $p$ .<sup>39</sup>

Assume now that the proposition known  $p$  is the subject being in a perceptual state. Then, in an example provided by Haddock (*ibid.*):

if at  $t$  I know that I see that your sweater is brown, then at  $t + 1$  I see that your sweater is brown.

But,

Now imagine a stretch of time between two intervals, at the beginning of which I see that your sweater is brown, but at the end of which I do not (perhaps this is a stretch of time during which your sweater is slowly starting to look a different colour, because the lights which make it impossible to tell the colours of things are slowly turning on).

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For every case  $\alpha$ , if in  $\alpha$   $C$  obtains, then in  $\alpha$  one is in a position to know that  $C$  obtains.

“ $\alpha$ ” here is intended to cover any possible case, and  $C$  is intended to cover a mental condition (e.g. being in an experiential state.)

<sup>38</sup> Haddock 2011, p. 30

<sup>39</sup> Compare knowing a cup is red at  $t$ . If at  $t + 1$  its color has suddenly altered (and, one assumes, this is generally how the colors of cups behave), one presumably just lacks a capacity for detecting the colors of cups. Changes at infinitesimally small temporal intervals are simply beyond the human senses to detect, and accordingly beyond human capacities to know. Or so the Williamsonian thought appears to go.

Accordingly, we imagine a time span from  $t$  through  $t + n$  over which the subject gradually stops seeing something (in this case, that a sweater is brown). So at  $t + n$  the subject is no longer seeing that the sweater is brown. From the foregoing it follows that if at  $t$  the subject knows she is seeing that the sweater is brown, then at  $t + 1$  it is still true that she is seeing that the sweater is brown. Just so, if at  $t + 1$  the subject knows that she is seeing that the sweater is brown, then at  $t + 2$  it is still true that she is seeing that the sweater is brown. And so on. But now assume that at  $t + n - 1$  the subject is seeing that the sweater is brown. Then, if perceptual consciousness were constitutively self-known or self-knowable the subject at  $t + n - 1$  is in a position to know that she is seeing that the sweater is brown. From this it follows that the subject at  $t + n$  is seeing that the sweater is brown. But we have stipulated that at  $t + n$  the subject is no longer seeing that the sweater is brown. Contradiction. It seems there cannot be a constitutive connection between conscious mental states and self-knowledge or self-awareness.

While these Williamson-style arguments have been widely accepted, for present purposes the philosophically interest is in seeing the way presentational disjunctivism would resist the objection. Specifically, the disjunctivism I have developed rejects the Williamson-style argument straight from its starting-point—i.e. the idea that self-knowledge is attended by a reliability condition. This is because for the disjunctivist (as I have specified her) it is the nature of thinking minds to have self-consciousness as a feature of their *first-order* consciousness. For thinkers, experiential consciousness simply *is* experiential self-consciousness. Haddock shows awareness of this suggestion when he concedes that “unlike my perceptual knowledge that P, my knowledge that I perceive that P is, for [the disjunctivist], in some sense *spontaneous*.”<sup>40</sup> As Haddock describes the idea

whereas the object of spontaneous knowledge (e.g. the fact that I perceive that P) suffices to put me in a position to know itself (e.g. to know that I perceive that P), the object of receptive knowledge (e.g. the fact that your sweater is brown) does not suffice to put me

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<sup>40</sup> For more on “spontaneous” self-knowledge, invoked by Haddock, see Rödl 2007.

in a position to know itself; to know the latter, I need to bear a receptive nexus to the object (e.g. I need to perceive that it is brown).<sup>41</sup>

As Haddock here outlines, for receptive knowledge (of which perceptual knowledge is a species) the object is not sufficient for knowledge. Instead, the subject must bear a “receptive nexus” to the object. By contrast, for spontaneous knowledge (of which (the relevant type of) self-knowledge is a species) this is not true: the object of such knowledge suffices for knowledge. Therefore, having a conscious perceptual state *eo ipso* grounds knowledge of the state. But then the disjunctivist can give the following reply to the Williamson-style argument: the idea of a limited reliability condition applies specifically to receptive knowledge, but it does not apply to self-knowledge.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the argument fails.

The disjunctivist’s response to Haddock’s argument illustrates the way presentational disjunctivism provides a fundamental gloss on disjunctivism as an expression of epistemic internalism. Internalism about perceptual experience is sometimes articulated in the context of the idea that the acquisition of perceptual knowledge is a case of “rationality at work”, since internalism includes the idea that perceptual judgment is a form of rational responsiveness to what subjective experience provides. Traditionally, it was thought that to capture this idea required a notion of perceptual evidence. And of course it is true that responsiveness to evidence is a paradigm of rationality. However, the type of rational self-consciousness that plays a role in presentational disjunctivism now suggests a different view of internalism. The rationality operative in the subject’s acquisition of perceptual knowledge need not reside in responsiveness to evidential support. Instead, self-consciousness *as such*, extending as it does to the very experiential *presence* of perceived items, itself furnishes a distinctly rational context in which the

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<sup>41</sup> Haddock 2011, p. 29.

<sup>42</sup> For example, limited reliability plausibly characterizes the sort of tracking capacities that are required for the subject to bear the appropriate “receptive nexus” to the objects of her receptive knowledge. I cannot count as possessing receptive knowledge of *p* if I am not within an appropriate range of sensitivity to the obtaining of *p*. But that does not bear on the relevant sort of self-knowledge.

subject can transition from experience to judgment. Accordingly, experience's epistemic value is anchored to knowledge not in virtue of its *strength* but rather just in virtue of what it *is*, i.e. a manifestation of presentational self-consciousness that belongs to a subject's rationality.

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