Presentation and the Ways of Knowing

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There can be no knowledge, even the highest, without presentation, and presentation is all that is necessary.

̶ Helen Wodehouse (1909: 399)

**Abstract**: Ordinary thought recognizes many ways of knowing. Not all are epistemologically fundamental. Nevertheless, it is standard to think there is more than one fundamental way—call this view *access pluralism*. *Access monism* opposes access pluralism. This paper defends a version of access monism I call *presentationalist monism* (§1), on which the sole fundamental way of knowing is *presentation*. I defend presentationalist monism in three stages. Firstly (§2), I suggest that it is compelling about four central ways of knowing—viz., perceiving, episodically remembering, introspecting, and intuiting. Then (§3) I argue that presentationalist monism also explains ostensibly less straightforward cases, including inference, testimony, semantic memory, and practical knowledge. After working through cases in this way, I show how this enumerative argument can be secured by understanding the view as a kind of formal foundationalism about ways of knowing. I conclude by addressing an objection (§4) and considering whether presentationalism about ways of knowing supports a presentational account of knowledge, cautioning against this inference (§5).

**1. Introduction**

Ordinary thought recognizes many *ways of knowing*: one can see on TV, learn from a friend, remember in vivid detail, intuit hazily, deduce from some axioms, or observe through a radio telescope that some fact obtains. But only some of these ways of knowing should qualify as *fundamental* in the epistemic domain. After all, there is not a fundamentalepistemological difference between deducing a conclusion via *modus ponens* and deducing another conclusion via *modus tollens*, or a fundamental epistemological difference between learning from speech that p and learning from writing that p. The first two are just special cases of knowing by deduction or, more simply, knowing by inference. The second two are just special cases of knowing by testimony. Nonetheless, it has been standard to think that there is more than one fundamental way of knowing. Indeed, the standard view is that there is a handful of ways—a representative list might include perception, inference, introspection, intuition, memory, and testimony.[[1]](#footnote-1)

I will call *access pluralist* any view on which there is more than one fundamental way of knowing. By ‘fundamental’, I mean more than what is sometimes intended by non-reductionists about testimonial knowledge. Non-reductionism in the epistemology of testimony is often defined as the view that one has default reason, not inferentially derived, for trusting testimony, where this reason is, if undefeated, sufficient to justify belief. One can be a non-reductionist of this sort about various ways of knowing while thinking that they are *mere special cases* of a more fundamental way of knowing. There is default reason to trust both hearing and vision, but we don’t need both on the list of fundamental ways—just *perceiving*.

Accordingly, access pluralism makes the stronger claim that there are multiple fundamental ways of knowing, where that entails that these ways are not just special cases of some other way of knowing. *Access monism*, by contrast, holds that there is only one fundamental way of knowing in this sense, and that all other ways of knowing qualify as such by being special cases of this way. So understood, access monism is consistent with a weaker sort of pluralism about *generative* (vs. transmissive) ways of knowing, and also with the view that there is more than one *independent* way of knowing. I take these weaker pluralisms to be obviously true: seeing that p and hearing that p are both independent, generative ways of knowing. This admission is compatible with access monism because these ways of knowing still qualify as suchby qualifying as special cases of a wider way—e.g., *perception*.

Some other preliminary clarifications are in order about the distinction between access monism and access pluralism. Firstly, I am concerned only with the monism vs. pluralism debate about *ways of knowing*. I don’t assume that the right views about ways of knowing are just consequences of views about justification. I want to be neutral in this paper on the knowledge-first project, and knowledge-firsters needn’t derive their views about access monism vs. pluralism from structurally similar views about justified belief.

A second clarification concerns the intended notion of a ‘way of knowing’. Under this heading I discuss *processes* associated with specific factive mental episodes that are the *culminations* of these processes.[[2]](#footnote-2) In particular, I focus on access monism about those processes which are (i) ways of learning[[3]](#footnote-3) or (ii) ways of remembering what one learned; as a word-saving reminder of this restriction, I will sometimes speak of ‘ways of (re)learning’. So understood, ways of knowing that p include episodes that figure in certain answers to the question ‘How do you know that p?’—namely, answers of the form ‘Because I φ [or φ-ed] that p’, where ‘φ’ is to be replaced by a factive verb like ‘see’, ‘hear’, ‘intuit’, ‘deduce’, or ‘remember’.[[4]](#footnote-4) When substituted into this schema, factive verbs refer to processes: ‘because I saw that p’ plausibly means *because I visually perceived that p*. Such processes culminatein factive mental episodes that can be picked out with the same verbs. But we should distinguish *visual perception*, a process, from *visual recognition*, the episode that is its culmination.

Access pluralism is the orthodox view in epistemology. It is often treated as true without any defense. Still, I think access pluralism shouldn’t seem so obvious even if skepticism is off the table. One way to bring out why is to consider a popular idea in the epistemology of intuition. Perceptual models of intuition on which intuitions constitute *presentations of facts* are familiar due to Bengson (2015) and Chudnoff (2013), and have an earlier history in Huemer (2005; 2007)’s phenomenal conservatism. While all these theorists defend this view as a claim about how non-factive *seemings* justify beliefs, there is an analogous view about ways of knowing. On that view, knowledge by intuition is knowledge by *quasi-perception*, which, if one follows Bengson and Chudnoff, is knowledge by means of *presentation*. If this view were true, there would be a challenge to one part of standard access pluralism. For intuition and perception would then each count as non-fundamental sources of knowledge and would be mere special cases of presentation. Hence, the list of basic ways of knowing could be shortened by one.

With this idea in mind, it is easy to see how the list could be shortened further. Episodic memory is plausibly a kind of presentation. Moreover, perceptual models of introspection allow us to knock one kind of self-knowledge—the passive kind—off the list. Hence, given a defense of quasi-perceptualism about intuition, episodic memory, and introspection, we can knock three allegedly fundamental sources off the list, and replace perception with the more fundamental way of knowing that Bengson and Chudnoff call ‘presentation’.

The thesis of this paper is that we can knock everything except presentation off the list of fundamental ways of knowing. The only fundamental way of knowing that p is presentation of the fact that p, where there are various determinate forms that presentation can take (e.g., it can be perceptual, intuitive, inferential, mnemonic, introspective, or active). I call this version of monism *presentationalist monism*, or *presentationalism* for short.[[5]](#footnote-5) I take it to be a new view for contemporary epistemology to consider, though as the epigraph suggests, a version was sketched by the unjustly forgotten English philosopher Helen Wodehouse (1909; 1910), and it may have been the standard view in Sanskrit epistemology.[[6]](#footnote-6)

It is worth distinguishing presentationalism from what Antognazza (2015; 2020) and Ayers (2019) suggest is the real traditional account of knowledge in the history of philosophy, augured by Theaetetus’s initial suggestion that ‘knowledge is nothing but perception’. Presentationalist monism is a view about *ways of knowing*, not knowledge itself. It may be, as I discuss in §5, that one can get from presentationalist monism to a presentationalist account of knowledge, but it is not obvious.

I will defend presentationalism on the basis of its simplicity and explanatory power in three stages. The first stage is nearly complete, and just consists in the suggestion that presentationalism is compelling about four central ways of knowing—viz., perceiving, episodically remembering, introspecting, and intuiting. But I will explain in more detail in §2 why we should treat presentationalism as the default view after saying more about how I am understanding the notion of presentation. I then argue in §3 that it is consistent with common sense to extend presentationalism to knowledge by inference, testimony, and practical knowledge. I also show how treating presentationalism as a novel form of what Sosa (1980) called *formal foundationalism* helps secure this enumerative argument. I then consider in §4 a structural objection to presentationalism and argue that it rests on mistaken assumptions about the relationship between ways of knowing and sources of justification. I conclude in §5 by considering whether my defense of presentationalism might be used to revive a traditional quasi-perceptual account of knowledge. I suggest that it may be better to restrict presentationalism to an account of ways of knowing in the sense at issue in this paper.

**2. Presentation and Presentationalism’s Default Status for Several Ways of Knowing**

2.1. *The Nature of Presentation*

According to the version of access monism I recommend, the sole fundamental way of knowing is *presentation*: all other ways of knowing qualify as such by being special cases of presentation. What, though, are presentations?

As flagged earlier, the concept of presentation has recently been a fixture of defenses of the perceptual model of intuition (e.g., Bengson (2015) and Chudnoff (2013)), though it has deep roots in historical epistemology and philosophy of mind.[[7]](#footnote-7) While not all presentations are intuitions, intuitions provide fine examples—e.g., consider intuiting that triangles have fewer sides than squares, or consider Bengson’s example of Ramanujan, who ‘immediately sees that [the number 1729] has the property of being the smallest number expressible as the sum of two positive cubes in two different ways’ (2015: 711).

I will assume, like Bengson and Chudnoff, that presentations are a kind of mental episode of which seeing that p and intuiting that p are special cases. This description may be enough to fix reference on presentations. But it doesn’t tell us much about the natureof presentations. It would be nice to know more about their nature and place in the mind, even if one doesn’t want to attempt an *analysis* of presentation (as I don’t here).

The ontological category to which presentations belong is the category of *episodes*, understood broadly to include some *processes* and not just *punctual occurrences*. Given the usual diet of examples in the literature, it is tempting to assume that presentations are punctual occurrences—flashes of insight or perception. But the diet of examples should be expanded. Perceptual and intuitive presentations can persist for more than a moment. Events that take time, like dances and other movements, are often (maybe always) presented in perceptual experiences that have non-trivial temporal extent and structure. Intuitive presentations can also be slow-going: one can *gradually realize* that p, or it can *gradually dawn on one* that p. For this reason, I will assume presentations are not instantaneous, and are often *bona fide* processes, even if these processes can be brief and have little structure.

What kinds of episodes are presentations? The standard diet of examples in the literature on perceptual and intuitive presentations suggests that presentations are essentially *mental* episodes, and more specifically are essentially *conscious* mental episodes. The presentations at issue here are indeed conscious mental episodes. But some cautionary remarks are needed to clarify the difference between the framework here and seemingly kindred frameworks in epistemology and philosophy of mind.

The first cautionary remark is that there is a more ordinary, wider sort of presentation that is not essentially mental. It might be invoked in an analysis of mental presentations. To elicit the wider concept, consider documentary films. They are presentations of reality in some perfectly good sense. But they are not mental episodes. I think it is an open question whether mental presentations are partly grounded in presentations in this wider sense. Perhaps, for example, S’s having a mental presentation of X is grounded in S’s having in their global workspace (see Baars (1997)) a mental representation that is a presentation of X in this wider sense.

The second cautionary remark is that while the presentations at issue are conscious mental episodes, it should be remembered that ‘conscious’ is said in many ways. I take it that *access consciousness* is the kind of consciousness essentially shared by mental presentations, where the earmark of access consciousness is that it attentionally poises a mental state or episode for use in the rational control of thought.[[8]](#footnote-8) Presentations do not essentially have sensory or imaginative phenomenal character, and for this reason are at least not *prototypical* examples of episodes that are essentially *phenomenally conscious*. This is not, however, to say that full-blown zombies can enjoy presentations, for it is not obvious that they enjoy access consciousness, *pace* Block (1995) and Chalmers (1996).[[9]](#footnote-9) Following Lennon (forthcoming), we should distinguish *sensory* and *cognitive zombies*. While presentations can lack sensory phenomenology, it is hard to see how they could be possible without what Lennon (forthcoming) usefully calls ‘cognitive experience’.[[10]](#footnote-10) To understand the relevance of this thought for presentation, consider intuitive presentations. They have no essential phenomenal character that could be peeled off from cognitive episodes via total zombification. Yet intuitive presentations are essentially occurrences in experience in the ordinary, broad sense of ‘experience’. The same goes for presentations in general, I assume.

The third cautionary remark is that I will be taking presentation to be essentially a success notion, unlike Bengson, phenomenal conservatives like Huemer (2005, 2007), and dogmatists like Pryor (2000). In taking presentation to be a success notion, I follow Wodehouse (1909, 1910): she took it for granted that only *reality* can be presented. Hence the construction for expressing presentations that I see as joint-carving is the *object-facing* construction of *a presentation of α to S*, where *α* is often not a denizen of S’s individual mind. I do not, however, assume *naïve realism*. One could allow, as Wodehouse did,[[11]](#footnote-11) that the reality with which one is presented is not the naïve realist’s manifest image. It seems fine to me, for example, to allow that Chalmers (2022)’s *reality+* is *presented* by VR glasses. The comparison with VR and films suggests a further regimentation of the object-facing construction. Plausibly there is always an implicit sourcethat generates presentations via some relevant process. Hence a more explicit way of picking out presentations is via this schema: *α is presented to S by source σ [via process φ]*.

An advantage of this regimentation arises when we ask whether the presentational can be grounded in the non-presentational. Plausibly, presentations are not absolutely fundamental. One might take them to be *relatively* fundamental for philosophy of mind. But access monism ought to be compatible with nottaking them to be even relatively fundamental. Relatedly, it ought to be compatible with rejecting the kind of internalist dogmatism favored by Bengson and Chudnoff. The way I’ve regimented talk of presentation makes it easy to appreciate other options. For example, it makes it clearer how one could ground presentations in broadly informationalterms, where the process of presentation begins with an *information source σ* that is appropriately linked up with some object of interest *α*, which *informs* a *receiver r* via a process *φ*. In this way, a natural form of presentationalism is the kind of informationalepistemology intimated by Evans (1982: 122-123). I don’t want to rule out this approach even though I do—contra Lyons (2009)’s zombie epistemology—rule out presentation and knowledge by presentation in a *total* zombie with neither sensory nor cognitive experience.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Let’s summarize the points so far. Firstly, presentations are conscious mental episodes, but they are only essentially conscious in the sense of being constituents of cognitive experience, and may be special cases of presentations of a wider sort. Secondly, presentations are essentially and non-accidentally successful: they are essentially presentations of ‘objects’ in various ontological categories (particulars, facts, events…). Finally, a conscious mental episode of presentation is identical to an event of α’s presentation to a mind via some source of presentation (e.g., perceptual experience) and presentational process (e.g., perceptual processing). Presentationalism is neutral on whether such processes should be understood in a more or less externalist way, barring the extreme externalism of zombie epistemology.

While I want to be neutral about whether presentations are reducible to other mental or non-mental phenomena, it would be nice to say more about how they are related to other recognizable mental phenomena. It would be especiallynice to fill in the template

S is presented with α (via <*σ, φ>*) iff \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

by filling in the blank with some independently recognizable description, though without assuming that this provides a reductive analysis of the right-hand side.

To prove helpful in the present context, we also need to fill in the blank with terms other than ‘way of knowing’ or closely related terms like ‘way of [re]learning’. One kind of option is to appeal to single ordinary concepts that are epistemic in a broad sense but are more specific than *learning* and *coming to know*. One option is to use an amodal epistemic notion of perception*—*e.g., the notion expressed by ‘sees’when used to indicate an *episode of* *recognition*. Hence, one might say that S is presented with α by <*σ, φ>* iff S *recognizes* α due to <*σ, φ>*. A more general option is to appeal to the notion of the *evident*, per Chisholm (1982) and Brentano (1930/1966), so that S is presented with the fact that p iff p is *made evident* to S. Another option still would be to appeal to the concept of (cognitive) *experience* and say that S is presented with the fact that p iff S the fact that p is given in experience. These are good ways of fixing reference on presentations, though some of the ordinary notions here are as flexible as the notion of consciousness and need similar regimentation.

A different option is to combine an appeal to ordinary epistemic concepts that are generic but distinct from *way of knowing* or *way of learning* with an appeal to additional non-epistemic concepts. One interesting possibility is to restrict the notion of *awareness* as elucidated in recent work by Silva (2023; forthcoming) and Silva and Siscoe (2024), or in the early work of Huemer (2001).[[13]](#footnote-13) Note that it will not do to appeal *only* to awareness in either of Silva or Huemer’s senses. Firstly, Silva and Siscoe and Huemer (2001) take awareness to be a state, but presentation is an episode. Secondly, both Silva and the early Huemer take awareness to be a state that can be stored and also, when occurrent, not *manifested in experience* but merely realized in an *occurrence*; hence even mere belief can count as awareness for Huemer (2001). Presentations cannot be stored and must be constituents of cognitive experience. Finally, unlike awareness according to Silva, presentations plausibly consume attention. One is presented with α only if α consumes attention, but one can be occurrently aware of a fact without attending to it at all: consider Silva (forthcoming)’s example of being unreflectively aware that the text one is reading is written in English, by processing it as English.

Perhaps one could say that one is presented with α iff one is made aware of α in some specific way. Huemer (2001)’s appeal to the *forcefulness* of perceptual awareness might initially seem promising: one is presented with o iff one is forcefully made aware of o. But Huemer (2001) seems to take this notion as primitive and graspable only by ostension. As far as I can see, ‘forcefulness’ is a metaphorical term for presentationality.[[14]](#footnote-14) A different option is to invoke attention. Perhaps one might say that one is presented with α iff one is made attentively aware of α. This is more compelling, since attention is independently recognizable.

While both options can help one to get a fix on presentations, only the first seems helpful for the presentationalist monist. *Being made attentively aware that p* is not plausibly a *way of knowing* in cases where such awareness yields knowledge that p: rather, it *just is* the process of coming to know in these cases. But presentation is a way of knowing. It is clear enough how it could be if we get a fix on it via the first option.

To summarize, the following biconditionals are all plausible, but are not all explained in the same way:

1. S is presented with the fact that p via <*σ, φ>* iff S (re)learns that p by <*σ, φ>.*
2. S is presented with the fact that p by <σ, φ> iff S recognizes that p because of <σ, φ>.
3. S is presented with the fact that p by <*σ, φ>* iff S is made attentively aware that p by <*σ, φ>.*

(2) is plausibly a conceptual truth, but presentation is metaphysically more fundamental, so that this conceptual truth is explained by the fact that recognition of o as F is grounded in a presentation of o as F, which may itself be grounded in <*σ, φ>’s presenting o as F to S*. Hence (2) can be used to get a fix on presentation, but does not constitute a reductive analysis of presentation. According to presentationalism, (1) is a substantive epistemological truth that is explained by the fact that presentation is the sole fundamental way of (re)learning that p. (3) could also be a substantive epistemological truth that is explained in a similar way to (1). I leave open, however, whether awareness has some intermediate place in the metaphysics of epistemology, per Silva (2023). Perhaps, for example, presentation is the sole fundamental way of (re)learning *because* it is the sole fundamental way of being made attentively aware that p—this is consistent with the view defended here.

2.2. *Presentationalism as the Default View for Several Ways of Knowing*

When the concepts of *presentation* and *way of knowing* are framed as I’ve done, it is straightforward enough to think that presentationalism should be a serious contender, and should be the default for perception and intuition. Perception and intuition are plausibly both ways of knowing in virtue of being presentations.

Presentationalism is also intuitive about episodic memory. The standard way of explaining episodic memory makes a quasi-perceptual construal seem inevitable. Bernecker (2010: 14), for example, glosses episodic memory as paradigmatically consisting in ‘the evocation of parts of the original experience in imagination, allowing [one] to relive or re-experience the original situation and [go] over what it is like’, adding that it can be ‘conceived as a sort of theatrical presentation to oneself’. Consider also Locke (1689/1975: 150), who characterized episodic memory as the mind’s ability to ‘revive perceptions, which it has once had, with this additional perception annexed to them, that it has had them before’. So there would appear to be no greater obstacle to presentationalism about knowledge by episodic memory than there is to presentationalism about intuition.

There is a potential worry about the reconstructive nature of episodic memory.[[15]](#footnote-15) In some cases, reconstruction poses no problem, since it also interferes with the reliability of the specific memory process to a sufficient degree that this process cannot produce *knowledge*. But one might think that *some* reconstructive memory processes can yield knowledge. Yet isn’t reconstruction incompatible with presentation?

The answer is No: there is no tension between being presentational and being reconstructive. The paradigm case of a presentational state—perception—is often reconstructive, as *amodal completion* illustrates: one sees that it is a whole circle partly occluded by a square with the help of the visual system’s reconstructive work.[[16]](#footnote-16) So the fact that the mind reconstructs a fact can’t imply that this fact isn’t presented to the mind.

Similar claims go for introspection as go for episodic memory: introspecting a state of pain, for example, is paradigmatically presentational. Note that I don’t use ‘introspection’ to mean ‘self-knowledge’. I allow that there are two ways of having self-knowledge (per Boyle (2009)) and discuss the other later. The point for now is that it is clear that there is one presentational kind of self-knowledge.

Accordingly, I suggest presentationalism is the default account of several ways of knowing on account of its simplicity and explanatory power. The reasoning here mirrors the reasoning for thinking that we shouldn’t count hearing and seeing as different fundamental ways of knowing, or deducing by *modus ponens* and deducing by *modus tollens* as different fundamental ways of knowing. Just as knowing by hearing and seeing are special cases of knowing by perceiving and knowing by *modus ponens* and knowing by *modus tollens* are special cases of knowing by deducing, so knowing by perceiving, introspecting, and episodically remembering are special cases of knowing by presentation, and hence shouldn’t be counted as fundamental.

**3. Presentationalism and Other Ways of Knowing**

While presentationalism is attractive for some ways of knowing, one might think it struggles with others. Presentations seem essentially perception-like, but there are ways of knowing that one might think are not perception-like. One might protest that inferential knowledge is indirect, and testimonial knowledge second-hand. So one might think presentationalism fails to explain the difference in epistemic value between different ways of knowing: one might insist that we value knowing by perception and intuition more than knowing by inference and testimony precisely because the former ways of knowing present facts and the latter don’t.

I will now address this apparent challenge, taking inference and testimony first. As I will stress, there is an attractive presentational model of the cases of inference and testimony that most clearly yield knowledge. I will suggest that cases of inferentially and testimonially justified non-accidentally true belief that don’t fit this model are not knowledge, though they have significant epistemic merit of other kinds. While I don’t want to court the skepticism that empiricist access monists court by requiring direct acquaintance for knowledge, I also think it is naïvely anti-skeptical to grant as cases of knowledge certain cases of justified non-accidentally true belief by inference and testimony.

3.1. *Inference as Presentation*

The first thing I want to do is push back against the intuition that inference presents a problem. To bring this out, note that there is an attractive presentational account of the clearest case of inferential knowledge—deductive knowledge. Consider Cook Wilson (1926: 490):

[I]n an important sense the knowledge of axioms is of the same kind as the knowledge of demonstrations. This knowledge we maintained to be an apprehension of a necessary connexion of universals in the construction of a particular case, the apprehension being always direct and the axioms requiring a construction as much as the theorems.

As Cook Wilson observes, it is tempting to think that in cases of deductive knowledge, the premises *make evident* or *present one with* the truth of the conclusion, and that one wouldn’t have a *proof* if the premises failed to make the conclusion evident. So far so good for presentationalism, then: inferences can be understood as presentational processes that start with presentations of the truth of premises and culminate in presentations of the truth of conclusions.

3.1.1. *What about Non-Evident Deductions?*

One might accept this view about some cases of deductive knowledge, but remain concerned. The premises don’t always make the conclusion evident, one might think, and yet plausibly one can still know a conclusion that isn’t evident. Here it would feel wrong to claim that one sees the truth of the conclusion in any interesting sense.

My reply is that there are cases and cases, all unproblematic, but for different reasons. Consider three examples of non-evident deductions:

(*Case 1: ‘OK. Huh!’*)I’m listening to my logician friend prove a striking proposition I hadn’t considered before. The assumptions she’s taking for granted seem clearly right. As I listen, each step sounds OK, though I’m not scrutinizing every step but rather trusting her expertise. We approach the last step, which also sounds OK, and arrive at the surprising conclusion. I say aloud—feeling a little lost—‘OK. Huh!’

(*Case 2: ‘That must be right. But lemme check again.’*)You are slowly reading a proof of a striking proposition you hadn’t considered before. The starting assumptions seem clearly right. You double-check every step, making sure it seems as clearly right to you as the starting assumptions. You read the last step, arriving at the surprising conclusion. You know that it follows. But it is surprising enough that you decide to re-read the proof, saying to yourself, ‘Wow, OK. That must be right, but I want to check again.’

(*Case 3: ‘OK. Weird!’*) You punish yourself with exercises in a non-classical logic textbook. You’re doing semantic tableaux. You’ve done enough that you’re working unthinkingly. You find that you are nearly infallible with them; all your results have checked out so far. The next exercise is a tableau for a weird modal conditional, one whose import you didn’t process at the outset. You complete the tableau and look back at what has been demonstrated, which is bizarre. You remark: ‘OK. Weird!’

In Case 1, I do not think it courts skepticism to deny that I’ve come to know the conclusion. In Case 2, it may seem implausible at the end to say that you *see* the truth of the conclusion. But here we can reason as follows in favor of presentationalism. Either you are in a position to see it or you aren’t. If you aren’t, it is not plausible that you know the conclusion. If you are, presentationalism isn’t in trouble: you’re still in a position to know by presentation. A plausible reading of this case is as one in which you do acquire first-order knowledge, and for a moment *do* see the truth of the conclusion, but your scruples prevent you from keeping a clear view of it, though you are poised to regain the view. This case poses no problem.

It is less obvious what to say about Case 3. Here it is hard to think that you may use the conclusion as a basis for terminating other inquiries in the way that a presentation of truth entitles you to do. But one might think that you can know the conclusion, at least in a low-grade way. But here too a dilemma settles the matter. Either you are presented with the truth of the conclusion at the end—if only in a shallow way—or you aren’t. If you are, you have what you would need to settle further inquiry. You may be obstructed from *coherently terminating* inquiry, owing to self-doubt. But the right verdict here is parallel to Pryor (2005: 366)’s verdict about Moore’s argument: if you are poised to see the truth of the conclusion, then even if your doubts *obstruct* you from accepting it, it is still true that you *have an entitlement to use it* to terminate inquiry.

3.1.2. *What about Non-Deductive Inferential Knowledge?*

One might still suspect that presentationalism is only limitedly plausible for inferential knowledge. One might grant it in deductive cases. But surely presentationalism will be implausible in non-deductive cases. We aren’t presented with facts about the future, are we?

This objection rests on false assumptions about presentation.  Consider a combination of points familiar from Dretske (1969) on seeing that p and literature on high-level perception (e.g., Siegel (2010)). Dretske distinguishes primary and secondary seeing: you see that X is F primarily when you see thatX is F in part by seeing X and its F-ness, and you see that X is F secondarily when you see that X is F only by seeing some Y ≠ X and its features. Both, however, are presentational.

The idea of secondarily seeing past facts is not mysterious: one can see from the footprints that someone has been here, for example. As Strohminger (2015) persuasively suggests and many perceptual psychologists agree, one can equally well see that some *non-actual possibilities* (e.g., Gibsonian affordances) obtain as one can see that someone has been in one’s garden. This possibility rightly isn’t ruled out by Dretske’s characterization of secondary seeing: just as one can see that X is F—where X is a spatially distant or past object-slice—by seeing the features of a distinct Y or a present slice of the same object, so one can see that X could be F by seeing the features of a distinct Y or X in actuality. Sentences like ‘I could see up close that it was fragile’ can be perfectly intuitive, as more importantly can sentences like ‘I could see that it would break if I nicked it’. Moreover, it is intuitive that the knowledge reported in these cases is visual. If one can see *these* kinds of properties—merely possible states of an object—one can plausibly see future properties as well. And intuition confirms this prediction: ‘I could see from the window that the plane would land within a few seconds’ can be just as literally true as the earlier sentences.

The same point could be made with the help of Siegel (2010)’s arguments for high-level content. Siegel (2014) notes that we can use her contrast arguments to support the view that we can perceive Gibsonian affordances. Once that point is made, the point about future contents is a simple extension. Siegel’s take on the perception of causation illustrates this extension. Suppose you’re watching a car that has swerved and is about to hit a tree. You feel yourself flinching just before it hits. If asked why you flinched before it hit the tree, it would be natural to say:

‘I could see it was going to crash.’

All presentationalism requires is that this familiar kind of claim can be literally true.

3.2. *Testimony as Presentation*

As in the case of inference, I will begin my discussion of testimony by pushing back against the idea that it presents a problem. Here is a *prima facie* appealing presentationalist model: The speaker attempts to present you with a truth. If the speaker fails to make this truth clear to you, you don’t come to know just by their testimony (though you might still know via a combined route, or another route). So, you know just by testimony in virtue of the speaker succeeding in their attempt to present you with the truth.

Now, the challenge is to defend the thought that in the *relevant* sense of ‘present’, the speaker must present the truth to you—i.e., they must make you enjoy a presentation of the facts. But this is a respectable old view in the epistemology of testimony. In the first great Western defense of non-reductionism about testimonial knowledge, Reid (1764/1997) emphasized the ‘striking analogy’ between perception and testimony, discussing testimony in a chapter entitled *Of Seeing*. Admittedly, Reid used ‘testimony’ in an extended way, so that facial expressions and gestures count as ‘natural testimony’ and hence knowledge by testimony includes mindreading. But there is nothing more surprising about the idea that one can hear *meanings*, and if Reid is right that one starts off following the principle of credulity and only later becomes ‘epistemically vigilant’, to use Sperber (2010)’s phrase, it’s not implausible to think that one can hear *truths* when listening to a reliable speaker.

This suggests a two-stage model of the testimonial case: in Edenic youth (which one relives when listening to trusted sources), testimonial knowledge is perceptual. One then meets liars, politicians, and the like, and develops epistemic vigilance. But when one is vigilant, one often doesn’t believe solidly on the basis of testimony, so that these cases can be treated in the reductionist’s inferential way, in which case we return to the case of inferential knowledge.

As with inference, we must distinguish cases. Sometimes one’s reception of testimony has a presentational character: the words make the relevant facts manifest to you, or so it feels. In these cases, the reception of testimony plausibly resembles secondary seeing. Reid said this in slightly different terms, analogizing the reception of so-called ‘artificial’ testimony to ‘acquired perception’ (his term for secondary perception).

In other cases, it is not intuitive that the words make the facts manifest. Some cases involving deference to experts are examples. But are these clear cases of testimonial *knowledge*? If the testifier doesn’t succeed in making the facts clear to you, or at least succeed in making them available as evidence, you plausibly don’t come to know them *just* on the basis of testimony. And some examples of deference to experts intuitively don’t satisfy the antecedent: when you ‘take the expert’s word for it’ that some theory you barely understand is true, I don’t think it’s obvious that you come to know it is true, though you might stand in other important epistemic relations to it.

There is a more general dilemma to invoke. Either the relevant testimonial knowledge is inferential or it isn’t. If it is, the problem of testimonial knowledge reduces to the problem of inferential knowledge, which we’ve already addressed. If it isn’t, Reid’s model is defensible. So, either there is no *new* problem for presentationalism, or no problem at all.

A more radical suggestion resembles a strategy I will mention in discussing semantic memory knowledge.[[17]](#footnote-17) One might understand testimonial knowledge as consisting in awareness of being informed that p by someone, where ‘informing that p’ is factive. On this view, the immediate object of testimonial knowledge is something other than the fact said to obtain, though one can infer that this fact is true from perceptual knowledge *that* one has been informed that p.

This model is compelling in some cases where you come to believe p by testimony despite not fully understanding what the testifier means by saying that p. One might deny that you really know *that p* here. You know that the proposition expressed by the sentence ‘p’ is true, and *this* fact is presented to you as true. But the fact that p itself isn’t presented to you as true. Consider any case where a scientist tells you some truth in scientific language you don’t really understand. You can come to believe that what they tell you is true. Your testimonial knowledge consists in knowledge of this meta-representational truth. Yet here we have no counterexample to presentationalism, since the scientist can present the truth of this claim to you.[[18]](#footnote-18)

3.3. *Semantic Memory as Testimony-Like*

Semantic memory might seem a stumbling block for presentationalism. While it may be intuitive that you enjoy a presentation of the fact that you kissed someone in remembering that you did, it is not intuitive that you enjoy a presentation of the fact that the Battle of Hastings was fought in 1066 when you remember this fact. My preferred diagnosis here is to treat the case analogously to testimonial knowledge.

There is a more direct route worth mentioning first. It begins with the observation that there is a plausible correlation between semantic memory and *some kind* of episodic memory. In particular, it seems plausible that whenever one semantically remembers that p, one also has at least the *generic* episodic memory that one *learned* that p at some point. Of course, it would be a mistake to claim that one must remember the *details* of the learning episode, or even remotely remember when it happened. I don’t remember the details of how I learned that the Battle of Hastings was fought in 1066. But I remember that I learned it in the same way that I remember, say, that I have had more than two paper cuts. Whether this generic episodic memory is presentational is perhaps unobvious. But here there is an analogy with Bengson (2015)’s observation that intuition can be more or less hazy: one can intuit, say, that there is some way of proving some truth, without yet being able to trace it. If presentationalism works for intuitive knowledge, it should be no less defensible here. This brings us to the most ambitious presentationalist story about knowledge that p by semantic memory: it is reducible to generic episodic memory that one learned that p.

My only reservation about this view is that it implies that one cannot *really* remember facts that weren’t episodes in one’s life. One remembers *that one learned* that p, not that p. I feel some temptation to say that one remembers that 7+5=12 *itself* even if one learned it by rote. On the other hand, there is some temptation to push back, and insist that memory is indeed fundamentally personal, and that it is only in an extended or elliptical sense that one’s knowledge that 7+5=12 is a product of *memory*. I don’t know which temptation to trust.

Other options are available to presentationalists. Firstly, one might insist that the mere fact that semantic memory lacks sensoryphenomenology doesn’t imply that it isn’t relevantly perception-like. Perception can lack such phenomenology (consider proprioception, whose phenomenology is similar to active self-knowledge). Even when this phenomenology is present, one might doubt it plays an essential epistemic role. Yet the most obvious difference between semantic and episodic memory is that the latter has sensory phenomenology.

I’m doubtful that this goes far enough, however. Even when perception lacks sensory phenomenology, it has presentational phenomenology. Yet it is unclear that semantic memory has presentational phenomenology. When I remember that the Battle of Hastings was fought in 1066, I don’t feel that I’m presented with that fact, even in the non-sensory way in which the facts accessible to intuition can be presented to me.

A second option is to hold a merely preservativeview of semantic memory and claim that the knowledge preserved over time is a non-memory form of knowledge for which presentationalism is plausible. On preservative views, what happens when one remembers that p is that one takes some knowledge ‘out of storage’. The knowledge one puts into storage is of other sorts. I see that there is a computer before me now, and I can make note of this fact. When I do, I store some perceptual knowledge. One could say that it then becomes memory knowledge when I retrieve it. But in calling it memory knowledge, one is merely taking note of the fact that it was successfully stored over time. The knowledge doesn’t *derive* from memory. Yet if it derives from some other source, presentationalists face the different, more favorable question of whether presentationalism works for that other source.

There are other problems for presentationalism about memory knowledge, but I think these reduce to ones that I have addressed or will now address. One problem I haven’t explicitly considered stems from the fact that it is plausible to understand some memory knowledge as knowledge taken on the trust of one’s earlier self. Cases in which one entirely fails to remember how one acquired a piece of information and could only offer one’s general reliability as an independent reason to keep believing provide good examples. These cases, however, are best understood as analogous to testimony, where one’s past self is the conveyor of information to be trusted. If presentationalists can address testimonial knowledge, they can also address these cases of memory knowledge.

3.4. *Two Kinds of Spontaneous Knowledge*

I turn to two final groups of *prima facie* troubling cases—cases of ‘spontaneous’ knowledge, in two different senses of ‘spontaneous’. The first includes cases of ‘non-observational’ self-knowledge, including the practical knowledge emphasized by Anscombe (1957). The second includes cases in which knowledge arises spontaneously not via one’s agency, but rather through development, growth, or relevantly similar changes. While these two kinds of cases require different treatment, they are helpful reminders of the ambitions of presentationalist monism and the fact that presentationalist monism is consistent with pluralism about sources and modes of presentation.

3.4.1. *Non-Observational Knowledge and Related Cases*

Active self-knowledge is supposed to be ‘non-observational’. Examples include knowing what one is doing by intentionally doing it and knowing what one will do by intending to do it. Such examples may appear to challenge presentationalism. The fact that active self-knowledge is not *introspective*—i.e., not derived from inner observation—may seem at odds with the spirit of presentationalism. Since perception is the prototypical case of presentation and agential self-knowledge is not knowledge from inner observation, it may feel tempting to conclude that it is non-presentational.

But the temptation is ill-founded. Presentationalists can reasonably insist that insofar as one has agential self-*knowledge* via an exercise of agency (whether intentional action or intending), an exercise of agency can be a source of presentation, perhaps with a distinctive mode of presentation. For the presentationalist can reasonably insist that if an attempted exercise of agency *fails* to present the agent with what they are doing (or will do), it fails to generate active self-*knowledge*, though it may yield justified belief. After all, if it is unclear to one what one is doing, one plausibly lacks agential self-knowledge of what one is doing. But if it is clear to one what one is doing, one is presented with what one is doing. At most, the case of agential self-knowledge illustrates that there is a distinctive source of presentations not yet discussed, not that there is a non-presentational way of knowing. Moreover, the fact that one’s agency is involved is not a problem given the earlier points about reconstructive memory and reconstruction in perception.

Note that this response is consistent with Anscombe’s observation that there is no *feeling* one uses to acquire agential self-knowledge. As emphasized at the outset, presentationalism does not entail that all knowledge resembles *sensation*. Presentations are essentially experiential, but there are forms of experience other than sensation. Hence agential self-knowledge is not best understood via a total zombie epistemology. It only illustrates that not all self-knowledge is derived from *interoception*. Agential self-knowledge is more like knowing what one is thinking by thinking, a case of cognitive experience.

Other cases of similarly spontaneous knowledge can be addressed in a similar way, including (i) knowing by being, (ii) knowing by exercising a competence (e.g., linguistic competence), (iii) normative knowledge, and (iv) acquiring know-how by practice. Under (i), consider the knowledge emphasized by standpoint epistemologists and the case of knowing what it’s like to be a bat by being one. Such examples only illustrate a distinctive kind of first-hand source. Under (ii), consider knowing that a sentence is grammatical by exercising one’s linguistic competence: again, if one’s linguistic competence weren’t sufficient to make it clear to one that some sentence is grammatical, one would not know that it is grammatical by linguistic competence. Under (iii), consider knowing that some act is wrong via moral understanding: if one’s moral understanding failed to make clear that this act is wrong, one would not know that it is wrong just by one’s moral understanding. Under (iv), consider learning how to ride a bike by practicing: if practicing failed to make clear that *that* is how to ride a bike, it would not afford the relevant know-how.

3.4.2. *Innate Knowledge and Acquisition without Learning*

Knowledge can be spontaneously generated in another way: namely, by growth, development and other processes of acquisition that are not processes of (re)learning. Innate knowledge and knowledge acquired through development after birth (e.g., object permanence) are both examples. While innate knowledge is not learned, it is ‘acquired’: a mind may go from merely having the capacity for consciousness to having some core conceptual capacities just via brain growth before birth.[[19]](#footnote-19) Other knowledge that arises through development after birth works in a similar way. Isn’t this kind of knowledge a counterexample?

I don’t think so: presentationalist monism is a view about ways of knowing in a specific sense, and (biological) growth is not a way of knowing in that sense. Consider how a similar point is needed to resolve Fodor (1975)’s nativism paradox while retaining the assumption that learning manifests rational agency. To avoid the conclusion that all lexical concepts are innate while retaining the idea that learning is a broadly rational process rather than an associative process, Fodor (2008: 130) distinguished between concept learning and other forms of concept acquisition:

‘[L]earned’ and ‘innate’ don’t exhaust the options; God only knows how many ways a creature’s genetic endowment may interact with its experience to affect the inventory of concepts at the creature’s disposal, but surely there are lots.

To avoid the conclusion that no knowledge is acquired through development within the constraints of access monism, a similar distinction is needed between knowledge acquisition via (re)learning and other cases of knowledge acquisition.

The interesting question of whether there is one or several fundamental ways of knowing is not the question of whether there is one or several fundamental ways of *acquiring* knowledge. For it is clear that there are many ways of acquiring knowledge that are not special cases of any of the familiar ways of knowing. The diversity of developmental acquisition across non-human animals, humans, and other creatures (e.g., Swampman) makes clear that there are many more ways of *getting* knowledge than perception, inference, testimony, memory, introspection, and other standard methods.[[20]](#footnote-20) They won’t have much in common besides being *knowledge-producing processes*. It does not follow, however, that there is no unity to the ways of *(re)learning*.

3.5. *Taking Stock: The Scope of Presentationalist Monism*

Let’s take stock. Presentationalist monism is ambitious, but its ambitions are restricted in ways that the discussion in this section has underscored. Firstly, presentationalist monism is a theory about ways of knowing in a specific sense: namely, ways of (re)learning. Not all ways of acquiring knowledge are ways of (re)learning. This point allows us to grant a nonnegotiable kind of pluralism: namely, that there is indefinitely great variety among ways of acquiringknowledge.

Secondly, the presentationalist monist can allow that there are interesting differences between modes of presentation, provided that there is sufficient underlying unity. Here it is helpful to note that presentationalist monism can be understood as a sort of monist formal foundationalismabout ways of knowing.[[21]](#footnote-21) A simple example of monist formal foundationalism about ways of knowing is a traditional quasi-perceptualist view, which would have the following recursive structure:

**Base Clause**: Perception is a way of knowing.

**Generative Clause**: If *w* is sufficiently perception-like, then it is also a way of knowing.

**Closure Clause**: Every *w* that is a way of knowing is so in virtue of either (i) or (ii).

The underlying idea was well expressed by Gupta (1995: 40) in a discussion of classical Indian theories of ways of knowing (pramāṇas):

Perception is also central in the scheme of pramāṇas in a much deeper sense. It is the presupposition of all other pramāṇas, not merely genetically in the sense that the latter are based on the knowledge derived from perception, but morphologically. Perception represents a structure that overlaps into all other means of knowledge. It is the paradigm of nonmediate knowledge, while also being intrinsic to mediate knowledge.

The enumerative argument I’ve offered is underwritten by a formal foundationalist account that captures the spirit of this suggestion, since it starts with paradigmatic cases of presentation and generates the other ways of knowing by analogy.

But there are other ways to be a presentationalist monist. One could invoke more than one mode of presentation in a base-clause of the form:

**Expanded Base Clause**: *w*1…*w*n are ways of knowing, in virtue of the fact that they are the paradigmatic modes of presentation.

One could then adjust the second clause so that any *w* that is sufficiently like these paradigmatic modes of presentation would also count. Evans (1982: 122-123)’s epistemology is a version, allowing for a variety of basic ways of *being informed*, where this is an event in cognitive experience. A different strategy would be to keep the base clause monistic but allow for pluralism about indirect presentation. Russell (1912)’s foundationalism is helpfully understood in this way, since he allowed that there were several forms of indirect presentation, including memory and inference.[[22]](#footnote-22)

In short, because presentationalist monism is a kind of formal foundationalism, it is compatible with substantive pluralism about presentation. It is also compatible with the implicit architectural dualism of the directly vs. indirectly evident, where the indirectly evident may be stratified among generative and transmissive ways of (re)learning, depending on what the best views about testimony, memory, and inference require. And partly because presentationalist monism is an architectural claim, it is consistent with a range of substantive views in epistemology and is notably neutral on the status of certain forms of externalism.

The main idea of this paper is that *provided* that the ambitions of presentationalism are appreciated—namely, it is a formal monist view about ways of knowing in a specific sense—it turns out to be surprisingly defensible. While I have defended a specific version as a working hypothesis, I encourage more work on others. The aim is to get this kind of view back on the epistemological map.

**4. An Objection Resolved**

I turn now to consider an objection.[[23]](#footnote-23) It emerges from an idea familiar from the literature on phenomenal conservatism and dogmatism—i.e., that presentations provide *immediate justification*. Assuming this idea, presentationalism entails that every way of knowing provides immediate justification, because every way of knowing is presentational. I will call this thesis *Wodehouse’s Thesis*, since something close to it was explicitly affirmed by Helen Wodehouse:

[A]ll kinds of knowledge are equally immediate. (1909: 395)

Here is a more official statement that gets closer to what I think is reasonable to extract from this claim:

**Wodehouse’s Thesis**: Every way of knowing provides immediate justification.

On the face of it, this thesis implies a claim that some will find intolerable:

**Inferential Knowledge as a Source of Immediate Justification (IKI)**: Purely inferential knowledge can provide immediate justification.

IKI leads to a problem familiar from the literature on E=K.[[24]](#footnote-24) IKI, one might insist, is analytically false. The debate between foundationalists and their opponents is often *defined* as a debate about whether there is a bedrock of non-inferential knowledge or justified belief on which all other knowledge or justified belief is inferentially based. Granting this way of setting up the debate, it is incoherent to suppose that purely inferential knowledge could provide immediate justification.

Thankfully, this argument is too quick. It rests on the assumption that the foundational/derived distinction for *ways of knowing* is the same as the foundational/derived distinction for *justification*. But there are good reasons to think that there are two distinct forms of epistemic structure. I will now explain why I think this is true and why Wodehouse’s Thesis is not absurd but rather a defensible implication of presentationalism.

A special case of the distinction needed to resolve this objection was already present in Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*. Aristotle distinguished between the structure of *learning* and the structure of *demonstration*. But a more general point lurks behind Aristotle’s distinction which undermines the assumption that the structures of knowing and justification are the same. As recent work on Aristotle’s epistemology suggests,[[25]](#footnote-25) Aristotle’s distinction supports a distinction between two kinds of epistemic immediacy. A suitable generalization of this distinction shows why Wodehouse’s thesis, properly understood, is not absurd.

To bring this out, note first that there is a plausible generalization of Aristotle’s distinction between the structure of learning and the structure of demonstration: namely, between the structure of *(re)learning* and the structure of *thinking*. The basic observations that Aristotle used to support his more specific distinction support this more general distinction. Aristotle stressed that there is no problematic circularity in appealing to ‘common’ knowledge as a starting point for systematic inquiry. Yet most such knowledge is built from prior learning. There is no problematic circularity here, Aristotle believed, because two forms of cognition are in play which have different structures—*gnosis* and *episteme*. It is straightforwardly possible to have *gnosis* of a truth but to also want *episteme* of the same truth, and to achieve itby reorganizing and systematizing *gnosis* in accordance with scientific principles. Hence Aristotle held that the structure of *gnosis* and the structure of *episteme* are different: *gnosis* is a foundation for achieving *episteme* even though *gnosis* has its own structure.

Aristotle’s core point was a simple observation about the transition from elementary learning to systematic inquiry in education: the latter is made possible by building on the former as a foundation, even though the former was hard won through earlier learning. The observation applies before education: vast learning in infancy provides a foundation for a child’s earliest attempts to think through questions (e.g., ‘Why is the sky blue?) and demand answers. This simple observation underscores the need for a distinction between *foundations of knowledge* and *foundations of inquiry*, and a related distinction between *proper conclusions of inquiry* and *proper derivation through learning and remembering* (what I’ve called ‘(re)learning’). Plausibly, these distinctions are orthogonal, as the following table of possibilities suggests (…examples to follow):

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Foundation of Inquiry** | **Proper Conclusion of Inquiry** |
| **Foundation of Knowledge** | (1) Possible though uncommon | (2) Possible and common in advanced inquiry |
| **(Re)learned Knowledge** | (3) Possible and common in ordinary life | (4) Possible and common in advanced inquiry |

I will call case (1) a case of a *Euclidean Foundation*, because it represents an aspiration reminiscent of ancient Greek mathematical methodology—i.e., finding first principles that are elementary intuitions. Euclidean foundations are foundations for a form of knowledge that is a special case of (4)—namely, *Euclidean Conclusions* which are demonstrated from elementary intuitions. Cases (3) and (2) I will call *Aristotelian Foundations* and *Conclusions* respectively, since they are inspired by Aristotle’s thought that one can acceptably start with common learning and then seek to systematically understand and make sense of what one already knew (for Aristotle, this is what one had *gnosis* of from early years).

IKI only appears implausible if we conflate Aristotelian and Euclidean epistemic structure. Aristotle reasonably thought it was obviousthat inferential knowledge can be a foundation for inquiry. It was sufficiently obvious to him that it is plausibly presupposed in the first line of *Posterior Analytics*: ‘All teaching and intellectual learning come about from already existing knowledge’ (Book 1, Section 1). Since the already existing knowledge on which inquiry (‘intellectual learning’) draws is often more high-level than what was learned in infancy, inquiry often rests on a foundation of inferential knowledge. After all, for inquiry to be possible, we must begin somewhere, and there seem to be no *general* restrictions on the content of this knowledge. All that is required in general is that it is something we *already knew* thanks to earlier learning, though specific domains of inquiry (e.g., Euclidean geometry) impose further restrictions. If so, it seems that at least in principle, *any* inferential knowledge could be a proper foundation for *some* inquiry.

With these points in mind, the versions of IKI and Wodehouse’s Thesis seemingly implied by presentationalism can both be expressed more clearly as follows:

**IKI**\*: Any piece of inferential knowledge can be an Aristotelian foundation for a justified conclusion in some proper inquiry.

**Wodehouse’s Thesis\*:** All knowledge is equally capable of being an Aristotelian foundation relative to some proper inquiry.

These claims are far from obviously false. They are plausible in light of Aristotle’s points about inquiry. If all that is required for proper ordinary inquiry to be resolved is that one take up a question and answer it knowledgeably, these claims seem clearly true. Consider everyday cases where a fact one learned has left working memory but not long-term memory, one temporarily forgets whether one knows that p, and one has a mental episode of the form, ‘Wait—*p*? Oh, yes, of course, p.’ Provided that one can manage to recall that p, one can terminate the inquiry and justifiably affirm that p by recalling that p in this way, where p might be something one learned earlier by inference, testimony, perception, or other sources. To be sure, if one enters a specialized domain of inquiry, this kind of resolution may become unacceptable. But for everyday inquiry, it is not only acceptable but necessary: otherwise one will lose most knowledge merely by dint of limited working memory.

Let’s take stock. The defender of presentationalism about ways of knowing can without absurdity accept that presentations provide ‘immediate justification’ in the following sense:

*Immediate Justification*: Immediate justification for p is justification for affirmatively answering <p?> *just* on the grounds that it is now clear to one that p.

Presentationalism does imply that any way of (re)learning, including inferential learning, can make it clear to one that p, since it implies that all ways of (re)learning are forms of presentation, and if one is presented with the fact that p, it is clear to one that p. This is a kind of immediate justification, but it is a kind that is consistent with that justification’s being provided by inferential knowledge. Presentationalism does *not* imply, however, that any way of (re)learning, including inferential learning, can provide one with *non-inferential knowledge*, or with justification that is ‘non-inferential’ in the strong sense of not presupposing anything learned by inference. For presentations and knowledge from presentation can be inferential, as we’ve seen. The appearance of a contradiction here is resolved by distinguishing between Aristotelian and Euclidean epistemic structure.

This response does leave us with the question of how to understand cases in which one is rationally required by the structure of some special inquiry to provide independent reasons for believing p, but in which one is presented with the fact that p. Ordinary cases in which one reminds oneself of the fact that p by raising the question of whether p aren’t like this: one has a *prima facie* entitlement to remind oneself of what one knows without having to provide independent reasons. But there are many other cases in which this procedure may appear disallowed. Such cases can, to make a second use of an earlier point, be understood in the way Pryor (2005: 366) understood Moore’s argument: namely, as cases in which one does possess sufficient *justification* to believe p, but in which one is *temporarily obstructed* from exploiting this justification on grounds of coherence. If so, one could stillclaim in these cases that one has immediate justification to believe p, but also allow that there is something bad about settling whether p just on the grounds that it is clear that p—i.e., it would be less than fully *coherent* to do so if one takes the question at issue seriously.

**5. Toward a Presentational Account of Knowledge?**

As I’ve stressed, presentationalism about ways of knowing should be distinguished from presentationalism about the nature of knowledge. It is, however, worth considering their relationship a little more by way of a conclusion.

One might think that it isn’t too much of a stretch to get from the view I’ve defended to a relative of a view that Wodehouse (1909, 1910) suggested, on which the knowledge relation is grounded in the converse of the presentation relation. This view is a more reasonable descendant of the first account of knowledge suggested in the history of Western philosophy—viz., Theaetetus’s idea that knowledge is nothing but perception—which Antognazza (2015, 2020) argues is the standardhistorical view.

Wodehouse claimed that to know something is to be presented with it: ‘Knowledge consists of the presentation of reality in consciousness’ (391). This claim is problematic for the same reason why Theaetetus’s idea was—viz., there is merely stored knowledge accompanied by no presentation. Still, one might think Wodehouse’s view survives slight modification. Her view faces no such problem when restricted to a view about occurrent knowledge. So perhaps we could slightly revise her view and say that knowledge is that factive mental state which, when occurrent, is constituted by a presentation of a fact.

If ways of knowing are understood in a certain way, it is tempting to think that my arguments support this Wodehousian view. Although the ways of knowing at issue here are not instrumental means of knowing, they could be *constitutive* means to knowing. If so, my arguments would suggest that there is a single factive mental state that always constitutes token instances of occurrent knowing. The simplest explanation of this fact is just that the type, occurrent knowing, is constituted by the converse of the fact-presentation relation. One only needs a further explanatory inference to get a Wodehousian view. One can insist that the simplest explanation of why occurrent knowing as a type is constituted by the converse of the fact-presentation relation is that knowing as a type is itself constituted by one’s being in a type of mental state that, when occurrent, is constituted by a presentation of a fact.

Hence, it may appear that we can get from presentationalism to a startling account of knowledge, one that suggests that epistemology went off the rails at the very beginning when Plato had Socrates reject Theaetetus’s initial suggestion that knowledge is perception and then diverted attention to a JTB-style account. Is it time to go back to the future?

Maybe, but there are reservations about a presentational analysis of knowing that would need to be addressed. The first concerns the relationship between ways of knowing and states of knowing. Even if ways of knowing are constitutive means to knowledge, one might plausibly think that knowledge is a state entered upon the culmination of a presentational process, where the process is the way of knowing. While processesof coming to know are presentations, it doesn’t follow that the occurrent knowledge yielded upon the culmination of the process is itself a presentation. This is admittedly only a concern for presentational views that see knowledge states as grounded in states that dispose one to enjoy presentations. One might instead give an analysis that just says that knowledge is the culmination of a presentational process. This view, however, raises other worries.

Firstly, the reply to the objection above from innate knowledge crucially granted that some knowledge is not the culmination of any relevant *way of knowing*, but just the product of developmental acquisition. The defender of presentationalism about the nature of knowledge would need some other way to address these cases, since it is far from obvious why all innate knowledge must generate a presentation when occurrent.

Secondly, even if one agrees that knowledge = the culmination of a presentational process, one might doubt that this is the end of the story as far as the analysis of knowledge is concerned. One might think that it is only a suggestive mezzanine that points in the direction of an analysis of some other kind—e.g., an informational account of Evans (1982)’s sort. This is a challenge to Antognazza (2020)’s project if understood as an attempt to reorient epistemology away from 20th century paradigms.

A final group of challenges concerns the apparent irrelevance of environmental luck to successful presentation: one might, after all, think that one is presented with the fact that some structure is a barn in fake barn country, but one doesn’t know. Here, however, there are several ways out. One is to argue, *a la* Williamson (2000), that while one is presented with *a barn*, one is not presented with *the fact* that the structure is a barn, a move that could be strengthened if one followed Littlejohn (2014)’s suggestion that one lacks the relevant recognitional ability here. The other is to follow Sosa (2007) and allow that one has animal knowledge here.

I suspect that most of these challenges to a presentational account of knowledge can be addressed. But I would expect addressing them to require a particular flavor of theory about presentations—one that might well clash with the spirit of the account Antognazza touts. It might then be better to think of a presentational account as a *paradigm* for analysis, which could lead to new analyses inspired by the history of philosophy or wholesale resurrections of historical analyses, but which also could lead merely to confirmation of 20th or 21st century analyses.

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1. For exemplary endorsements of this idea, see Audi (2011: 150), who writes that ‘perception, memory, consciousness, and reason are our primary individual sources of knowledge’ while ‘testimony from others is our primary social source’, as well as Feldman (2002: 3-4), who offers a list including perception, memory, testimony, introspection, reasoning, and rational insight as ‘[o]ur list of sources of knowledge’. Feldman (2002: 4) also explicitly takes acceptance of such a list to represent the ‘Standard View’ about how we know. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Note that a process’s *culminating* in X is different from its *producing* X: in the former case, X is a stage in the process rather than part of the aftermath of the process. Hence ways of knowing in the relevant sense are not *instrumental* means to knowledge. As French (2014) notes, there are several worthwhile uses of ‘ways of knowing’: this talk can also refer to instrumental means of knowing, and to states rather than processes. As I will explain below (and have already hinted), it seems reasonable to combine access monism about ways of knowing in the sense at issue here with pluralism about ways of knowing in a wider sense. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. At least in the central factive sense of ‘learning’—viz., what Scheffler (1965) called the ‘discovery’ rather than the (non-factive) ‘tutorial’ sense; for discussion of the epistemology of learning, including non-factive learning, see Sylvan (ms). I will henceforth assume that learning and knowing are success notions. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Note that the relevant verbs comprise a proper subset of factive verbs, including only ones that correspond to a source, unlike ‘know’; note also that not just verbs but some adjective phrases (e.g., ‘am visually aware’) could also be used. Silva (2023) calls the relevant bits of language *modal* rather than *amodal factives*, though note that this ‘modal’/’amodal’ contrast is more general than the one used in connection with perception (where ‘modal’ is linked to a *sense modality*). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This use of ‘presentationalism’ to refer to a monist view about ways of knowingshould be contrasted with its use in Sylvan (2025) to refer to a view about the nature of knowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Gupta (1995: 40), as well as Chatterjee (1939: 42-43) and Bhatt (1962: 71-72)’s early presentations in English of Sanskrit epistemology. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. To take a couple of examples from independent traditions, consider how Brentano (1973) took presentation to be the most basic mental phenomenon (see Kriegel (forthcoming)) and how the Nyāya school of Sanskrit epistemology took something worth translating as ‘presentation’ (*anubhava*) as a basic form of awareness and the only form that can constitute knowledge (see Chatterjee (1939/2008)). Kant’s bifurcation of representations into ‘intuitions’ and concepts and insistence on the necessity of intuition for knowledge (*erkenntnis*) could also be understood as an illustration—'presentation’ seems a more helpful translation than ‘intuition’. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For discussion of this earmark, see Stoljar (2019). He also uses it to defineaccess consciousness as *poise grounded in attention*, but I use it only to fix reference on access consciousness, which could reasonably be treated as primitive in the metaphysics of mind, and more fundamental than attention. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See Burge (1997), Smithies (2019), and Lennon (2023, forthcoming) for arguments against the view that full-blown zombies enjoy access consciousness. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. I don’t find talk of cognitive phenomenology very helpful, however: it suggests a stronger analogy between sensory and cognitive experience than I think is plausible. So, unlike Chudnoff and Bengson, I will not put much emphasis on the *phenomenal character* of presentations. But I take this to be compatible with holding that knowledge-yielding presentations must occur in (cognitive) experience. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Wodehouse was a Meinongian and an idealist. The Austrian influence on Wodehouse (1909; 1910) is clear. Her idealism is not obvious from her (1909) and (1910), which sound realist, but her (1908) reveals that she combines empirical realism with objective idealism. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Evans (1982) would have agreed: his informational epistemology was different from Dretske (1981)’s, which was plausibly compatible with total zombie epistemology. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting discussion of the interaction between the access monism defended here and Silva’s work on awareness and the substructure of knowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Seemings* may seem to provide an alternative, but ‘seems’ talk is sufficiently flexible that a restriction to relevantly forceful seemings would be needed. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For discussion of reconstruction in memory, see Michaelian (2011; 2016) and Salvaggio (2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For discussion of the epistemology of amodal completion, see Helton and Nanay (2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Sperber (1997), Sperber et al. (2010), and Mercier and Sperber (2009) lay the foundations for this strategy. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. There is a different take on these cases which is reminiscent of social externalist models of mental content, which is to say that you do come to know the scientific fact under a deferential mode of presentation (cf. Recanati (1997)). But pace Recanati (2001)’s later attempt to contrast deferential and perceptual modes of presentation, it seems to me that if it is plausible to claim that are deferential modes of presentation, it will also be plausible to think that some facts known by secondary perception are known under such modes of presentation. If so, we cannot infer that these testimonial cases are not genuine cases of presentational knowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For related points about innate knowledge, see Mackie (1970: 247-248). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Bernecker and Grundmann (2019)’s interesting examples of knowing from forgetting also fall into this category if understood as described at the end of their paper—viz., as involving a process of *levelling* that consists in ‘the loss of details, the condensation of elements, and the general simplification of information encoded in memory’ (538). Rather than treating this as a novel case of memory knowledge without presentation, it is more plausible to treat it as knowledge by levelling, where levelling is epistemologically on a par with developmental knowledge acquisition. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See Sosa (1980) for an exploration of formal foundationalism about justification, which provides the template for the recursive account of ways of knowing I am about to sketch. Sosa’s use of the problem of scatter for Chisholm’s pluralism about epistemic principles and his argument on this basis for formal foundationalism is structurally similar to my strategy for defending presentationalism. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. This view has been resurrected by Kriegel (2024). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. For a more involved discussion of this objection and its problematic implications for presentationalism about the *nature of knowledge* rather than about *ways of knowing*, see Sylvan (2025). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See esp. Goldman (2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See esp. Zuppolini (2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)