

## Consciousness and Knowledge

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### Abstract

This chapter focuses on the relationship between consciousness and knowledge, and in particular on the role perceptual consciousness might play in justifying beliefs about the external world. We outline a version of phenomenal dogmatism according to which perceptual experiences immediately, *prima facie* justify certain select parts of their content, and do so in virtue of their having a distinctive phenomenology with respect to those contents. Along the way we take up various issues in connection with this core theme, including the possibility of immediate justification, the dispute between representational and relational views of perception, the epistemic significance of cognitive penetration, the question of whether perceptual experiences are composed of more basic sensations and seemings, and questions about the existence and epistemic significance of high-level content. In a concluding section we briefly consider how some of the topics pursued here might generalize beyond perception.

**Keywords:** evidence-insensitivity; high-level content; immediate justification; perceptual experience; presentational phenomenology; phenomenal conservatism; dogmatism; seemings; sensations; cognitive penetration

### Introduction

You wonder whether it is raining. So you look out the window, see it raining, and thereby come to know that it is indeed raining. When you see it is raining, you have a perceptual experience. This is a conscious mental state with a distinctive phenomenology. When you come to know that it is indeed raining, you form a new belief about your immediate environment. This is a cognitive mental state for which you have adequate justification. If one is interested in the relationship between consciousness and knowledge, then a good starting point for inquiry is to consider the relationship between perceptual experiences and justified beliefs. That is what we will do here. We will organize this chapter around five questions:

1. Does having a perceptual experience make one have justification for any beliefs?
2. Does having a perceptual experience make one have justification for any beliefs about the external world?
3. Does having a perceptual experience make one have justification for any beliefs about the external world in virtue of its phenomenology?

4. Is perceptual experience unified?
5. What does perceptual experience reveal?

The strongest relationship between consciousness and knowledge that we might reasonably expect to hold is that being conscious in a certain way itself constitutes the basis we have for some of our knowledge about the world. The first three questions and the sections dedicated to them lead up to the view that this relationship does indeed hold in the case of perceptual consciousness and our knowledge about our immediate environment. The second two questions and the sections dedicated to them explore the details of this relationship further, taking up issues about the structure and content of perceptual experience and their bearing on perceptual justification. In the concluding section we indicate how some of the topics pursued in this essay might generalize beyond perception.

### **1. Does having a perceptual experience make one have justification for a belief?**

It is worth commenting on the relevant epistemic property. It is one thing to know that it is raining, another thing to have a justified belief that it is raining, and yet a third thing to have justification for believing that it is raining. To have justification for believing that it is raining is to be such that it is reasonable, or epistemically appropriate, for you to believe that it is raining. It does not imply that you do actually believe that it is raining.

If you have a justified belief that it is raining, then you do believe that it is raining and this belief is based on whatever it is that constitutes your justification for believing that it is raining. Suppose your perceptual experience as of rain makes you have justification for believing that it is raining and your belief that it is raining is formed by taking your perceptual experience at face value, then your belief that it is raining is a justified belief that it is raining.

To know that it is raining requires more than having a justified belief that it is raining. The project of saying what more remains steeped in controversy, but by most accounts the belief at least needs to be true. Suppose your perceptual experience as of rain is a result of a hoax: someone is on your roof spraying water down so as to make it look as if it is raining to anyone looking out the window. Provided that you have no reason to be suspicious, arguably you still have a justified belief that it is raining, but in this case you do not know that it is raining.

Perceptual experiences can be the result of hoaxes and need not be taken at face value. So if they make one have an epistemic property, the relevant epistemic property is having justification for a belief. This should become clearer when we say more about the relevant making relation. What we have in mind is a constitutive, not a causal relation. Here is an illustrative example: I might say, "the fact that 7 is only divisible by 1 and itself makes it prime." The fact that 7 is only divisible by 1 and itself does not cause 7 to be prime. Rather, it constitutes 7's primality. Similarly, when we ask whether having a perceptual experience makes one have justification for a belief we are asking whether having a perceptual experience constitutes one's having justification for a belief. Is the perceptual experience itself a justifier?

If the answer to our question is positive, then there is immediate justification. If you have justification for believing  $p$  and you do so in part because you have justification for believing

other propositions  $q$ ,  $r$ ,  $s$ , etc, then your justification for believing  $p$  is mediate--it is mediated by your justification for believing  $q$ ,  $r$ ,  $s$ , etc. If you have justification for believing  $p$  and you do so independently of justification you have for believing other propositions  $q$ ,  $r$ ,  $s$ , etc, then your justification for believing  $p$  is immediate. Now suppose having a perceptual experience makes you have justification for believing  $p$ . Your perceptual experience itself constitutes your justification for believing  $p$ , so this is justification you have independently of justification you have for believing other propositions  $q$ ,  $r$ ,  $s$ , etc. Hence it is immediate justification.

An important qualification is here in order. Imagine you are in the circumstances described above, looking out your window and having a perceptual experience as of rain because of a hoax, but this time you have received information that some such hoax is in the works. In this case you shouldn't believe that it is raining. Having the perceptual experience no longer makes you have justification for believing that it will rain. This observation might raise a worry: given that your perceptual experience justifies you in believing that it is raining only if you do not have information that it is likely the result of a hoax, is the justification it makes you have absent this information really immediate? The answer is positive, and the correct response to the observation is to draw a distinction between prima facie and all things considered justification.

Prima facie justification can be defeated or undermined. Consider three cases. You have a perceptual experience as of rain; you have a perceptual experience as of rain after acquiring information that it is likely the result of a hoax; you have a perceptual experience as of rain after listening to a weather report that says it will not rain. In all three cases you have prima facie justification for believing it is raining. In the second case this prima facie justification is undermined. It no longer weighs in favor of believing that it is raining. In the third case this prima facie justification is, or at least might be, defeated. It weighs in favor of believing that it is raining, but it has to be balanced against the weather report. What you have all things considered justification for believing depends on the result of this balancing.

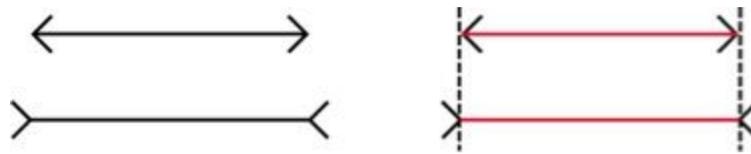
Taking the distinction between prima facie and all things considered justification into account, then, the thesis under consideration is this: having a perceptual experience makes one have prima facie justification for a belief. The main opposition to this thesis comes from philosophers who deny that there is any immediate justification, and in particular any immediate justification deriving from experience (Sellars 1956, Bonjour 1978, Davidson 1986). One of the most influential lines of reasoning against immediate justification deriving from experience is known as "The Sellarsian Dilemma," after Wilfrid Sellars (Sellars 1956, Bonjour 1978). The basic line of reasoning goes like this:

- (1) Either perceptual experiences are belief-like in that they represent the world as being a certain way, or they are not.
- (2) If perceptual experiences are belief-like, then they do not immediately justify beliefs, since belief-like states only justify beliefs by inferential transmission of justification one has for them to other beliefs.
- (3) If experiences are not belief-like, then they do not immediately justify beliefs, since the only relations non-belief-like states can stand in to beliefs are causal relations, not inferential relations.

(4) So perceptual experiences do not immediately justify beliefs.

The argument is no longer seen as compelling. Its two key premises, (2) and (3), have been subject to sustained criticism. With respect to (2), many philosophers now believe that perceptual experiences are belief-like in representing the world as being a certain way, but are not belief-like in that they are not the sorts of mental states for which one can have justification.<sup>1</sup>

One reason experiences are thought not to be the sorts of mental states for which one can have justification is that unlike beliefs, experiences are evidence-insensitive: they endure even when we are faced with strong evidence that they are inaccurate. Consider the Müller-Lyer illusion (**Fig. 1**).



**Figure 1 - The Müller-Lyer Illusion.** Even when you learn that the line segments on the left have the same length, they continue to appear as if they have different length.

In the Müller-Lyer illusion the line segments have exactly the same length but because of the fish hooks, they appear as if they have different lengths. This illusion persists even when you measure the line segments and come to the conclusion that they have the same length. Because the experience of the line segment persists despite strong evidence against its accuracy, it is evidence-insensitive. Beliefs are not evidence-insensitive in this way. If you believe it's raining but walk outside only to find that there is not a single cloud in the sky, you don't hold onto your belief but without it and form the belief that it is not raining.

With respect to (3), some philosophers—including Laurence Bonjour, a former major proponent of the Sellarsian Dilemma—now believe that there are justifying relations other than inferential relations (Bonjour 1999). Having a headache, for example, might justify you in believing that you have a headache, though, on the face of it, it does not do so in virtue of providing you with a basis from which you can infer that you have a headache.

## **2. Does having a perceptual experience make one have justification for a belief about the external world?**

Suppose having a perceptual experience makes one have justification for a belief. This leaves open what the belief is about. In the previous section we defaulted to the assumption that in the cases under consideration the belief is about a bit of the external world, namely the local weather. But there is disagreement among those philosophers who think that having a perceptual experience makes one have justification for a belief.

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<sup>1</sup> See, however, Byrne (2009) and Gluer (2009). They both defend the view that experiences are beliefs.

Some philosophers--call them Cartesians--think that if a perceptual experience itself justifies a belief, then that belief must be about the character of that perceptual experience (Bonjour 1999). It would be a belief about the internal world. This view is often combined with the view that beliefs about the external world are justified by inferences from such beliefs about the internal world. The combined view is known as classical foundationalism.

Other philosophers think that if a perceptual experience itself justifies a belief, then that belief might be about the ostensible bit of reality presented in the experience. It would be a belief about the external world--the apparently seen, heard, felt, etc. portion of one's immediate environment. This view is associated with two labels, made prominent by two turn of the century formulations (Pryor, 2000, 2005; Huemer, 2001):

*Dogmatism*: whenever you have a perceptual experience as of  $p$ , you thereby have immediate prima facie justification for believing  $p$ .

*Phenomenal Conservatism*: if it seems to you as if  $p$ , then you thereby have at least prima facie justification for believing that  $p$

Three quick observations about phenomenal conservatism in relation to dogmatism. First, as originally formulated, it is about all seemings, not just perceptual seemings. Second, some philosophers think that even perceptual seemings are distinct mental states from perceptual experiences (Tucker 2010; Bengson, et al 2011; Cullison 2013; Lyons 2015; Conee 2013; Bergmann 2013; Reiland 2015b; Reiland 2015b). We explore this issue in section 4. Third, the "phenomenal" in the label suggests a commitment about what feature of seemings makes them justifiers--it is their phenomenology. We explore this issue in section 3.

Typically, when one forms a belief on the basis of a perceptual experience, it is a belief about the external world, not the internal world, and such beliefs are, at least by ordinary standards, paradigm cases of justified beliefs. On the face of it, the Cartesian view is a departure from common sense. One traditional motivation for this departure is based on the argument from illusion (Ayer 1963: 3-11).

Compare veridically perceiving a moving texture with having an illusory perception as of a moving texture due to the waterfall illusion, also known as the motion aftereffect. This is an illusion that a stationary object is moving induced by perceptual adaptation to a previously viewed moving stimulus. The argument from illusion rests on three key ideas:

*Indiscernibility*: A veridical perception of a quality and an illusory perception as of that quality are introspectively indiscernible.

*Common Kind*: If two experiences are introspectively indiscernible, then they are constituted in the same way.

*Relationalism*: Experiences are constituted by awareness relations to objects instantiating the qualities that appear in them.

Taking the example of moving texture as representative, the argument from illusion can be rendered as follows:

- (1) By Relationalism, the illusory perception of a moving texture is constituted by awareness relations to objects instantiating motion.
- (2) In the illusory perception case, there are no external world objects instantiating motion.
- (3) So the illusory perception as of a moving texture is constituted by awareness relations to internal world objects, not external world objects.
- (4) By Indiscernibility, veridically perceiving a moving texture and having an illusory perception as of a moving texture are introspectively indiscernible.
- (5) By Common Kind, they are constituted in the same way.
- (6) So the veridical perception of a moving texture is also constituted by awareness relations to internal world objects, not external world objects.

Suppose one accepts the conclusion, (6). Then one might reason further: Since both veridical and illusory perceptions are constituted by awareness relations to internal world objects, perceptual experiences in general are constituted by awareness relations to internal world objects. And if perceptual experiences in general are constituted by awareness relations to internal world objects, not external world objects, having such experiences can at most justify beliefs about the internal world, not the external world. Justification for beliefs about the external world existence of a moving texture, say, would depend on the perceptual experience plus some additional reason to think that there is an external world object corresponding to the internal world object it presents. Hence Cartesianism.

There are various ways one can resist this argument. In the contemporary literature, the most popular way of rejecting the argument has been to reject relationalism, viz. the claim that perception is *constituted* by awareness relations to objects instantiating the qualities that appear in them (Tye, 1995; Dretske, 1995; Chalmers, 2004; Siegel, 2010; Pautz 2010, Schellenberg, 2014). One can reject relationalism, for instance, by arguing that perception is a relation to a proposition, or content, that represents the world in certain ways. Alternatively, one can reject the Common Kind assumption and argue that only veridical cases are cases of genuine perception, whereas illusory cases are cases of some other kind of mental state, such as a believing or being inclined to believe. This view is also known as disjunctivism (Hinton, 1967; Snowdon, 1980-1; Martin, 2002; Fish, 2009; Brewer, 2011).

One argument for thinking that experience is representational rather than relational turns on the assumption that statements about how things perceptually seem to a person are statements about that person's perceptual experiences (Chudnoff & Didomenico, 2015). We will return to this assumption in the next section of the paper. Given this assumption, the argument runs as follows (Brogaard, manus. For an argument that does not rely on this assumption see Brogaard, 2015):

- (1) 'Perceptually seem' is a hyperintensional mental state operator.
- (2) Hyperintensional mental state operators operate on representational content.
- (3) So, 'perceptually seem' operates on representational content.

- (4) If 'perceptually seem' operates on representational content, then the states that usages of it refer to are representational states.
- (5) So, perceptual experiences are representational states.

Here 'perceptually seem' is an instance of the kinds of 'seems' locutions that occur in sentences such as 'It seems to John that the rock is moving' and 'it seems to Mary that the table is red'. When 'seems' occurs in sentences like these, it is hyperintensional. Substituting one expression for a necessarily equivalent expression within its scope can yield a change in truth-value. For example, even though 'Hesperus is the the brightest object in the evening sky' and 'Phosphorus is the brightest object in the evening sky' are necessarily equivalent, 'it seems to Mary that Hesperus is the brightest object in the evening sky' may be true, while 'it seems to Mary that Phosphorus is the brightest object in the evening sky' may be false. Since Mary cannot stand in a direct relation to Hesperus (i.e., Venus) without standing in the same relation to Phosphorus (i.e., Venus), it follows that the states that such seemings reports refer to cannot be direct relations to external objects. If not that, then the most likely alternative is that such states are relations to representational contents. Given the assumption that these states just are perceptual experiences, it follows that perceptual experiences are relations to representational contents, not relations to objects instantiating the qualities that appear in them.

### **3. Does having a perceptual experience make one have justification for a belief about the external world in virtue of its phenomenology?**

According to dogmatism *whenever* you have a perceptual experience as of  $p$ , you thereby have immediate prima facie justification for believing  $p$ . For now let us suppose a weaker thesis is true, namely the thesis that *sometimes* when you have a perceptual experience as of  $p$ , you thereby have immediate prima facie justification for believing  $p$ . A natural question to ask is: if your perceptual experience as of  $p$  immediately prima facie justifies you in believing  $p$ , then in virtue of what does it do so? Here are a few possible answers:

Factivism: if your perceptual experience as of  $p$  immediately prima facie justifies you in believing  $p$ , then it does so in virtue of being a factive mental state (Williamson, 2000; McDowell, 2011).

Reliabilism: if your perceptual experience as of  $p$  immediately prima facie justifies you in believing  $p$ , then it does so in virtue of its reliability (Goldman, 2009; Lyons 2009).

Functionalism: if your perceptual experience as of  $p$  immediately prima facie justifies you in believing  $p$ , then it does so in virtue of its functional role (Brogaard, 2016).

None of these answers accords a special role to perceptual consciousness as such. A fourth possible answer does:

*Phenomenalism*: if your perceptual experience as of  $p$  immediately prima facie justifies you in believing  $p$ , then it does so in virtue of its phenomenology.

According to phenomenalism there is an explanatory link between the fact that perceptual experience is a distinctive form of consciousness and the fact that perceptual experience is a source of justification: it is a source of justification *because* it is the distinctive form of consciousness that it is (cf. Pryor, 2000; Huemer, 2001; Smithies, 2014).

One motivation for phenomenalism is intuitive. Consider what it is like to have a perceptual experience as of rain, say. The rain seems to be there right before you. Supposing you have no independent evidence that it is not raining and no reason to think your perceptual experience is faulty, what is the reasonable attitude to take toward the claim that it is raining? You might believe it, disbelieve it, or suspend judgment. Disbelieving is irrational and suspending judgment is overly cautious. Believing is the reasonable attitude. If you go out and don't want to get wet you should take an umbrella. In thinking through this scenario and what the reasonable attitude is all we did was focus on the fact that in it you have a perceptual experience with a certain phenomenology and no defeaters. We did not have to bring in the facts about your environment, the track record of your perceptual capacity, or the causal tendencies of your experience. The phenomenology alone seems to suffice. Hence there is some intuitive motivation for phenomenalism.

A related motivation comes from reflection on two classic thought experiments targeting reliabilism.

*Norman the Clairvoyant* (Bonjour, 1980): Norman is a clairvoyant with respect to the whereabouts of the president. He has no normal evidence for or against the existence of this power. One day his clairvoyance gives him the (correct) impression that the president is in New York. He has no normal evidence for or against the claim that the president is in New York. Does Norman have justification for believing that the president is in New York?

*New Evil Demon* (Cohen, 1984): Descartes considered the skeptical hypothesis that all of our experiences are the result of the manipulations of an evil deceiver. His aim was to show that experiences do not rule out the possibility of error. But suppose, absent any evidence that it is so, the hypothesis turns out to be true and consider your perceptual experience as of rain. It turns out to be non-veridical, but does it still justify you in believing that it is raining?

The typical response to Norman the Clairvoyant is to say that no, he does not have justification. Reliability is not sufficient. The typical response to New Evil Demon is to say that yes, the perceptual experience still justifies believing that it is raining. Reliability is not necessary. These judgments count against factivism and functionalism as well. That they count against the former is obvious. That they count against the latter can be seen by imagining the results of Norman's clairvoyance to have the relevant functional role, and the experience produced by the demon to lack the relevant functional role. Phenomenalism explains both judgments. Norman's impression

lacks the kind of presentational phenomenology associated with perceptual experience, and the demon's victim's experience possesses just this kind of phenomenology. Variants on reliabilism, factivism, and functionalism might be designed to *accommodate* the judgments, but phenomenalism seems to provide the simplest, most natural *explanation* of them. So reflection on these cases supports phenomenalism.

A prominent, recent challenge to phenomenalism derives from reflection on the cognitive penetrability of experience. One argument along these lines is Markie's gold prospector argument. It runs as follows:

Suppose that we are prospecting for gold. You have learned to identify a gold nugget on sight but I have no such knowledge. As the water washes out of my pan, we both look at a pebble, which is in fact a gold nugget. My desire to discover gold makes it seem to me as if the pebble is gold; your learned identification skills make it seem that way to you. According to [phenomenalism], the belief that it is gold has *prima facie* justification for both of us. Yet, certainly, my wishful thinking should not gain my perceptual belief the same positive epistemic status of defeasible justification as your learned identification skills. (Markie, 2005: 356-357)

The problem here is that because it seems to both the expert and the novice that the pebble is gold, phenomenalism entails that they both have *prima facie* justification for believing that it is gold. Since the novice possesses no defeater that he has access to, and the novice's belief is based on his experience, the expert and the novice are equally justified in believing that the pebble is gold. This might seem implausible, as the novice's belief is based on wishful thinking and wishful thinking is not a source of justification. So, phenomenalism would seem to make the wrong prediction in this case.

Susanna Siegel (2011) has presented a similar argument. Jill thinks Jack is angry at him. Her belief is unjustified. However, the next day when she encounters Jack, her belief that Jack is angry at her makes her see Jack's neutral facial expression as an angry face. Phenomenalism entails that Jill's experience as of Jack's face expressing anger *prima facie* justifies her in believing that Jack is angry. Again, this might seem implausible, as Jill's initially unjustified belief causes itself to become justified by its effect on Jill's experience. This looks like circular reasoning, and circular reasoning is not a source of justification. So, phenomenalism would seem to make the wrong prediction in this case too.

Both cases are driven by a form of cognitive penetration (for more on which see e.g. Macpherson, 2012). In the first case, wishful thinking makes Peter see the nugget as gold by changing his experience, and his experience then has the phenomenology phenomenalists take to be sufficient to *prima facie* justify his belief that the nugget is gold. In the second case, Jill's unjustified belief that Jack is angry at her penetrates and thereby changes her perception of his face. Her perception now has the phenomenology phenomenalists take to be sufficient to *prima facie* justify her belief that Jack is angry at her.

One possible reply here would be to argue against the existence of cognitive penetration. This move is a nonstarter. Although some thinkers have argued that there are early

visual processes that are not cognitively penetrable (Fodor, 1983; Pylyshyn, 1999), this view does not rule out the possibility that wishful thinking and dogmatic belief might alter the contents of perceptual experience via processes that occur after early visual processes. Further, for philosophical purposes the mere possibility of, not the actual existence of, cognitive penetration might suffice.

Another more plausible line of response is to question the verdicts about the cases. Markie thinks that the novice gold prospector lacks justification because desires do not justify beliefs. Siegel thinks that Jill lacks justification because beliefs do not justify themselves. But Markie's novice gold prospector does not base his belief that he has found gold on his desire; he bases it on his experience. And Jill does not base her belief that Jack is angry on that very belief; she bases it on her experience. Why not think that this makes all the difference between lacking justification and having justification? The main reason seems to be the idea that taking experiences at face value is on par with reasoning from beliefs or other mental states. If you desire that *p*, take this to be a reason to think that *p*, and so believe *p*, then your belief that *p* is not justified. If you believe that *p* without justification, take this belief to be a reason to think that *p*, and so reaffirm the belief that *p*, then your belief that *p* is no more justified than it was initially. But the phenomenalist is likely to deny that taking experiences at face value is on par with reasoning from beliefs or other mental states. Reasoning transmits epistemic statuses. Experiences generate epistemic statuses.

Siegel has argued that experiences also transmit epistemic statuses (Siegel, 2013). She focuses on reasoning from beliefs and considers the question: what distinguishes beliefs and experiences such that reasoning from a belief transmits epistemic status and taking an experience at face value does not? She argues that there are no features that beliefs have and experiences lack that might be the features in virtue of which reasoning from a belief transmits epistemic statuses and taking an experience at face value does not. Candidates include: being assessable for rationality, being the result of explicit reasoning, being evidence sensitive. We will not review the details of her discussion. Here we would like to make an observation about the form of her overall argument. It goes like this:

- (1) Whatever features beliefs have in virtue of which reasoning from them transmits epistemic statuses experiences also have.
- (2) So taking an experience at face value also transmits epistemic statuses.

This form of argument, however, is invalid. Consider the property of being a U.S. citizen. There are various features a person might have in virtue of possessing which he or she counts as a U.S. citizen. For example, there is being born in the U.S. or successfully applying for citizenship. Suppose another person has all the same features. It doesn't follow that that person is also a U.S. citizen. For that person might have all those same features *plus some additional features* that makes him or her not a U.S. citizen. For example, there is being convicted of treason. So it is open to the phenomenalist to argue that even if experiences have whatever features beliefs have in virtue of which reasoning from them transmits epistemic statuses, taking them at face value does not transmit epistemic statuses because experiences have special additional

features. And if one is attracted to phenomenalism then the candidate additional features are obvious: those that constitute the distinctive phenomenology of experience.

#### 4. Is Perceptual Experience Unified?

In this section and the next we will consider the detailed elaboration of phenomenal conservatism and phenomenalist versions of dogmatism. Recently a number of writers on these views have promoted the idea that perceptual experience is disunified (Bengson et al 2011, Bengson 2015, Bergmann, 2013; Brogaard 2013; Conee, 2013; Cullison, 2013; Lyons, 2005; 2015; Markie, 2013; Reiland, 2015b; Tooley, 2013; Tucker, 2010). They distinguish between sensations and seemings and take perceptual experiences to be composed of these two distinct states. That is, they endorse the following:

*Composition View:* for you to have a perceptual experience as of  $p$  is for you to have a sensation and for it to seem to you that  $p$  and for these to be suitably related.

The greatest variation among proponents of this view is in how they conceive of sensations. Sensations might be states with the same kind of content as seemings whatever that is, or states with nonconceptual content as opposed to the conceptual content of seemings, or states lacking content altogether. We set this issue aside here.

A good way to get a grip on the Composition View is to consider how it treats perceptual experiences in different sensory modalities. In what does the contrast between seeing a texture and feeling the same texture consist? Proponents of the Composition View tend to think of the difference along the following lines. For you to see a T-ish texture is (i) for you to have a *visual* sensation and (ii) for it to seem to you that there is something T-ish textured and (iii) for these states to be suitably related. For you to *feel* a T-ish texture is (i) for you to have a *tactile* sensation and (ii) for it to seem to you that there is something T-ish textured and (iii) for these states to be suitably related. The visual sensation and the tactile sensation are different kinds of mental state. But the seemings are the same kind of mental state. Seemings, on this view, are amodal states.<sup>2</sup>

The Composition View contrasts with what we might call the Identity View:

*Identity View:* having a perceptual experience as of  $p$  is the same as having a sensation as of  $p$ , which is the same as its perceptually seeming to you that  $p$ .

On this view, seeing a T-ish texture and feeling a T-ish texture are two distinct ways for it to seem to you that there is a T-ish texture. So, on this view seemings are modality-specific; there is no mental state of its seeming to you that there is a T-ish texture that can be factored out as a

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<sup>2</sup> Given that composition theorists think that the recognition of kinds and functions occur at the level of seemings, not sensations, there is a prima facie worry for the view deriving from the fact that agnosias are modality specific. We are not aware of anyone addressing this worry in the literature.

common component between seeing a T-ish texture and feeling a T-ish texture. The visual seeming and the tactile seeming are two distinct mental states.

Suppose the Composition View were true. Then understanding the relationship between perceptual experience and justification would require facing a significant new question. Take the weakened dogmatist thesis that sometimes when you have a perceptual experience as of  $p$ , you thereby have immediate prima facie justification for believing  $p$ . What does the “thereby” refer back to? If the Identity View is true, then the only option is the perceptual experience. If the Composition View is true, then there are three options: the constituent sensation, the constituent seeming, and the composite perceptual experience. All three positions are occupied in the recent literature on phenomenal dogmatism and phenomenal conservatism (for a representative development of each see Conee 2013, Tucker 2010, Reiland 2015b). In our view, all three face potential difficulties, though we will not pursue them here.

Here we would like to consider the motivation for adopting the Composition View in the first place. The main motivation comes from a series of arguments challenging the Identity View. Three basic patterns dominate the literature. (For further critical discussion of these three patterns of argument and additional references to the relevant literature, see Chudnoff & DiDomenico, 2015).

The first is the Speckled Hen (originally introduced for a different purpose by Chisholm, 1942, and appealed to by Tucker, 2010; Brogaard, 2013; Markie, 2013).

*Speckled Hen:* When you see a hen with 48 speckles you have a visual sensation as of 48 speckles. This is why the phenomenology is slightly different from seeing a hen with 47 or 49 speckles. But when you see a hen with 48 speckles, it does not seem to you that there is a hen with 48 speckles. This is why you cannot form a justified belief that there is a 48-speckled hen just by taking your experience at face value. So sensations are different from seemings.

One way to resist the argument is to give an alternative explanation of the phenomenal differences between seeing a hen with 47, 48, or 49 speckles. When you see a hen with 48 speckles, say, you might have a visual experience (= sensation = seeming) as of a hen with a speckle there<sub>1</sub>, there<sub>2</sub>, there<sub>3</sub>, ..., and there<sub>48</sub> without this also being a visual experience as of a hen with 48 speckles. The content of the unitary experience would explain both its phenomenal distinctiveness and the inability to form a justified belief that there is a 48-speckled hen just by taking your experience at face value.

The second argument pattern for the Composition view focuses on differences between expert perceivers and novice perceivers (Bengson, 2015; Brogaard, 2013; Lyons, 2005).

*Expert vs. Novice:* When an expert about 17th century French furniture--or some other natural or artifactual kind--and a novice about 17th century French furniture look at a 17th century French desk, they have visual sensations with the same content. This is why the phenomenology is similar. But while it seems to the expert that there is a 17th century French desk, it does not seem so to the novice. This is why the expert, but not

the novice, can form a justified belief that there is a 17th century French desk just by taking his or her experience at face value. So sensations are different from seemings.

One way to resist the argument is to explain the difference between expert and the novice in terms of overlapping, but distinct contents. The idea is that both the expert and the novice have unitary visual experiences with common contents characterizing shape, color, size, ornamentation, basic level categorization, etc. But only the expert's visual experience also has as part of its content that the table is a 17th century French desk. On this view, the expert but not the novice has an experience with a high-level content (Siegel, 2005). We will return to the distinction between high-level and low-level content in section 5.

Another way to resist the argument is to say that the expert has a perceptual experience that has a richer *low level* content than the perceptual experience of the novice as a result of perceptual learning (Connolly 2014; Arstila, 2015). The expert might, for example, be aware of more details of the table than the novice. This, too, would explain the difference in the phenomenology of the experiences of the expert and the novice as well as the novice's inability to form a justified belief that the table is a 17th century French desk just by taking his experience at face value.

The third argument for the Composition View derives from reflection on cases of blindsight (Tucker, 2010; Brogaard, 2013; Lyons, 2015; Tooley, 2013).

*Blindsight:* If a blind-sighter judges there to be an X shape--or some other visual form--in his or her blind spot, then it is because it seems to him or her that there is an X shape there. The seeming explains the judgment. But a blind-sighter does not have a visual sensation as of an X shape in his or her blind spot. The absence of a sensation explains the reported lack of visual phenomenology in the blind spot. So sensations are different from seemings.

One way to resist this argument is to argue that the seemings in these cases are epistemic (Chisholm, 1957; Jackson, 1977; Brogaard, 2013; Brogaard, 2015). Seemings are epistemic as opposed to phenomenal if they are belief-like mental states that normally are sensitive to counterevidence by not persisting in face of it.<sup>3</sup> Suppose you are enjoying a sunset over Biscayne Bay. If you were told that you were a brain in a vat and that no real sunset is taking place, this would not make your seeming recede or become less clear or less lively. This is because your seeming in this case is phenomenal. Compare this to a case where you have been told that a hurricane will hit Miami. It may seem to you that you ought to evacuate but if you are told that the hurricane has changed its direction and is now hitting New York rather than Miami, it no longer will seem to you that you ought to evacuate. In the latter case, your seeming is epistemic.

When a blindsighter detects the shape of a visual stimulus presented to her in her blind field, she has no distinctly visual awareness of the shape of the stimulus. So when she reports

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<sup>3</sup> Epistemic seemings may be best captured in terms of degrees of belief. For example, if you say 'Premise 1 seems false' (as opposed to, say, 'Premise 1 is false'), you are likely expressing a degree of disbelief in the truth of premise 1.

on the shape of a stimulus presented to her in her blind field, she cannot make use of any visual phenomenology associated with the shape information. Rather, she must infer from her inclination to guess that the stimulus is X-shaped that it is an X shape. Were she to be presented with a defeater, she would no longer have the inclination to state that the stimulus looks X-shaped. Because she doesn't have a seeming that is evidence-insensitive, her seeming that the stimulus looks like an X shape is epistemic. Epistemic seemings are belief-like states and not candidates to be constituents of perceptual experiences. So, the argument doesn't show that sensations are different from seemings of the sort that could be treated as experiential components.

One might worry that the distinction between phenomenal versus epistemic seemings is just reintroducing the distinction between seemings versus sensations. But this is not the case. Given that epistemic seemings are evident sensitive and plausibly thought of in terms of degrees of belief, there is no reason to think that they might be components in a mental state that might count as a perceptual experience as understood by all parties to the present debate.

## **5. What Does Perceptual Experience Reveal?**

So far we have taken a relaxed view about what aspects of the world show up in perception. It is common to distinguish low level properties such as color, shape, and motion from high level properties such as the natural kind property of being rain and the artifactual kind property of being a 17th century French desk. We have been writing as if we have perceptual experience of both low level and high level properties. And we have been writing as if given such perceptual experiences, they prima facie, immediately justify beliefs about both low level and high level properties. But all of this is disputed ground (Peacocke, 1992; Tye, 1995; Lyons, 2005, 2009; Siegel, 2005; Fish, 2013; Reiland, 2014), some of the main areas of which we will discuss in this section.

Whether high-level properties are presented in perceptual experience may be thought to turn in part on what we take to be high-level properties. Uncontroversial high-level properties include natural kind properties (e.g., being an elm), artificial kind properties (e.g., being a cork screw), semantic properties (e.g., the meaning of 'bachelor'), mental state properties (e.g., being sad or trying to do something), aesthetic properties (e.g., being gloomy), moral properties (e.g., being an act of kindness), personal taste properties (e.g., being attractive), and some events (e.g., causing the lights to go on). But rather than simply talking about low-level and high-level properties, one can also talk about some properties being higher-level than others. Properties pertaining to faces may be higher level than shape properties but lower level than natural kind properties (e.g., being H<sub>2</sub>O). It is questionable that we can settle the dispute about which high-level properties are presented in perception with one easy argument. An argument would likely need to be made for each class of high-level properties (see e.g., Siegel, 2005; 2009; Bayne, 2009; Block, 2013; Scholl and Gao, 2013; Audi, 2013; Stokes, 2014; Chudnoff 2016; Brogaard, 2016; Werner, 2016).

Suppose, however, that some of our perceptual experiences represent the instantiation of high level properties. It is a further thesis to claim that these perceptual experiences also prima facie, immediately justify beliefs about the instantiation of those high level properties. In

one of the few explicit discussions of the topic, Nico Silins (2013) articulates a principle that bridges the two theses:

*Experience to Belief.* If you have an experience with the high-level content that  $p$ , then the experience (at least defeasibly) gives you immediate justification to believe that  $p$ .

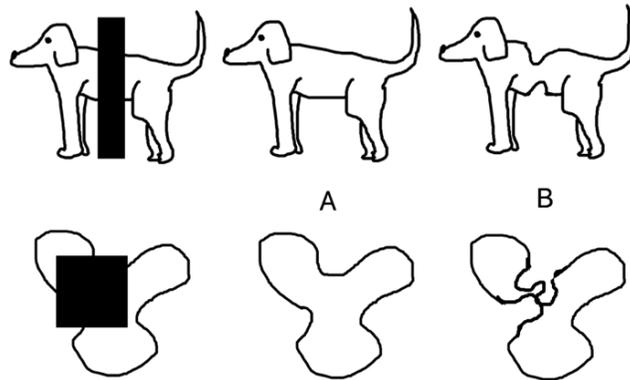
Why think this principle is true? Silins considers the following argument:

- (1) If your experiences have high-level contents, then you are able to form justified high-level beliefs on their basis without performing any conscious inference, and instead by taking the experiences at face value.
- (2) If you are able to form a justified belief on the basis of an experience without conscious inference, and instead by taking the experience at face value, then you have immediate justification from the experience for the belief.
- (3) So, if you have experiences with high-level contents, then you have immediate justification from them for high-level beliefs.

Silins notes that the argument might fail to persuade those who doubt that perceptual experiences immediately justify any beliefs about the external world. But he thinks it should persuade those who do accept that experiences immediately justify some beliefs about the external world. That is: “if experiences have high-level contents, *and* give us immediate justification for some beliefs, then experiences will give us immediate justification for some high-level beliefs.”

Silins is taking a stand on a more basic question about perceptual justification. Supposing a perceptual experience *prima facie*, immediately justifies believing some of its content, does it *prima facie*, immediately justify believing all of its content? Silins is assuming that the answer is positive. Perhaps this should be taken as the default view (Tucker, 2010; Huemer, 2001). But there are good reasons to think that it is mistaken, and these have nothing to do with high-level content in particular.

Imagine being in real world scenarios corresponding to the first members in the following two sequences of illustrations (**Fig. 2**):



**Fig. 2. Amodal completion in two different scenarios.** Both in the case of the dog and the case of the blob, we come to believe that the occluded figure is completed as in A rather than B, based on amodal completion. But arguably our belief is justified only in the case of A, because we have justified background beliefs about what dogs look like but not what random blobs look like.

In the first scenario you see a partially occluded dog. But because of perceptual (“amodal”) completion you have a perceptual experience as of a dog that continues behind the bar. Though you do not see the occluded part of the dog, your perceptual experience represents it as continuing behind the bar in a specific way—way A rather than way B. In the second scenario you see a partially occluded blob. But because of perceptual completion you have a perceptual experience as of a blob that continues behind the square. Though you do not see the occluded part of the blob, your perceptual experience represents it as continuing behind the square in a specific way—way A rather than way B.

So far we have made claims about what your perceptual experiences represent. Now let us consider what you have justification for believing. In having the perceptual experience of the occluded dog you also have justification for believing that the dog continues behind the bar in way A rather than way B. This is what you would believe in the scenario, and it seems perfectly justified. In having the perceptual experience of the occluded blob, however, you do not also have justification for believing that the blob continues behind the square in way A rather than way B. This is probably what you would believe in the scenario, and one might think it seems perfectly excused—for that is how the blob looks—but there is room to doubt that it is a justified belief.

To bring out the contrast between the two cases, consider the attitude of suspending judgment. If you suspended judgment about whether the dog continues in way A rather than way B, this would be unreasonably cautious. Dogs have a familiar nature that makes way A much more likely than way B, so there is no reason not to commit. But if you suspended judgment about whether the blob continues in way A rather than way B, this would be reasonable, and no one could legitimately criticize you for being unreasonably cautious. Unlike dogs, random blobs do not have a familiar nature that makes way A much more likely than way B, so there is some reason not to commit.

If we consider what explains the epistemic difference between the two cases, then the following seems like the most plausible story. In both cases, your justification depends on background information about the occluded parts of the seen objects. In the case of the dog, you have justified background beliefs.<sup>4</sup> In the case of the blob, you do not have justified background beliefs. What this implies, however, is that although both experiences have contents that represent occluded parts, neither experience *prima facie*, immediately justifies beliefs about occluded parts. In both cases the *prima facie* justification is at best mediate, and in the case of the dog, there is justification for the mediating background beliefs, but in the case of the blob, there is no justification for the mediating background beliefs. Notice, further, that this has nothing to do with high level contents. The properties in question are low level shape properties.

If the foregoing stands, then there is no unconditional bridge from an experience representing that  $p$  to an experience *prima facie*, immediately justifying the belief that  $p$ . The experience must meet some further conditions with respect to the proposition that  $p$ .

One natural proposal flows from contrasting the proposition that, say, the dog above has a tail with the proposition that it continues behind the bar in way A rather than way B. Plausibly your perceptual experience does *prima facie*, immediately justify believing that the dog has a tail. Why? Because not only do you represent that the dog has a tail, but you can also see the tail. Your experience has what we might call presentational phenomenology with respect to the proposition that the dog has a tail. Contrast the occluded part of the dog: you represent it as continuing in way A rather than way B, but, unlike the tail, you cannot see it—it is occluded after all. Your experience lacks presentational phenomenology with respect to the proposition that the dog continues in way A rather than way B. The contrast suggests the following idea: a perceptual experience representing that  $p$  can immediately, *prima facie* justify believing that  $p$  only if it has presentational phenomenology with respect to the proposition that  $p$ —i.e., only if it is one in which you are, or as in cases of trickery or hallucination at least seem to be, perceptually aware of the bit of the world corresponding to  $p$ . In order to apply the principle to unclear cases—such as cases of perceptual experience with high level content—we would need a more articulated understanding of what it is to be, or at least seem to be, perceptually aware of the bit of the world corresponding to  $p$  over and above just perceptually representing that  $p$ . For further discussion and elaboration of sort of view under consideration see (Chudnoff 2012, 2013, 2016).

A second approach to demarcating those content of perceptual experience that are candidates for immediate, *prima facie* justification appeals to the notion of evidence insensitivity. There are two ways one might appeal to the notion. Unqualified, evidence insensitivity is a dispositional property that subjects possess with respect to experience. Arguably there is also a felt aspect to this dispositional property—this might be compared with the idea that experience has felt objectivity (Church, 2013; Siegel, 2006; Koksvik, 2011). We can call this felt evidence insensitivity. Felt evidence insensitivity is a property of the phenomenology of experience, not a

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<sup>4</sup> On this model, the background information is stored in semantic memory. Another possibility is that it is stored in in virtue of modifications to the perceptual system. These can be seen as two different ways of retaining justification from previous experience over time. We will focus on the first model for simplicity.

dispositional property of subjects of experience. One way to appeal to the notion of evidence insensitivity, then, is to say that an experience immediately, *prima facie* justifies believing that  $p$  only if it is evidence insensitive with respect to  $p$ . A second way to appeal to the notion of evidence insensitivity is to say that an experience immediately, *prima facie* justifies believing that  $p$  only if it has felt evidence insensitivity with respect to  $p$ . The first approach is incompatible with phenomenalism: two subjects who have experiences with the same phenomenology could differ in whether they possess evidence-insensitivity with respect to the contents of those experiences, since phenomenal properties do not guarantee dispositional properties. The alternative approach that invokes felt evidence insensitivity, however is compatible with phenomenalism. Appealing to felt evidence insensitivity might be more attractive than appealing to presentational phenomenology because arguably the resulting view can be more easily generalized beyond perception to cases such as to memory and it can more naturally account for our justification for beliefs about high level contents. For further discussion and elaboration of this sort of view and arguments for thinking it is preferable to appealing to presentational phenomenology (see Brogaard, 2016).

### **Concluding Remarks: Beyond Perceptual Experience**

We have worked our way toward the view that perceptual experiences immediately, *prima facie* justify some beliefs about the external world in virtue of their phenomenology, and we have sketched two different ideas about just what aspects of their phenomenology might be relevant—presentational phenomenology and felt evidence insensitivity. A natural next issue to explore is how far this picture generalizes beyond perceptual experience to other forms of consciousness. We briefly consider two cases—emotions and intuitions.

It is widely accepted that emotions attribute evaluative properties to external objects, for instance, fear of a snake attributes the property of being dangerous to the snake, and anger at a person attributes the property of having done something offensive to the bearer of the emotion. One might consider, then, the view that emotions, in virtue of attributing evaluative properties to external objects can immediately, *prima facie* justify beliefs about whether the objects have these evaluative properties. Suppose you see a suspicious-looking person and tremble in fear. You have no other reasons to believe the person is dangerous than your perception of the person and your emotional reaction. You nonetheless come to believe that the person is dangerous. Is your belief justified? Generalizing the foregoing discussion of perception, the fact that the emotion is an experience that represents an evaluative property does not itself imply that it also immediately, *prima facie* justifies believing that it is instantiated. On the view we have considered, there are additional, relevant questions. Does the emotion possess presentational phenomenology with respect to the proposition attributing evaluative properties? Does the emotion possess felt evidence insensitivity with respect to the proposition attributing evaluative properties? See (Brogaard & Chudnoff, 2016) for some reasons to think that these questions should receive negative answers.

Perception tells us about features of our surrounding environment. But we also have beliefs about abstract matters—e.g. beliefs about mathematics, metaphysics, and morality. According to a tradition that traces back at least to Plato justification for these beliefs derives

from a kind of experience, intuition, that is in some ways similar to perception but that reveals truths about abstract, rather than concrete, subject matter. Gödel's is a typical expression of this view:

The similarity between mathematical intuition and a physical sense is very striking. It is arbitrary to consider "This is red" an immediate datum, but not so to consider the proposition expressing modus ponens or complete induction (or perhaps some similar propositions from which the latter follows). For the differences, as far as it is relevant here, consists solely in the fact that in the first case a relationship between a concept and a particular object is perceived, while in the second case it is a relationship between concepts (Gödel 2001, pg 359).

Intuition has been an object of intense philosophical debate over the last two decades (for a sampling of the literature, early and late, see Depaul and Ramsey, 1998, and Booth and Rowbottom, 2014). Though many writers do not follow Gödel in pressing the analogy with perception, a number do, and for them it is incumbent to say just what features of perception intuition is supposed to share in virtue of which it can serve as the basis for our beliefs about abstract matters. The foregoing discussion of perception suggests one approach: intuition must be phenomenally similar to perception though it is directed at different subject matter. Both presentational phenomenology and felt evidence insensitivity are abstract enough features of phenomenology to be present in experiences that are not directed at the sensible features of our surrounding environment (for further elaboration and development of the idea that intuitions possess presentational phenomenology see Chudnoff 2011, 2013; for alternative ways of developing the analogy between intuition and perception see Koksvik, 2011; Nagel, 2012; and Bengson, 2015).

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