

# Perspectivity and Rationality of Perception

KRISTJAN LAASIK

doi:[10.48106/dial.v75.i1.06](https://doi.org/10.48106/dial.v75.i1.06)

Kristjan Laasik. 2021. "Perspectivity and Rationality of Perception." *Dialectica* 75(1): 119–136.  
doi:[10.48106/dial.v75.i1.06](https://doi.org/10.48106/dial.v75.i1.06).



# Perspectivity and Rationality of Perception

KRISTJAN LAASIK

Susanna Schellenberg has presented several arguments for the “situation-dependency thesis” (SDT), i.e. the claim that (visual) perceptual experiences are necessarily situation-dependent, insofar as they represent objects’ situation-dependent properties. In my critical response to her paper, I focus on her argument from the “epistemic dependence thesis” (EDT), according to which “perceptual knowledge of intrinsic properties is epistemically dependent on representations of the relevant situation-dependent properties” (Schellenberg 2008, 75). I consider what support she musters for EDT, so as to make an objection to her argument from EDT. To address this objection (or, rather, to bypass it), I will re-formulate the EDT, as a different but closely related thesis that I will call EDT\*, informed by the admittedly radical Husserlian view that perception is epistemically rational.

In a paper titled “The Situation-Dependency of Perception,” Susanna Schellenberg presents several arguments for the “situation-dependency thesis” (SDT), i.e. the idea that (visual) perceptual experiences are necessarily situation-dependent. One of her arguments involves an appeal to the “epistemic dependence thesis” (EDT), i.e. the claim that “perceptual knowledge of intrinsic properties is epistemically dependent on representations of the relevant situation-dependent properties,” where intrinsic properties are the properties that do not depend on the object’s relations to other individuals distinct from itself: e.g. its intrinsic size or shape, irrelative to the perceiver’s viewpoint (2008, 75). In my critical response, I focus on the argument from the EDT, including what support she musters *for* the EDT, so as to make an objection to this argument. To address, or rather, to bypass, this kind of objection, I will re-formulate the EDT as EDT\*, modifying Schellenberg’s ideas concerning perspectival perception and perceptual epistemology along Husserlian lines.

In particular, EDT\* is informed by the admittedly radical view that perception is epistemically rational, in the sense of being responsive to evidence.

As part of her account of the SDT, Schellenberg fleshes out the idea of situation-dependency in terms of perceptual experiences' necessarily representing situation-dependent properties, e.g. an object's situation-dependent size or shape, relative to the perceiver's point of view (2008, 56–57). The notion of a situation-dependent property provides a way of regarding the perspectival properties, and, thus, the perspectivity of perception, in mind-independent terms. Schellenberg's argument for the EDT is based on the claim that the defeat of one's perceptual evidence for situation-dependent properties necessarily brings with it the undercutting defeat of a line of evidence for intrinsic properties (but not vice versa). She complements such "asymmetry of defeat" with a similarly conceived "asymmetry of warrant." I will challenge these ideas by means of a counterexample.

However, I will also propose a peculiar re-formulation of EDT, viz., as EDT\*, which, I believe, does not fall prey to this kind of objection, while still doing justice to Schellenberg's basic underlying intuition that "one perceives an object's intrinsic properties precisely because of the way the object is presented" (2008, 56–57). By contrast with Schellenberg's EDT, I will defend a thesis, according to which the perspectivity of perceptual experience is accounted for in terms of (subjective) appearance properties, not situation-dependent properties, and the pertinent relation of epistemic dependence is construed as obtaining between perceptual experiences and their aspects, not between beliefs or judgments. So, it is built into my account that perceptual experiences not only provide, but also receive evidential support—a radical idea which renders perceptual experiences epistemically rational, and which I propose to articulate in terms of the Husserlian notions of fulfillment and disappointment, i.e. a kind of experiential confirmation and disconfirmation.

Schellenberg argues for a view of the perspectivity of perceptual experience by appeal to the contributions that perceptual experiences make to our epistemic rationality. I choose the same starting point and try to deepen her line of thought, viz., by proposing that perceptual experiences themselves be regarded as rational.

## 1 The SDT and the Argument from the EDT

I will set the stage for the arguments of the present paper by giving an exposition of Schellenberg's central ideas and arguments. In general, Schel-

lenberg addresses the issue of how we can be said to perceive the intrinsic properties of physical objects, while perceiving such objects from different perspectives. In Section I of her paper, she contrasts her approach with naïve realist views, which downplay the perspectival nature of perception, insofar as they regard perception as direct and thus appear to have no need to appeal to situation-dependent properties, and traditional views which account for the perspectival aspect of perception by invoking mind-dependent objects or properties, like sense data or appearances. In Section II, she proceeds to set forth her own view, articulated by appeal to situation-dependent properties. According to her, situation-dependent properties are functions of the intrinsic properties of the object, and of the situational features, e.g. the perceiver's location or the lighting conditions. She adds that situation-dependent properties are, furthermore, ontologically dependent on and exclusively sensitive to intrinsic properties and situational features. Such a view renders the situation-dependent properties just as objective and mind-independent as the intrinsic properties, and can be presented in a rigorous way by invoking Christopher Peacocke's notions of scene and scenario content.

Schellenberg offers several lines of argument for *SDT*. Most prominently, in Section II, there is an argument based on the point that her view can do a good job accounting for Peacocke's example of a perceptual experience of two same-sized trees located at different distances from the subject. The example provides a way to scrutinize different accounts for whether they can render the content of perspectival perceptual experience consistent: we clearly want to avoid the idea that one perceives the two trees as being both the same size and not the same size. Schellenberg, however, addresses the problem elegantly, viz., by providing a formulation according to which we perceive the two trees as having the same intrinsic size and different situation-dependent size. Her title for her Section II, "The Argument for the Situation-Dependency Thesis," surely refers to this particular argument, insofar as it is the most prominent of all the considerations that she offers in support of her view in Section II. However, Section II also contains other considerations in favor of *SDT*, as well as an indication that still others will be put forward in the rest of her paper.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Thus, Schellenberg argues that her view has four advantages over alternative accounts. First, it brings with it the putative advantage of rendering the accuracy conditions of perceptual experiences richer, viz., by situation-dependent properties. The second putative advantage is that recognizing situation-dependent properties allows us to do justice to the fact that there is a wide range of viewing conditions that count as normal. Third, we are now in a position to appreciate the epistemic dependence of intrinsic properties on situation-dependent properties (Section

As for the EDT, Schellenberg gives a detailed discussion of this claim in her Section III, titled “The Argument for the Epistemic Dependence Thesis.” The argument for the EDT is rightly regarded as part of an argument for the SDT. Schellenberg makes this clear at the end of Section III, “If representing intrinsic properties is [epistemically] dependent on representing their situation-dependent properties, then the representation of situation-dependent properties must be a necessary part of perceptual content” (2008, 80). In other words, by Schellenberg’s lights, the EDT counts as support for the SDT. The argument from EDT appears to be dialectically at least as weighty as the argument concerning consistency of content (the pre-eminent argument in her Section II, as we have seen). I am saying this because several accounts of perspectivity unquestionably succeed in avoiding inconsistency of content—yet the argument from EDT can be viewed as providing a further principled consideration, enabling Schellenberg’s view to prevail over this group of alternative views. Also, Schellenberg particularly directs it against the kind of “naïve direct realism” which proposes to altogether do away with the perspectival aspect of perception (2008, 75).

## 2 Defeat, Warrant, and the Argument for the EDT

As part of her argument for SDT from EDT, Schellenberg makes a case for EDT. I will proceed to clarify the EDT and her argument for it, and to bring a counterexample to EDT. Schellenberg articulates the argument for EDT by once again invoking Peacocke’s tree example, viz., as focus of considerations pertaining to defeat of evidence,

The subject has experiential evidence that the two trees are the same size. This evidence is, however, parasitic on her evidence that the nearer tree is presented as larger than the tree that is further away from her. Both layers of evidence are liable to defeat. However, if evidence for the situation-dependent properties is defeated, the subject’s evidence for the intrinsic properties is de-

---

III). And, fourth, if we accept her view, it will be possible for us to embrace the motivations of phenomenalism and indirect realism, while remaining direct realists (Section IV). This is a rich variety of ideas. In what follows, I will set aside all but the third claim of an advantage for her view, i.e. the argument from EDT: I believe that Schellenberg regards it as a more important argument than the other advantage-based considerations that she invokes, insofar as these are either un-developed (the first and the second) or clearly conceived as dependent on EDT (the fourth).

feated, but not vice versa. Defeaters can be understood in two ways. While undercutting defeaters block the line of evidence from which the warrant actually arises, rebutting defeaters provide independent lines of evidence warranting the contrary conclusion. If the subject's evidence for the situation-dependent properties is defeated, then her evidence for the intrinsic properties is undercut (and not just rebutted). (2008, 76–77)

This undercutting defeat claim is not devoid of *prima facie* plausibility.<sup>2</sup> Take  $P$  to be the experiential evidence to the effect that  $R$ , i.e. the nearer tree is presented as larger than the other. Take  $Q$  to be the experiential evidence to the effect that  $S$ , i.e. the nearer tree is the same size as the other. Schellenberg's claim is that if  $\sim(P \rightarrow R)$  or  $\sim R$ , then  $\sim(Q \rightarrow S)$ . If we accept  $\sim(P \rightarrow R)$ , i.e. the idea that the evidence for  $R$  is undercut, then it appears not implausible that the line of evidence for  $S$  is also undercut. In other words, it seems quite plausible that if we cannot trust our experience with regard to  $R$ , i.e. the nearer tree's being presented as larger than the other, then neither can we trust it with regard to  $S$ , i.e. the nearer tree's being the same size as the other. On the other hand, we can make sense of the rebuttal of  $R$  as, likewise, undermining our trust in our senses. Thus, accepting  $\sim R$  leaves us with an inconsistent triad  $P$ ,  $P \rightarrow R$ , and  $\sim R$ . Now it is, again, natural to accept  $\sim(P \rightarrow R)$ , yielding the same situation as before.

Notice that these considerations seem to point to an *asymmetry* of defeat. Granting, for the sake of argument, that if I take a pill that distorts my experience of a tree's situation-dependent size, it will always also distort my experience of its intrinsic size, should we also concede the converse point, in cases where I take a pill that, first and foremost, distorts my experience of the tree's intrinsic size? We clearly should not, because the latter kind of pill might achieve its effect by confusing me about my distance from the tree, while leaving uncompromised my experience of its situation-dependent size.

To achieve a well-rounded appreciation of how these ideas bear on EDT, let us continue the above quotation,

If the subject's evidence for the situation-dependent properties is defeated, then her evidence for the intrinsic properties is undercut (and not just rebutted). It follows from this that the asymmetry of defeat is grounded in an asymmetry of warrant. It is because

---

2 For a classic source on defeasibility, see Pollock (1974, chap. 2).

the evidence for the situation-dependent property is in the line of evidence for the intrinsic property that defeat of the former entails defeat of the latter. And it is because the evidence for the intrinsic property is not in the line of evidence for the situation-dependent property that defeat of the former does not entail defeat of the latter. Thus, evidence for intrinsic properties is dependent on evidence for situation-dependent properties both with regard to defeat and warrant. (2008, 77)

Remember that in our introduction we have already quoted EDT as the claim that “perceptual knowledge of intrinsic properties is epistemically dependent on representations of the relevant situation-dependent properties” (Schellenberg 2008, 75). We have now learned that it is to be unpacked as a claim about “asymmetry of defeat” and “asymmetry of warrant,” where the former asymmetry claim is argued for directly, and the latter by a kind of inference to the best explanation. Schellenberg invites us to accept certain ideas concerning defeat, and then also that they are best accounted for by accepting certain points concerning warrant. Notice that, insofar as she makes specifications concerning rebutting and undercutting defeat, they are precisely what it takes to argue that the evidence for a certain situation-dependent property is, so to speak, part of the line of evidence that can warrant perceptual knowledge of an intrinsic property. In order to establish this, the defeat of the experiential evidence for situation-dependent properties needs precisely to result in the undercutting of the evidence for intrinsic properties, and not just, somehow, in its rebuttal by other lines of evidence. (There may or may not also be additional rebutting defeaters of the evidence for intrinsic properties.)

As far as I am concerned, there are just two points that Schellenberg has not made explicit. For one, she has not said what she means by asymmetry of warrant. In view of her detailed explanation of the asymmetry of defeat, it seems apt to conceive of the asymmetry of warrant in analogous terms: in the absence of experiential evidence that could yield a warrant for the relevant situation-dependent property, there also fails to obtain a line of experiential evidence that could yield a warrant for an intrinsic property; but not vice versa.<sup>3</sup> As for the second inexplicit aspect of Schellenberg’s account, she never, in her discussion of the EDT, says what kind of item she has in mind as the recipient

---

<sup>3</sup> I take it that a body of evidence can fail to yield a warrant while not having been defeated. Instead, there may not have been sufficient evidence, or the evidence may not have been suitably interpreted.

of evidential support. She appears to be discussing perceptual experiences, and yet there is a philosophical consensus, which remains unchallenged (and even unmentioned) by her, to the effect that perceptual experiences, while providing evidential support for beliefs and judgments, cannot themselves receive evidential support.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore safe to assume that she is really talking about the defeat and warrant of evidence for perceptual beliefs or judgments.

*EDT* is open to objection by the following counterexample. Suppose that I am looking at a tree that is three meters tall. It has the situation-dependent property of appearing, from where I stand, to be the same height as the length of a pencil in my outstretched hand. But I am reliably informed that I have ingested a pill which makes it as likely as not that I experience the situation-dependent size of a tree as considerably smaller. E.g. if its real situation-dependent height is the same as the length of a pencil, I may experience it as being the same as the length of half a pencil. I am also told that whenever the pill does this to me, it will also increase the apparent distance between me and the tree, so that it will still appear to have the intrinsic property of being (of a height that could be described as) three meters tall. Now the evidence for the situation-dependent property has been undercut, but the evidence for the intrinsic property has not been in any way defeated. Our experiential evidence, in this case, does not yield a warrant for the tree's situation-dependent size, but it does for its intrinsic size.

It is possible to reply to this counterexample by arguing that it does not confute *EDT*, because in this case we are getting it right about the intrinsic size only by accident. Yet, I have been reliably informed that the pill regularly, predictably achieves its effects in me, altering my experience of distance whenever it alters my experience of situation-dependent size. We could, likewise, even conceive of perceivers whose visual system functions this way by default, without any need for the pill, and who are aware of this fact. Bear in mind also that by attaining such awareness of the workings of the pill, the perceivers cannot re-gain their warrant concerning situation-dependent properties: according to the setup of our counterexample, the pill may or may not alter one's experience of the situation-dependent properties. Therefore, the counterexample really does tell us something about situation-dependent properties, viz., that they cannot perform the epistemic role that *EDT* accords to them, and that they are not well-suited for developing the intuition that

---

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of this view, and a challenge to it, see Siegel (2017).



“one perceives an object’s intrinsic properties precisely because of the way the object is presented,” as Schellenberg has sought to do (2008, 75).

Another worry about the counterexample is that if I am, indeed, informed by somebody that the pill has such an effect on me, then my evidence for the intrinsic properties is a combination of perceptual and testimonial evidence, with the upshot that we are no longer, strictly-speaking, dealing with perceptual knowledge of the intrinsic properties, and the scenario we have envisioned is therefore not a counterexample to EDT. It seems that here we can reply that our talk of the informant, just as our talk of the pill, is simply a convenient pointer, a device that we could, in principle, dispense with,<sup>5</sup> and invoke a situation where the subject has found out about the effects of the pill by himself, e.g. by comparing, as it were, a sample of visual experiential data from after taking the pill, with samples from other times. Perhaps, even in that case, our evidence would not be all perceptual, but would also have to involve memory and thought, leaving our counterexample with a problem? However, it seems to me that here, if we do accord a minimal role for (something like) memory and thought, they can be regarded, not so much as raising issues peculiar to our case, but as being, more generally, part of the enabling conditions of epistemic perception.<sup>6</sup> We could make a very limited appeal to (something like) memory and thought, so as not to have to invoke them as independent sources of evidence, but merely as part of what it takes to organize and interpret the perceptual evidence. I believe that such ideas fit naturally not only with a broadly Kantian outlook, but also with the Husserlian outlook that we will proceed to articulate in section 3 of this paper, viz., as functioning towards the “constitution” of the perceptual experience and its objects, with an emphasis on coordinating aspects of the diachronic experience, some of them retained and others merely anticipated.

Someone might voice the yet different concern that, in our scenario, we invoke a piece of evidence that defeats the perceptual evidence for the situation-dependent property, and then reach for additional evidence, e.g. from additional testimony, to ensure that we still have evidence for the intrinsic property.<sup>7</sup> Thus, our informant tells us that the pill may make the situation-dependent size appear smaller, *and* then she also tells us that when it does so,

5 The idea of modifying our example, so as to leave out the pill, was already discussed in the previous paragraph.

6 For a discussion of the enabling conditions of epistemic perception, see Cassam (2007, sec.1.4), with various examples given, 37–38.

7 Here, too, keep in mind that testimony per se can be eliminated from our account.

it accordingly makes the distance appear greater. This may not seem right. But let us recall what claim we are questioning: “If the subject’s evidence for the situation-dependent properties is defeated, then her evidence for the intrinsic properties is undercut [...]” (Schellenberg 2008, 77). We need to invoke a case where the evidence for the situation-dependent properties is defeated, but the evidence for the intrinsic properties is *not* undercut. Now, the worry is that if we invoke the evidence that, so to speak, *really* defeats the the subject’s evidence for the situation-dependent property, viz., from the first piece of testimony, then the evidence for the intrinsic properties *is* undercut. Yet surely the evidence from the combination of the first and the second items of testimony *also* defeats the evidence for the situation-dependent property, but without undercutting the evidence for the intrinsic property. We thus have a counterexample to the EDT.<sup>8</sup>

### 3 An Alternative Account of the Epistemic Dependence

Taking as my starting point this objection to EDT, I will proceed to offer an alternative account of what I take to be the pertinent epistemic dependence relation. This is not to say that there may not be other ways of tackling the objection; I will try to do it in a way that relates interestingly to Schellenberg’s own approach and builds on aspects of it. So as to bypass the problem that arose for situation-dependent properties, I will formulate my account in terms of subjective appearance properties.<sup>9</sup> Also, remember I pointed out that Schellenberg aims to give a kind of account of the nature of our perceptual

---

8 Reviewers of this paper have suggested that there might be yet another way to challenge my counterexample to EDT, viz., by arguing that even if the counterexample renders false the conditional that Schellenberg uses to argue for EDT, the EDT could still be true. However, I have difficulty seeing how this could be so. Assume that the conditional is false: the evidence for the relevant situation-dependent properties is defeated, but the perceptual evidence for the intrinsic properties, instead of being undercut in its entirety, is either rebutted or remains undefeated. What this means is that, in addition to the line of evidence from representations of situation-dependent properties, there must also be some other line of perceptual evidence for the intrinsic properties, by virtue of which one could have perceptual knowledge of intrinsic properties, while not having representations of the relevant situation-dependent properties. If this is so, perceptual knowledge of intrinsic properties is *not* epistemically dependent on representations of the relevant situation-dependent properties, i.e. EDT is false.

9 In her 2008 paper, Schellenberg speaks of appearance properties as subjective or mind-dependent (2008, 72). In a more recent paper, the terminology has shifted, and she and her co-author argue that appearance properties can be understood either in mind-dependent or mind-independent terms (Green and Schellenberg 2018).

experiences, and yet, if rigorously spelled out, it instead seems to amount to an account of the epistemology of our perceptual beliefs. I merely put forward this thought as an observation, not, in any way, an additional objection to Schellenberg's view. But I will re-phrase EDT in such a way that it really does capture what I take to be a significant point about perceptual experiences: *perceptual experience* of intrinsic properties is epistemically dependent on experiences of the relevant appearance properties. This thesis—call it EDT\*—I take to be supported by the consideration that if the experiential evidence in support of one's experience of an appearance property is either rebutted or undercut, then a line of experiential evidence in support of one's perceptual experience of an intrinsic property will be undercut. Likewise, absent the experiential evidence warranting an experience of an appearance property, there also fails to obtain a line of evidence warranting a perceptual experience of an intrinsic property.

The most pressing question our account would need to deal with is how we can be mistaken about subjective appearance properties—to be able to make sense of EDT\* as being non-vacuous.<sup>10</sup> This is, *prima facie*, a quite difficult issue, but I believe we will be able to address it by drawing upon a Husserlian view of perceptual experience, especially the ideas of fulfillment and disappointment, i.e. kinds of experiential confirmation and disconfirmation. Let us briefly sketch this view.<sup>11</sup> On the assumption that the back sides of objects are perceptually experienced by us, the experience, the presence, of the back side must clearly be phenomenally different from that of the front side. To mark this distinction, let us call the experience of the front side “full” and the experience of the back side “empty.” Now we can also call the transition from “empty” to “full” experience, e.g. as I turn the object around, “fulfillment.” We can think of such fulfillment as a gradually cumulative process, as I examine the object in various ways. It yields a view that we can extend to our perceptual experience of the different perceptual properties, e.g. shape, size and color, not just as a way to think about the experience of the object's

---

It also needs to be said that, in speaking of appearance properties, I am using the term “property” differently from Husserl. Husserl speaks about properties (*Eigenschaften*) in a more restrictive sense that would not be applicable to size, shape, or color appearances (1989, sec.1, chapter 2).

<sup>10</sup> Schellenberg believes that we cannot be mistaken about subjective, mind-dependent appearance properties (2008, 74). (To remind the reader, Schellenberg's situation-dependent properties are conceived as objective, mind-independent.)

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed, authoritative introduction to Husserl's view of perceptual experience, including a discussion of the significance of fullness and emptiness, see Bernet, Kern, and Marbach (1993, chap. 4).

back sides vs. front sides.<sup>12</sup> On the Husserlian view, the “empty” experience is conceived entirely in terms of more or less tacit anticipations of ways in which the experience might continue, or, as we might put it, anticipations of fullness. Indeed, according to this view, the presence of objects and their aspects in perceptual experience is conceived entirely in terms of such anticipations of fullness, realizing the fulfillment conditions for these objects and their aspects. We can thus say that the contents of perceptual experience are fulfillment conditions, rather than, say, accuracy conditions, which a certain mainstream view takes them to be. (Here, we need not argue that this mainstream view is in any ways problematic or even untenable.)<sup>13</sup>

I will illustrate certain salient aspects of our Husserlian view with a quotation from Husserl, viz., informing us that the perceptual object is given through “adumbrations” (*Abschattungen*), i.e. perspectival appearances, with the present adumbrations always pointing to the ones to come, insofar as the perceiver anticipates them, and it is by virtue of the having and fulfillment of such anticipations that one’s experience of the object’s front side can be integrated into an “omni-sided” experience,

If, [...] in a perception, the series of appearances runs its course in continuous unity, then the first determination of the change, the so-called differential of movement, already defines the “direction” of the course, and thereby is given a system of intentions that are continuously setting out and continuously getting fulfilled. In normal perception, these are anticipatory intentions. (The series of appearances is dominated by a certain teleology.) Every phase refers to the following one. That, of course, should not be taken to mean that we focus on the appearances, since we are indeed directed to the object as the perception flows on. But every adumbration is precisely an adumbration of the square; every one “brings the square to appearance,” but each in a different way. And every one brings to appearance something that previ-

12 It has been argued that Schellenberg’s idea of a situation-dependent property will not so readily generalize from size properties to other, e.g. shape, properties (Jagnow 2012, sec.2).

13 For a discussion of perceptual contents as accuracy conditions, see Siegel (2010, pt. 1).

Should anybody, at this stage, express the worry that our fulfillment-based view is a phenomenalist or an idealist one, whereas Schellenberg is concerned with accommodating perspectival perception as part of a realist account, we may reply that there are renowned Husserl scholars who regard such a view as realist, or at least compatible with realism. See, e.g. Crowell (2013, 16, 18), and Drummond (1990, 264–70).

ously did not appear, not precisely that way. In addition, each one points forward: in the stream of appearances, the stream of objective adumbrations, we feel ourselves drawn on from adumbration to adumbration; each one points forward objectively in a continuity, and in this forward referral, the adumbration is an intimation of what is now coming, and the intimation, the allusion, the intention, is fulfilled. The one-sided view opens out to what is “omni-sided.” Already in the case of a single determination, we experience what this determination is, not in the one view with its single adumbration, although it indeed stands there as self-given, but only by traversing the adumbrations, whereby the determination is brought to a complete, “omni-sided” givenness. And this complete givenness is constituted in the consciousness of unity which produces a perpetual fusion of intention and fulfillment. (1997, 86–87)

Having thus presented the basics of our Husserlian view, let us return to the issue of how to make sense of our being mistaken about appearances. According to our view, objects and their intrinsic properties are present to us in terms of structured series of appearances, past, present, and future. The future appearances are experienced by virtue of certain anticipations. There is, of course, considerable leeway concerning what exactly one may be anticipating while having a perceptual experience, say, of a red ball, but insofar as the object is indeed experienced as being red, and as being a ball, and in certain experiential circumstances rather than others, there are constraints on the anticipations. Moreover, the thus constrained anticipations can be disappointed (yielding disappointments of the relevant perceptual experience). My point is that we can be wrong about appearances qua anticipated appearances. Insofar as we are pursuing a certain structured line of appearances, e.g. in perceptually experiencing a red ball, we are achieving fulfillments which constitute the experiential evidence for certain upcoming appearances. If a different appearance turns up, incompatible with these anticipations, it rebuts the evidence based on which we had formed our anticipations, leading to the formation of other anticipations, and to a re-configuration of our experience in terms of another constellation of fulfillment conditions.

Someone might object to these remarks by suggesting that perceivers do not, in fact, anticipate appearances. Instead, they may have anticipations about the objects that they perceive. In reply, perceivers can indeed have anticipations

about the objects they perceive, but on the present view, the givenness of these objects is accounted for in terms of other anticipations that are not about objects but appearances, amounting to a condition of possibility of our perceptually experiencing objects. Such are the anticipations that Husserl speaks about in the above block quotation. As we have just learned, his according a role for these anticipations and appearances “should not be taken to mean that we focus on the appearances, since we are indeed directed to the object as the perception flows on” (1997, 86). Nevertheless, reflection can reveal the requisite anticipations and their fulfillments as aspects of perceptual experience.

Having spoken about the disappointment of tacit anticipations concerning appearances, we now turn to the disappointment of perceptual experiences themselves. Insofar as EDT\* is about the undercutting of experiential evidence for intrinsic properties, it may not be very clear how it could be understood in terms of the Husserlian language of disappointments, because superficially it may seem that the Husserlian disappointment is in all cases basically a kind of rebuttal, rather than undercutting. *Prima facie*, the disappointment seems to consist in one’s realizing, e.g. as the light changes, or as one takes a closer look, that what one took to be a red object, is really a green one, or that what one took to be a large object, is actually a small one.<sup>14</sup> This seems like a kind of rebuttal: e.g. the object cannot be red, despite appearing to be red before, in view of the new evidence that we just received, in the improved lighting, to the effect that it is green.<sup>15</sup>

However, this cannot be the general account of disappointments, insofar as a disappointment with regard to the object’s redness does not necessarily yield an experience of the object as having some other color, such as green. It can also give way to a more or less deep perceptual confusion, or indeterminacy, where one is not sure what color one may be seeing. The nature of a disappointment does not consist in a rebuttal by a new perceptual constellation, but, rather, in the interruption of a series of appearances that was projected to continue into the future, even infinitely. The disappointment of a perceptual experience involves a kind of rebuttal, *viz.*, of the anticipated appearance,

---

14 To be clear, this is how Husserl himself describes some cases of disappointment. See e.g. (1973b, 88). I am not claiming that these are not really disappointments. Instead, I argue that not all aspects of such cases are necessary for a disappointment (in the Husserlian sense).

15 A rebuttal, say, of a hypothesis, does not generally require that one produce a superior alternative hypothesis. In our case, however, the rebutting evidence would, by the same token, also support an alternative “hypothesis.”

yet does not itself consist in a rebuttal, but in an undercutting. The evidence, e.g. for redness, is corrupted or compromised, rather than just outweighed by new evidence. The fulfillment conditions for redness yield a set of structured infinite series of color appearances, ways in which one's experience of red can go, and any finite series of color experiences constitutes evidence for redness insofar as it forms part of any such infinite series. But once an appearance turns up that does not fit into such an infinite series, the support from the foregoing appearances is lost. Indeed, they are typically incorporated into another series, e.g. one consistent with the fulfillment conditions for greenness. Thus, Husserl argues that, in such a situation, a modification "takes place *retroactively* in the totality of the preceding series," e.g. as "the earlier apprehension, which was attuned to the harmonious development of the" red and uniformly round," is implicitly "reinterpreted" to "green on one side and dented" (1973b, 89).

Apart from the above point concerning the inapplicability of the idea of rebuttal, what other reason is there to believe that this is an adequate account of the phenomenon of perceptual disappointment? While there are, presumably, both gradual and abrupt perceptual disappointments, it seems to me that if disappointment were regarded as fundamentally a kind of rebuttal, the paradigmatic case would have to be that of a gradual disappointment, as new evidence emerges and gradually outweighs the previously existing evidence. But I think that in the paradigmatic cases the defeat is abrupt, e.g. as one just suddenly sees that the shape, size or color is not as one took it to be. This suggests that we are dealing with an undercutting: the existing evidence is vitiated by a new development.

But why should the cases of an abrupt disappointment, and not the others, be regarded as paradigmatic? One way to think about it is that the abrupt cases most straightforwardly realize the principle at work, viz., fullness prevailing over emptiness. Absent other considerations, present appearances win out against ones that have sunk back into the past—underscoring the fact that we do not adjudicate first-personal evidence from some detached perspective but respond to it, so to speak, from the midst of things, where this just means that present fullness impresses itself upon our consciousness in a privileged way. None of this militates against the consideration that if we add on other factors, e.g. the inertia of habit, or cognitive penetration, the past appearances may prove resilient, resistant to undermining.

We can now see that it is possible to make sense of EDT\* in terms of the Husserlian view: if the experiential evidence for the appearance properties

is defeated, the pertinent evidence for the intrinsic properties will be undercut. Therefore, perceptual experience of intrinsic properties is epistemically dependent on experiences of the relevant appearance properties. Thus conceived, EDT\* is a compelling claim about the nature of perceptual experience and perceptual presence. Before, we did not look very deep into whether the problem highlighted by our counterexample was due to the idea of a situation-dependent property specifically, or the idea of a mind-independent perspectival property more generally, but with our view we have distanced ourselves from all such conceptions, and refrained from attempting to purge our conception of the perspectival nature of perceptual experience, of subjective ingredients. Our subjectivization of perspectival properties has the effect of rendering it more difficult (though not impossible, as we have seen) to defeat the experiential evidence in favor of them. It should therefore be unsurprising that it is now also more difficult to conceive of a case where the evidence for the perspectival property is defeated, but the relevant evidence for the intrinsic property is not. Indeed, I cannot think of a way to do it. Our above counterexample to Schellenberg's view has no bite against the present view. If, as in our scenario, I ingest a pill and it alters my experience so that the tree perspectivally appears the same height as the length of half a pencil in my outstretched hand, instead of how it might otherwise have appeared, then this is the perspectival property in terms of which the intrinsic height of the tree is experienced, consistent with the idea that the latter is epistemically dependent upon the former. By contrast, if we were experiencing the tree in terms of a series that led us to anticipate its appearing the same height as the length of half a pencil in our outstretched hand, and it surprised us by appearing otherwise, then the evidence for this perspectival height would be defeated, but so would the evidence for the relevant intrinsic height—unless the system of appearances associated with this intrinsic height allows for greater perspectival variety, at this juncture.

We have seen that, on the present view, perceptual experiences can be either supported or undermined by experiential evidence, in sharp contrast with the more commonly held view that perceptual experiences can *provide* evidential support for beliefs, but not *receive* evidential support themselves.<sup>16</sup> This amounts to the view that perceptual experiences are rational, in the sense of being responsive to evidence—providing a way to render cogent Schellenberg's talk of a relation of epistemic dependence between perspectival

---

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of this topic, see Siegel (2017).



and intrinsic properties, in perceptual experience.<sup>17</sup> To be sure, we cannot revise our perceptual experiences in quite the same ways that we can revise our beliefs. Nor can we choose, or decide, to be disappointed. Nevertheless, we can be responsive to experiential evidence in choosing where to take our perceptual experience, which fulfillments to seek and how to render ourselves open to disappointments. In these regards, we can be praise- or blameworthy as perceivers.

In this paper, we have built towards the idea of the rationality of perception by invoking considerations specific to perceptual experience, but be it said that our position conforms with Husserl's general view of intentionality. For Husserl, every kind of intentional experience is associated with kinds of evidence which could support it by bringing the pertinent object or objectivity to fullness, which he also refers to as original givenness or self-givenness, "*The concept of any intentionality whatever—any life-process of consciousness-of something or other—and the concept of evidence, the intentionality that is the giving of something-itself, are essentially correlative*" (1969, 160). Husserl further elaborates on this point in relation to the idea of objectivity as such,

*Category of objectivity and category of evidence are perfect correlates. To every fundamental species of objectivities—as intentional unities maintainable throughout an intentional synthesis and, ultimately, as unities belonging to a possible “experience”—a fundamental species of “experience,” of evidence, corresponds, and likewise a fundamental species of intentionally indicated evidential style in the possible enhancement of the perfection of the having of an objectivity itself. (1969, 161)*

It is a natural and well-known part of this picture that perceptual experiences provide the requisite evidence for our beliefs and judgments, but we must not neglect the fact that perceptual experiences themselves harbor emptiness, which they can overcome (though never entirely) as they unfold through time. This shows perceptual experiences to be self-supporting, viz., by fulfillment.


---

<sup>17</sup> The present view of the rationality of perception bears considerable similarities to Susanna Siegel's ideas regarding the same topic (2017). I have already explored this connection elsewhere (cf. Laasik 2021).

## 4 Conclusion

Susanna Schellenberg argues for the situation dependency thesis (SDT); one of her arguments is by appeal to the epistemic dependence thesis (EDT), a claim of a kind of asymmetry of both defeat and warrant, which she phrases in terms of situation-dependent properties. I have objected to EDT by counterexample, and circumvented the objection by re-phrasing EDT as EDT\*, viz., in terms of subjective appearance properties, rather than situation-dependent properties. I have developed this view as an aspect of a Husserlian view of perceptual experience, involving the ideas of fulfillment and disappointment. The view has the intriguing upshot that perceptual experience is rightly viewed as rational, viz., as responsive to experiential evidence—enabling us to deepen Schellenberg’s central concern with the epistemic significance of the perspectivity of experience.\*

Kristjan Laasik

 0000-0003-0568-378X

Zhejiang University, Hangzhou

klaasik@gmail.com

## References

- BERNET, Rudolf, Iso KERN, and Eduard MARBACH. 1989. *Edmund Husserl. Darstellung seines Denkens*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag.
- . 1993. *An Introduction to Husserlian Phenomenology*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press. Translation of Bernet, Kern, and Marbach (1989).
- CASSAM, Quassim. 2007. *The Possibility of Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199208319.001.0001.
- CROWELL, Steven Galt. 2013. *Normativity and Phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139548908.

---

\* While writing this paper, I benefited from comments, questions, and advice from various quarters. I am particularly grateful to Elizabeth Behnke, Davide Fassio, George Heffernan, Ivan Ivanov, Michael Johnson, Marko Jurjako, Luca Malatesti, Jennifer Nado, Susanna Schellenberg, and Ru Ye—as well as other audience members at the University of Hong Kong, the University of Rijeka, and Zhejiang University, and the anonymous reviewers at *Dialectica*. This research was supported by the Hundred Talents Program Research Funds, Humanities and the Social Sciences, Zhejiang University, as well as by a Humanities and Social Sciences General Research Project of the Chinese Ministry of Education, titled *Perceptual Experience: Beyond the Mainstream Intentional Approach* (21YJA720001).

- DRUMMOND, John J. 1990. *Husserlian Intentionality and Non-Foundational Realism. Noema and Object*. Contributions to Phenomenology 4. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers. doi:10.1007/978-94-009-1974-7.
- GREEN, E. J., and Susanna SCHELLENBERG. 2018. "Spatial Perception: The Perspectival Aspect of Perception." *Philosophy Compass* 13 (2). doi:10.1111/phc3.12472.
- HUSSERL, Edmund. 1929. *Formale und transzendente Logik*. Halle a.S.: Max Niemeyer Verlag.
- . 1939. *Erfahrung und Urteil, Untersuchungen zur Genealogie der Logik*. Praha: Academia.
- . 1948. *Erfahrung und Urteil*. Hamburg: Claassen Verlag. Reissue of Husserl (1939).
- . 1952. *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Zweites Buch: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*. Husserliana 4. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. Edited by Marly Biemel.
- . 1969. *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. Translation of Husserl (1929) by Dorion Cairns.
- . 1973a. *Ding und Raum. Vorlesungen 1907*. Husserliana 16. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.
- . 1973b. *Experience and Judgment*. Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press. Translation of Husserl (1948) by James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks.
- . 1989. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*. Collected Works 3. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers. Translation of Husserl (1952) by Richard Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer.
- . 1997. *Thing and Space: Lectures of 1907*. Collected Works 7. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers. Translation of Husserl (1973a) by Richard Rojcewicz.
- JAGNOW, René. 2012. "Representationalism and the Perspectival Character of Perceptual Experience." *Philosophical Studies* 157 (2): 227–49. doi:10.1007/s11098-010-9634-9.
- LAASIK, Kristjan. 2021. "Perceptual Confidence: A Husserlian Take." *European Journal of Philosophy* 29 (2): 354–64. doi:10.1111/ejop.12580.
- POLLOCK, John L. 1974. *Knowledge and Justification*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- SCHELLENBERG, Susanna. 2008. "The Situation-Dependency of Perception." *The Journal of Philosophy* 105 (2): 55–84. doi:10.5840/jphil200810525.
- SIEGEL, Susanna. 2010. *The Contents of Visual Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195305296.001.0001.
- . 2017. *The Rationality of Perception*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198797081.001.0001.