

The Co-Presentational Character of Perception

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Abstract

Phenomenologically, perception distinguishes itself from other modes of consciousness by presenting its objects and contents “in the flesh;” it has a *presentive* character. From the first person perspective, there is a clear difference between thinking about a laptop on the desk, imagining a laptop on the desk, believing or hoping that there is a laptop on the desk, and actually visually *perceiving* a laptop on the desk. Only perception has a presentive character with respect to physical objects. *Epistemologically*, perception distinguishes itself by being a source of *immediate justification* for beliefs about physical states of affairs. Believing, imagining, or hoping that there is a laptop on the desk does not justify a person in believing so. However, if the person sees that there is a laptop on the desk, it is plausible to assume that she is thereby justified in believing that there is a laptop on the desk. Only perception is a source of immediate justification with respect to such states of affairs. In the phenomenological as well as in the recent analytic tradition, there have been attempts to connect the phenomenological and the epistemological distinctiveness of perception: It has been argued that perception is a source of immediate justification *precisely by virtue of its presentive phenomenal character*. In the analytic tradition, however, it has been often overlooked that the phenomenal character of perception is not exhausted by its presentive character. Perception, essentially, also has a co-presenting character; it has a horizontal structure. The aim of this paper is to shed light on the epistemological significance of the horizontal structure of perception.

1. The presentive character of perception

Assume that you are enjoying a cup of coffee in the cafeteria when a colleague comes over and tells you that your office door is open. You are worried because there have been some burglaries at the department lately. Worse still, you have left your laptop in the office and the only version of the paper you are working on is saved on the laptop’s hard drive. Thinking about your office door, you are worried that it is in fact open; you wish that it were closed; you try to remember whether you have closed and locked the door; and you imagine it being open and

¹ The names are given in alphabetical order.

thus inviting everyone to steal your laptop. After rushing back to your office, you find your door closed and locked. Your colleague was wrong. Just to be on the safe side, you enter your office and take a look at your desk. You see your laptop sitting on your desk—you breathe a sigh of relief.

It is beyond doubt that at least some mental states have a phenomenology, i.e., a phenomenal character. An experience's phenomenology or phenomenal character "is what it is like subjectively to undergo the experience" (Tye 2015: section 1). Having a phenomenal character is characteristic of experiences. "It is definitional of experience [...] that they have some phenomenal character, or more briefly, some phenomenology. The phenomenology of an experience is what it is like for the subject to have it." (Siegel 2016: section 1) Clearly, perceptual experiences have a distinctive phenomenology.² This is true in a threefold sense. 1) Different perceptual experiences of the same type, e.g., visual experiences, can differ phenomenologically. Seeing a closed door is phenomenologically different from seeing a laptop. 2) Perceptual experiences of different types differ phenomenologically. Seeing a door is phenomenologically different from touching it or from hearing the noise when it clicks shut. 3) Perceptual experiences differ phenomenologically from other mental states. Thinking about your office door, worrying or believing that it is open, hoping that it is closed, and imagining it being open are all mental states that are intentionally directed at your office door. Yet, having a perceptual experience of the office door is a mental state that is phenomenologically different from the aforementioned states.

So what does the phenomenal character of perceptual experiences look like? What does it mean, from a first-person perspective, to undergo a perceptual experience? In our opinion, it is a distinctive feature of perceptual experiences to have a *presentive* or *presentational* phenomenal character.³ When you have a perceptual experience of your office door, then the door is presented to you within your experience, you seem to be perceptually aware of it. Experiences that give their objects in this way exhibit a special quality that is discussed in contemporary analytical philosophy under labels such as "presentational feel" (Foster 2000: 112), "scene immediacy" (Sturgeon 2000: 24), "presentational phenomenology" (Chudnoff

² With respect to the term "perceptual experience," it has become common to distinguish between veridical perception, illusion, and hallucination. In the present paper, when we use the term "perception," we use it in the inclusive sense of perceptual experience.

³ To be sure, we do not want to suggest that only perceptual experiences have such a presentive character. Arguably, rational intuitions, introspective acts, and moral perceptions are candidates for having such a character too. However, only perceptual experiences have such a character with respect to physical objects. In this paper, our focus is on perceptual experiences.

2013), or “presentationality” (Bengson 2015). Susanna Siegel subscribes to these characterizations and points out that this idea has been expressed in many different terms (Siegel 2017: 45, fn. 13). We agree. Most important in the context of this paper, the idea has been systematically explored by philosophers with phenomenological leanings, and by Edmund Husserl in particular. For Husserl, perceptual experiences are originary presentive intuitions, which means that they present their objects “in the flesh,” “as actually present,” or “self-given” (Husserl 1997: 12).

The philosophical significance of perceptual experiences is largely due to their justificatory force. Consider again the earlier example: Neither thinking about your closed office door nor believing, hoping, or imagining that your office door is closed justifies you in believing that your office door is closed. However, seeing that your office door is closed clearly has some justificatory force with respect to the proposition that your office door is closed. It is often argued that perceptual experiences are justifying without being themselves in need of justification.⁴ If this is the case, then they are a source of immediate justification and thus lend support to some sort of foundationalism (cf. Huemer 2001: 97; Ghijsen 2016: 37 f.).

So far, we have distinguished between a phenomenological and an epistemological thesis: *Phenomenologically*, perception distinguishes itself from other modes of consciousness by presenting its objects and contents “in the flesh”; it has a *presentive* character. From the first person perspective, there is a clear difference between thinking about a laptop on the desk, imagining a laptop on the desk, believing or hoping that there is a laptop on the desk, and actually visually *perceiving* a laptop on the desk.

Phenomenological thesis: Perceptual experiences, and only perceptual experiences, have a presentive character with respect to physical objects and states of affairs.

Epistemologically, perception is characterized by its being a source of *immediate justification*. Believing, imagining, or hoping that there is a laptop on the desk does not justify a person in believing so. However, if the person looks at the desk in front of her and sees that there is a laptop on the desk, then it is plausible to assume that the person is justified in believing that there is a laptop on the desk.⁵

⁴ “Perception is nothing that can be substantiated. For that reason, it is itself grounds providing.” (Husserl 2008: 9; cf. also 2001b: §22)

⁵ In the present paper, we are only concerned with propositional justification, not with doxastic justification.

Epistemological thesis: Perceptual experiences, and only perceptual experiences, are a source of immediate justification with respect to physical objects and states of affairs.

Some philosophers aim at connecting the phenomenological and the epistemological thesis, thus establishing an intimate relationship between epistemology and philosophy of mind. The claim is that perceptual experiences are a source of immediate justification precisely *because* they exhibit a distinctively presentive character. Let us call this the phenomenological conception of perceptual justification (PCPJ):

PCPJ: Perceptual experiences are a source of immediate justification by virtue of their distinctive, justification-conferring phenomenal character.

PCPJ is advocated, for instance, by James Pryor who argues “[...] that our perceptual experiences have the epistemic powers the dogmatist says they have because of what the phenomenology of perception is like. I think there’s a distinctive phenomenology [...]” (Pryor 2004: 356 f.). Other analytic epistemologists who champion PCPJ are John Bengson (2015), Elijah Chudnoff (2013), Jennifer Church (2013), Ole Koksvik (2011), and Declan Smithies (2014). They all agree in their commitment to PCPJ but differ in their precise definition of the distinctive justification-conferring phenomenal character.

Interestingly, there are also passages in Husserl’s works that suggest a commitment to PCPJ (Husserl 1982: 36; Husserl 2008: 343). As we have pointed out, Bengson, Chudnoff, Husserl, and others designate this distinctive, justification-conferring phenomenal character as a “presentive” character in the sense that perceptual experiences present their objects as bodily present. What is termed “presentational phenomenology” or “presentationality” by Chudnoff and Bengson is labeled “originary givenness” or “self-givenness” by Husserl. However, while we agree that perceptual experiences gain their justificatory force by virtue of this presentive character, there is one crucial fact that is investigated by Husserl in detail, but often ignored or overlooked in analytic circles.⁶ What can be learned from Husserl’s writings is that the phenomenal character of perceptual experiences is not exhausted by their presentive character. Perceptual experiences, essentially, also have a *co-presenting* character.

⁶ A notable exception is Church 2013, who explicitly refers to Husserl. For further contributions that exemplify the relevance of Husserl’s conception of horizontal intentionality for current debates cf. Madary 2017 and Smith 2010.

2. The co-presenting character of perception

One of Husserl's main contributions to a phenomenological analysis of perceptual experience is the disclosure of what he calls the *horizontal structure* of experience. To make a long story short: As phenomenological descriptions reveal, perceptual experiences always and necessarily go beyond what is directly given.⁷ Or, to be more precise: Perceptual experiences do not only have the above-discussed character of self-givenness, but also the character of co-givenness. What this means can be illustrated by means of an example: Assume that you have a veridical perception of a laptop. At first glance, what presents itself to you in experience is a three-dimensional object in space. But a more accurate description reveals that what is really sensuously given to you is not simply a laptop, but only *one single profile of the laptop*, its current frontside. To be sure, you could alter your position and make the current backside the new frontside, and vice versa. But this doesn't change the fact that the laptop is always given *in perspectives* and that, more generally, physical things always and necessarily have more parts, functions, and properties than can be actualized in one single intentional act. The laptop—as it is intended—is *transcendent*, not only in the sense that it can be seen from indefinitely more perspectives than you can take up at a given point in time. The laptop is also transcendent in the sense that it has, for instance, a momentarily hidden internal structure, a history, certain practical functions, or many properties that aren't in the center of attention right now.

So, a closer look at how physical things appear to us reveals that our intentions towards these things always “transcend” or “go beyond” the actual experiences that give rise to them. As the example of the laptop shows, there is a describable difference between what is meant through a particular perceptual act (the laptop in front of you) and what is sensuously given (the laptop's facing side with its momentarily visible features). Phenomenologically construed, this discrepancy does not represent a problem that must be somehow remedied, e.g. by proposing a theory that explains how a number of seemingly disconnected profiles add up to a homogeneous thing to which we then attribute these profiles. The fact that our perceptual intentions always transcend the sphere of direct givenness is rather to be treated as a

⁷ Here many of Husserl's insights are in agreement with the findings of early experimental psychologists such as Gestalt psychologists and the members of the Graz school.

phenomenologically discoverable feature of experience itself: Intending is, as Husserl puts it, always and necessarily an “*intending-beyond-itself*” (Husserl 1960: 46).

The important lesson to draw from these considerations is that perception is a composite of interwoven “fulfilled and unfulfilled intentions” (Husserl 2001c: 221) such that self-giveness could not be without co-giveness.⁸ Or, to put it in an alternative terminology: Intentional experiences are always embedded in *horizons* of intentions that are momentarily unactualized, but that could be actualized in the course of further acts. Even though you can only see the laptop’s facing side with its momentarily visible features, the laptop appears to you as something that could be explored more fully. You “know” that you could alter your vantage point and explore its currently concealed backside. You “know” that you could look more closely and explore its surface in more detail. You “know” that you could disassemble the laptop and study its inner workings. It is these and indefinitely many other potentialities that add up to the co-given horizon against the background of which intentions towards physical things always stand out.⁹

Phenomenological descriptions reveal that intentional acts towards things always point to co-given horizons of possible further experiences. Hence, on a phenomenological view, experience is never exhausted by what is actual; experience is always already saturated with implicit references to future experiences that are possible insofar as they could be actualized in the course of further acts. However, two things need to be emphasized at this point. The first thing to note is that an act’s horizon is, as we have already indicated, *co-given* with the act itself. This is to say that the horizon is no theoretical construct that is *retrospectively* ascribed to the initial act. An act’s horizon rather belongs to the perceptual experience even though we usually aren’t aware of this. That the laptop in front of you has a backside isn’t something that can only be asserted after you have changed your vantage point. It is also not something that is the product of some sort of inferential process. Rather, it is something that belongs to the very nature of being intentionally directed towards physical things.

⁸ Or, as Erhard puts it: “*No presence without absence.*” (Erhard 2014: 179)

⁹ Husserl distinguishes between *inner* and *outer* horizons: While the inner horizon comprises co-intended aspects of the thing itself (such as its backside), the outer horizon consists of the spatial field in which the intended object is embedded. Even if your attention is solely directed at the laptop in front of you, it is part of your experience that the laptop does not float around in nothingness. The laptop is rather sitting on a desk, which is standing in your office, which is located in a building on the university campus, and so on. In Husserl’s terminology, these co-given objects (desk, office, campus, etc.) make up the *outer horizon* of your experience. The non-thematic, but co-intended aspects of the intended object itself, on the other hand, constitute the *inner horizon* (cf. Husserl 1973: §8).

The second important aspect is this: On the basis of what we have said so far, one could define horizons as sets of empty intentions against the background of which particular fulfilled intentions always and necessarily stand out. But this definition is somewhat misleading: Although it is correct to say that a horizon consists of empty intentions and thus can be described as a “halo of emptiness,” it is crucial to stress that “this emptiness is not a nothingness,” but rather that “the sense of this halo [...] is a *prefiguring* that *prescribes a rule* for the transition to new actualizing appearances” (Husserl 2001a: 42; our emphases). Hence, Husserl describes horizons in terms of “‘predelineated’ potentialities” (Husserl 1960: 45) and adds “that a hidden intentional ‘if-then’ relation is at work here: the exhibitings must occur in a certain systematic order; it is in this way that they are indicated in advance, in expectation, in the course of a harmonious perception.” (Husserl 1970: 161 f.) Upon looking at your laptop, the horizontal structure of your experience is such that you have certain anticipations of how your laptop looks when you move or turn it around, of how it feels when you touch it, and of what will happen when you press a certain button. To be sure, anticipations of this kind are *motivated* by previous experiences with laptops and thus by your relevant background beliefs.¹⁰ To a person who has never experienced a laptop before, a laptop would not look foldable. However, although background beliefs and horizontal anticipations are closely related, phenomenologists typically stress their distinctness: Rather than being identical with background beliefs, horizontal anticipations are *part of the phenomenal character of experience*. To say that you experience your laptop as foldable is to say that the laptop’s disposition to be foldable is, in some sense, *visually* present. But is this view really tenable? One might, for instance, accept that the disposition to be foldable is part of what you experience when you see your laptop in front of you. One might deny, however, that the disposition to be foldable is *visually* present—that the laptop is foldable is rather something

¹⁰ “Motivation” is a technical term that plays a prominent role in Husserl’s understanding of the concept of possibility. Perhaps the best way to make this distinction clear is by way of an example (Husserl 1982: p. 337): Suppose that you enter an unfamiliar room with a desk in it. The desk is positioned such that its underside is currently out of view. Now, the question arises: How many legs does the table have? While the answer “Hundred!” corresponds to an *empty possibility*, the answer “Four!” corresponds to what Husserl calls a *motivated possibility*. How is this distinction to be understood? Well, first of all, neither answer refers to a scenario that is logically impossible. Although you may have never actually seen such a thing, it is easily conceivable that the table will indeed reveal an underside with exactly one hundred legs. But, apart from this, there is a fundamental difference nonetheless: The difference lies in the fact that the projected scenario of the table’s four-leggedness is not only logically possible, but also probable in light of your previous encounters with tables and thus with your implicit background beliefs. It is, to put it differently, only in the latter case that “*something speaks on behalf of the positum*” (Husserl 1982: p. 334) and that, consequently, the respective possibility has considerable epistemic weight. This is what the distinction between empty and motivated possibility is designed to express (cf. Husserl 2001a: §§2-4; Husserl 1982: §140; Husserl 1989: §56). And, on Husserl’s view, it is characteristic of perceptual horizons to be composed solely of motivated possibilities that regulate our expectations and anticipations concerning further perceptual experiences.

that you *believe* or are *disposed to judge* in addition to the ordinary givenness of the laptop's front side.

The reason why it might be tempting to think that perceptual horizons can be reduced to (a system of) background beliefs is that, as we have pointed out, an act's horizon is shaped by foregoing experiences, thus shaped by one's beliefs, and, as a consequence, usually in agreement with one's background beliefs. But this need not be the case. Consider two persons, P1 and P2, and suppose that P2 is afraid of spiders. P1 and P2 may both know that the spider in front of them is absolutely harmless, afraid of human beings, and not capable of feeling emotions such as anger. However, it may still be the case that P1 and P2 perceive the spider very differently. To P2 the spider may look angry and the horizon of P2's spider experience may include the anticipation that a spider attack is imminent. In short, P2's horizon does not match her background beliefs, which speaks against the reducibility of perceptual horizons to (systems of) background beliefs.

Furthermore, there are cases of "wrong" horizons in which somebody perceives an object O, has an experience that has a *presentive* character with respect to O, knows that she is perceiving O, has correct background beliefs about O, but nevertheless perceives O through a horizon h which is "wrong" in the sense that h includes elements that do not match O, but a different object G. Consider Matthew Ratcliffe's example of what he calls a "horizontal hallucination" (Ratcliffe 2016: 219):

"[S]uppose that one's perception of an entity, such as a chair, were associated with a horizontal structure more usually integral to the experience of a different entity or kind of entity, such as a hungry tiger. In one sense, the content of the experience would be unchanged. One would see a brown entity with four legs, a flat, horizontal surface, and a vertical back. At the same time, one would have the 'feeling' of encountering something different. [...] Thus, as one encounters the chair, one does not see something for sitting on, but something that offers threat, something to flee from, something menacing." (Ratcliffe 2016: 218)

The fact that there are recorded cases of people who suffer from horizontal hallucinations has obvious consequences for the question as to whether horizontal anticipations can be reduced to background beliefs: It is true that horizontal anticipations are usually in harmony with the

background beliefs that give rise to them. In cases of horizontal hallucination, however, something goes wrong: The perceived chair is presented to you as a chair; you know it is a chair; and you know that chairs are not dangerous. Yet, you nevertheless experience the chair as a threat, as watching you, and as being about to attack. This is all part of your experience, not of your background beliefs. Of course, perceptual hallucinations occur only rarely, usually as a result of mental illness. But this is not important for our argument. That cases of mismatch between horizontal anticipations and background beliefs are possible at all makes the prospects of reducing the former to the latter dim.¹¹

As Husserl repeatedly stresses, it is characteristic of the way in which physical things appear to us that perceptual experiences present these things *in perspectives* or, to use a distinctively Husserlian notion, *in adumbrations*. However, it is important to realize that we are not talking about empirical matters of fact here. As Husserl argues, “[i]t is neither an accident of the own peculiar sense of the physical thing nor a contingency of our ‘human constitution,’ that ‘our’ perception can arrive at physical things themselves only through mere adumbrations of them” (Husserl 1982: 90-91). On some occasions, Husserl even goes so far to declare that not even God could perceive physical things in a non-perspectival manner (Husserl 1982: 95). But this view has been met with criticism. Consider the following counterexample by Wayne Martin:

“Imagine some kind of conscious intelligence that is embodied in a kind of fog. We humans perceive an object from a single perspective, but the fogging consciousness simply fogs all around it, taking in all sides at once. Many animals manage to integrate sensory input from two sides of their body; why shouldn’t the fogging being integrate views of an object from every side?” (Martin 2005: 210)

Unlike humans, Martin’s fogging being could perceive all aspects of a physical object at once, which seems to undermine Husserl’s claim that perception is *essentially* perspectival. However, as Michael Madary has recently remarked, Martin’s counter-example misses something important, namely that “the way that properties are given to us in adumbrations (perspectivally) is such that their appearances change in a way that is sensitive to self-generated movement” (Madary 2017: 183). The point of Madary’s argument may be summarized as follows: While it is true that a fogging being would perceive physical objects in a way that is radically different from how human perception works, it does not follow from

¹¹ Cf. Smith 2010 for further arguments that “the phenomenology [of co-givenness] itself is belief-independent.” (Smith 2010, 736)

Martin's counterexample that a fogging being would not be subjected to perspectivity at all. It is, for instance, implausible to assume that an object would not appear differently to the fogging being if the object was located at different positions within the fog or if the object and the fogging being were in relative motion to one another. So, all that Martin's counter-example shows is that perspectivity may take different forms, depending on certain contingencies in the physiological make-up of the perceiving subject. But this does not change the fact that even for a fogging being there is always more to a physical object than can be actualized in one single intentional act, and that perception is an open-ended process in which ever-changing appearances of objects are constantly projected against horizons through which we anticipate courses of possible further experiences.¹²

One final aspect of Husserl's conception of horizontal intentionality we would like to emphasize is its epistemological dimension. *Both* self-givenness and co-givenness determine the overall phenomenal character of any perceptual experience. But only what is self-given can be immediately justified, while what is co-given can only be inferentially justified. As Husserl puts it, "the *primal source of all legitimacy* lies in immediate evidence and, more narrowly delimited, in *originary evidence*, or in originary givenness motivating it" (Husserl 1982: 338). Imagine again perceiving a desk whose underside is currently out of view. By looking at the desk, you are immediately justified in believing that there is a desk, that its surface has a certain color, that there is a book on it, etc. All this is given to you originally and you are immediately justified in believing it *because* it is given originally. This is not true with respect to your belief that the desk has four legs. While the anticipation that you will see four legs when you change the perspective is part of the overall phenomenal character of the experience, this anticipation is not originally given but co-given as a motivated possibility. By looking at the surface of the desk, your belief that it has four legs may be *psychologically* immediate and the belief may be justified, but it is only *inferentially justified* since its justification depends on background beliefs concerning the four-leggedness of most other tables you have encountered so far. Thus, the difference between self-givenness and co-givenness is a phenomenological difference with crucial epistemological implications. But let us, before we discuss the epistemological implication of the horizontal structure of intentionality in more detail, summarize the findings of this section by formulating eight hypotheses about perceptual experience.

¹² Cf., for a detailed phenomenological analysis of a similar thought experiment in which a sphere of eyeballs is wrapped around a physical object, Wiltsche 2013.

H1: Perceptual experience is perspectival. You cannot perceive physical objects in their entirety, there are always aspects and features that are not in the center of attention right now. However, some of these aspects and features are co-given within experience. Experiences have an *inner horizon*.

H2: Perceptual experiences do not present their objects as being isolated, objects are always given as being embedded in a surrounding world. Experiences have an *outer horizon*.

H3: Perceptual experience is never exhausted by what is actual. To perceive a physical object also means to anticipate courses of possible future experiences. Hence, perception is a composite of interwoven full and empty intentions such that certain aspects of the perceived object are presented and others are co-given. Self-givenness cannot be without co-givenness.

H4: Horizontal anticipations are usually grounded in motivated possibilities, i.e. in possibilities that are grounded in corresponding background beliefs.

H5: The horizontal nature of perceptual experience underscores the holistic structure of experience. The way you perceive is shaped by previous experiences and by your background beliefs. On this view then, experiencing is an open-ended process in which new appearances are constantly projected against horizons through which we anticipate courses of possible further experiences.¹³

H6: While it is true that perceptual horizons are shaped by previous experiences and background beliefs, the horizon must not be confused with or reduced to a set of beliefs or inclinations to believe. Co-givenness is part of your experience's phenomenology; it is belief-independent although horizontal anticipations are usually in accordance with your background beliefs.

H7: Both self-givenness and co-givenness determine the overall phenomenal character of any perceptual experience. But only what is self-given can be immediately justified, while what is co-given can only be inferentially justified.

¹³ Importantly, the holistic character of horizontal intentionality tells us something about the structure of experience, not about the structure of experiential justification. Experiences can be a source of immediate justification despite their holistic structure (cf. Berghofer 2017: section 2.4).

H8: The perspectivity of perception is not a shortcoming of human beings but an essential property of perception.

3. Justification and co-givenness

Phenomenologists typically stress that epistemology must be preceded by phenomenological descriptions. If the aim is to determine the epistemic force of, say, beliefs, imaginings, or perceptual experiences, then the first step must be to clarify how these different types of mental states differ phenomenologically. The more precise the phenomenological description, the more accurate the resulting conception of perceptual justification can be. What this means concretely shall be exemplified in the present section. In particular, we will show how the distinction between self-givenness and co-givenness helps to solve several pressing epistemological problems and leads to a conception of perceptual justification that is superior to a currently popular proposal, Michael Huemer's principle of phenomenal conservatism.

Let us begin by introducing a philosophically significant real-world example, the phenomenon of blindsight. Chris Tucker describes the phenomenon as follows:

"Subjects who have a damaged visual cortex often emphatically report that they cannot see anything within a certain region of their visual field. Nonetheless, such subjects often show remarkable sensitivity (though less than properly functioning humans) to such things as motion, the orientation of objects, and the wavelength of light within their reported 'blind spot'. These subjects are typically surprised to discover their success, thinking that they were making random guesses." (Tucker 2010: 530)

Assume an experiment in which a blindsighted person S is asked to look at a piece of paper with a circle in S's region of normal sight (region R1) and a triangle within S's blind spot (region R2). On the basis of what we know from similar experiments that were actually performed by psychologists, it is to be expected that S will judge that there is a circle in R1 and a triangle in R2. Now, the epistemologically relevant question is whether or not both judgments are equally justified. Building on the results of the previous sections, a phenomenological answer to this question goes as follows: The first step is to assume that her perceptual experiences make it seem to S that there is a circle in R1 and a triangle in R2. Without this assumption, S's judgment that there is a circle in R1 and a triangle in R2 would appear mysterious. However, the second step is to point to a crucial *phenomenological* difference between the ways in which

the circle and the triangle appear to S. With respect to the circle, it seems safe to assume that S's perceptual experience has a presentive character. S is visually aware of the circle and the circle is presented to her in a "fleshed out" manner. But this is not true of the triangle. Phenomenologically construed, the most plausible view is that, although the triangle is somehow visually present to S, it is only *co-given* to S in the sense that S *anticipates* a triangle in R2. The triangle is in the horizon of S's attention, but it is not immediately present to her. Note that this *phenomenological* difference is in perfect harmony with the relevant *epistemological* difference. S's perceptual experience provides her with *immediate* justification for believing that there is a circle in R1. Since she sees that there is a circle, she is immediately justified in believing that there is one. Intuitively, however, S's perceptual experience does not provide her with immediate justification that there is a triangle in R2. Of course, if S knows that her blindsight faculties are reliable in the sense that most of her previous blindsight seemings have turned out to be veridical, S may have mediate justification for the belief that there is a triangle in R2. But such a justification is not immediate. A plausible conception of perceptual justification should avoid the consequence that blindsight seemings can be a source of immediate justification (cf. Ghijsen 2016: 17-19 and Smithies 2014: 103 f.). And this is exactly what a phenomenological conception of perceptual justification is able to deliver: Although the triangle is, in some sense, visually present to S, she is not immediately justified in believing that there is a triangle in R2 because, unlike the circle in R1, the triangle is only co-given within S's perceptual horizon. In a similar sense in which seeing a laptop's frontside automatically comes with anticipations concerning its backside, S anticipates that, if she were to move her head accordingly, she would become directly aware of a triangle. Presumably, this horizontal anticipation is motivated by S's background belief that her blindsight faculties were reliable in the past.

As these considerations are supposed to show, phenomenology provides us with the means to offer a satisfying approach to the epistemological problem of blindsight. To be sure, one might want to object that our results are trivial because no one would disagree that S's seemings differ in their justificatory force. This, however, is not true. Michael Huemer's principle of phenomenal conservatism (PC) has it that every seeming is a source of prima facie justification.

PC: "If it seems to S as if P, then S thereby has at least prima facie justification for believing that P." (Huemer 2001: 99)

It is a standard objection against PC that its proponents fail to provide a sufficiently detailed characterization of what seemings actually are (cf., e.g., Tooley 2013; Wiltsche 2015). This neglect has severe epistemological consequences, as the problem of blindsight shows: Proponents of PC accept that blindsighted subjects have seemings about what is going on in their blind spots. However, since the very point of PC is that every seeming is a source of immediate justification, proponents of PC are thereby also forced to hold that blindsight seemings are a source of immediate justification (Tucker 2010: 530 f.; Huemer 2013: 333). On our view, this consequence is implausible and could be avoided if proponents of PC paid closer attention to a phenomenological description of how co-given seemings (such as S's triangle seeming) differ from presentive seemings (such as S's circle seeming).

The point we are trying to make can also be emphasized by considering two other influential counterexamples against Huemer's PC. The first is Markie's example of *cognitive malfunction*:

"Suppose that I perceive the walnut tree in my yard, and, having learned to identify walnut trees visually, it seems to me that it is a walnut tree. The same phenomenological experience that makes it seem to me that the tree is a walnut also makes it seem to me that it was planted on April 24, 1914. Nothing in the phenomenological experience or my identification skills supports things seeming this way to me. There is no date-of-planting sign on the tree, for example. Cognitive malfunction is the cause of its seeming to me in perception that the tree was planted on that date." (Markie 2005: 357)

In this example, a visual experience is accompanied by two seemings with very different contents.

S1:¹⁴ "This tree is a walnut."

S2: "This tree was planted on April 24, 1914."

Intuitively, one is only justified in believing S1, but not S2. However, if S2 is a seeming without being a justifier, then Huemer's PC is refuted. Like in the earlier case, however, there is an obvious and epistemologically significant phenomenological difference between the givenness of S1 and S2. In Markie's example, one's perceptual experience has a presentive phenomenal

¹⁴ In what follows, "S1" and "S2" refer either to the mental state—seeming 1—that has a specific content or to the content itself.

character with respect to the tree and its distinctive features. Thus, the experience provides immediate justification for believing that this is a (walnut) tree. But this is not true with respect to S2. The experience one has in this situation simply does not present a content that would specify the date of the tree's planting. Hence, S2 is just an empty seeming.

Considering Markie's example, we take the phenomenological difference between S1 and S2 to be fairly obvious. S1 and S2 are given differently, and the point of our proposal is that the way in which contents are given is of fundamental epistemological significance. But, of course, one could question whether the difference between S1 and S2 is really as obvious as we take it to be. What, precisely, is the difference between contents such as "there is a tree," "the leaves have a distinctive shape," and "the leaves are green" on the one hand and "this tree was planted on April 24, 1914" on the other? And how does this difference come about? Since a complete answer to this question would lead us too far afield, we shall restrict ourselves to one aspect that seems particularly relevant in the present context. Following the results of the previous sections, contents such as "there is a tree," "the leaves have a distinctive shape," and "the leaves are green" are given in perspectives and come with certain (pre-reflective) anticipations of how the tree will look from different angles or how the leaves will appear when the sun sets, etc. But this is not the case with respect to the date of the tree's planting. That the tree was planted on April 24, 1914 is not given in perspectives. One does not have anticipations of how this content would look differently if one were to circle the tree. What this shows is that the content in question is not perceptual in any straightforward sense of the term. The perceptual experience one has may cause the belief that S2, but S2 is no content a perception could immediately justify. We may thus conclude that perceptual experiences can only justify contents that are perspectively given and that come with horizontal anticipations.

Let us now turn to Markie's second counterexample, that of *wishful thinking*:

"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 (PC), the belief that it is gold has *prima facie* justification for both of us. Yet, certainly, my wishful thinking should not gain my belief the same positive epistemic status of defeasible justification as your learned identification skills." (Markie 2005: 357)

Cases of wishful thinking are often used to argue against internalist conceptions of justification.¹⁵ Huemer responds to this challenge by, first, biting the bullet and by, second, pointing out that an experience's justificatory force is not affected by its etiology: "When the subject is unaware of an appearance's etiology, that etiology is irrelevant to what it is rational for the subject to believe." (Huemer 2013: 344) While we agree with Huemer that, in principle, the etiology of an experience cannot determine its justificatory force, Markie's example nevertheless poses a problem for Huemer. If the novice's perceptual experience has a presentive character only with respect to the content "this is a yellow pebble," but not with respect to "this is a gold nugget," then it is implausible that the novice is immediately justified in believing that she is in fact dealing with a gold nugget.

However, be that as it may, the problem with Markie's example is still that it is underspecified with respect to how the pebble is presented within experience. Do the novice's and the expert's experiences differ phenomenologically? Or does the difference only lie in their respective background knowledge? Does the novice's wishful thinking result in an *illusion* of gold, similar to when one is desperately looking for a loved one and has the illusion that some stranger looks exactly like the person one is looking for? Or is the novice having an empty seeming like when it seems to a gambler that this specific slot machine will win?¹⁶

While we are in no position to provide an account of how it is for an expert to experience gold and how to distinguish a gold nugget from an ordinary yellow pebble, we believe that delving into the phenomenon of *perceptual learning* might provide us with the answers we are looking for. Perceptual learning "refers to an increase in the ability to extract information from the environment, as a result of experience and practice with stimulation coming from it" (Gibson 1969: 3). Assume that you are looking at a piece of paper with two lines that slightly differ in length. At time t_1 you are unable to spot the difference in length. It visually seems to you that both lines have the same length. Yet, after some practice, the content of your experience has changed in a way that allows you to spot the difference at time t_2 . Now, it visually seems to you that the lines differ in length. It is plausible to assume that you are immediately justified in believing that the lines differ in length at t_2 , simply because you can see it.

¹⁵ However, as proponents of internalism have also pointed out, Huemer's PC seems particularly vulnerable to such objections. Audi, for instance, complains that Huemer cannot exclude cases "in which one already believes p wholly on the basis of a desire that it be true and lacks an intuition (or other basic ground) that it is true" (Audi 2013: 200). The problem to which Audi alludes to here is that such seemings lack the distinctive phenomenal character that is typically associated with justification-conferring experiences (Audi 2013: 189).

¹⁶ To be sure, the precise phenomenal character of the novice's seeming is irrelevant to Huemer because for him every seeming provides prima facie justification.

The point of this example is that perceptual learning can not only affect the horizon of experiences but even their presentive character. In philosophical debates, “cases of perceptual learning have often been used to show that through learning we come to represent new properties in perception, which we did not represent prior to learning” (Conolly 2017: section 3.1). In line with this, Siegel has argued “that being able to visually recognize things such as your own neighborhood, pine trees, or John Malkovich can influence how those things look to you when you see them” (Siegel 2017: xiii). Siegel adds that this insight has crucial epistemological consequences: “For instance, consider a tree expert and a non-expert who look at the same pine tree, and the expert gets more justification to believe it’s a pine tree than the non-expert gets, because the expert’s experience has the content *x is a pine tree*.” (Siegel 2017: 75) Conolly comes to a similar conclusion: “The idea is that the best way to explain the change in perception is that perception *represents* [our emphasis] the property of *being a pine tree after*, but not before, learning takes place. That property becomes part of the content of perception: it comes to be *presented* [our emphasis] in perceptual experience.” (Conolly 2017: section 3.1) Note, however, that Conolly oscillates between two different terms here, those of *representation* and *presentation*. On our view, this terminological ambiguity signifies an important difference. Is the property of being a pine tree merely *represented* in experience, like in the earlier examples of blindsight and cognitive malfunction, where the triangle in R2 and the tree’s planting date were only emptily represented? Or is the property of being a pine tree more akin to a *presented* content such as “there is a circle in R1” or “the tree has green leaves”?

Let us consider one final episode that is analogous to Markie’s example of *wishful thinking* (and based on a true event):

Philipp and Steven are looking for porcini. Philipp has been familiar with porcini for many years. He knows what they look like and he can distinguish them from other mushrooms by sight. Steven has just begun to become familiar with porcini. Theoretically, he knows what they look like but he is unable to distinguish them from other mushrooms by sight. Philipp and Steven are both looking at a mushroom, which, in fact, is a porcino. To both of them, the mushroom’s cap looks brown and the stem looks white. However, Philipp’s and Steven’s perceptual experiences differ phenomenologically. To Philipp, the cap does not just look brown, it looks porcino-brown, and the stem does not just look white, it looks porcino-white. Steven’s perceptual experience does not have such a distinctive phenomenology. However, due to wishful thinking it seems to him that the mushroom is a porcino.

In this example, it is safe to say that Philipp's and Steven's perceptual experiences differ phenomenologically, and that only Philipp is justified in believing that he has found a porcino. However, the question is whether Philipp is immediately or inferentially justified in holding this belief?¹⁷ Similarly, in the case of *Wishful Thinking*, only the expert appears to be justified in believing that the pebble is gold. But is she immediately or inferentially justified?

It seems to us that a proper phenomenological analysis suggests that the respective experiences of Philipp, the tree-expert, and the gold-expert not only represent distinctive features, but also have a presentive character with respect to these properties. It does not just empty seem to Philipp that the mushroom in front of him is a porcino. Since he underwent a process of perceptual learning, he has a presentive character with respect to distinctive porcino-characteristics. Likewise in the other examples discussed, where the experts' experiences are a source of immediate justification for the exact same reason. The novices' experiences, on the other hand, lack this distinctive phenomenal character, which is why they are not a source of immediate justification. Thus, phenomenological analyses have also proven to be fundamental for discussing the problem of *wishful thinking*.

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¹⁷ Of, course, psychologically speaking, he is immediately justified. He does not need to make any conscious inferences. However, the question is whether his justification is epistemologically immediate, i.e., whether his experience is sufficient for providing immediate justification or whether he is in need of epistemic support from his background beliefs.

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