

Research Statement

In my dissertation, I argue for an account of experience that is superior to the two dominant kinds of views on perceptual experience: relationalism and standard representationalism. Proponents of the former, I argue, cannot accommodate many conceivable effects beliefs may have on the phenomenal character of experience. Proponents of the latter can accommodate them, but in doing so undermine what they think is experience's rational role: justifying beliefs. On my view, the rational role of experience is to make rational background-view relative transitions to e.g. perceptual judgments. Experience plays this role no matter what. Moreover, experience so construed can still provide the necessary friction with the world that provides us with challenges to modify our views, as long as it is granted, as everyone does, that our experience can diverge from our expectations.

The account I recommend is novel, draws on philosophy of science, contemporary philosophy of perception, and epistemology, and rehabilitates a thinker – Norwood Russell Hanson – whose work has been unduly neglected. It also suggests that the debate between relationalists and representationalists about whether experience has representational content is not as important as is commonly held. Indeed, I contend that one can go either way – as long as one gets the rational role of experience right.

Taking this insight seriously suggests that many debates in which experience figures must be reconstrued, given that they typically depend on construals of the rational role of experience that I think we should reject. Thinking about these debates in light of the account I recommend thus promises to have transformative effects.

More specifically, my position invites interventions in e.g. debates *on the role of experience in epistemic justification*. Example questions are: how does the position stand vis-a-vis foundationalist or coherentist approaches, or vis-a-vis positions like phenomenal conservatism, dogmatism, or evidentialism? This is a rich area of research and several papers in which I argue in favor of the account I recommend over other positions are conceivable. Currently, I am working on a paper on related issues. In it, I consider what has come to be known as the New Evil Demon Problem in *epistemology* and *philosophy of mind*. My account, I argue, provides a novel way of responding to this problem, one that differs from responses issued by a) relationalists and b) epistemic disjunctivists. (For an overview of current projects, see <https://rajarosenhagen.info/research>).

Another paper I am currently working on falls into the area of *general philosophy of science*. In it, I argue against Gerhard Schurz's claim that to avoid a position according to which reasoning in science is inevitably circular, we must rehabilitate a notion of theory-neutral observation. Vicious circularity, I agree, must be avoided. But a notion of *theory-neutral observation*, I argue, is neither available nor required. Rather, we can accept that observations are thoroughly theory-laden and at the same time avoid circularity that is vicious.

Generally, the account I recommend promises to allow interventions also in debates that focus on the question how to rationally reconstruct changes of scientific theories and scientific concepts, particularly to the extent that such changes are driven empirically.

I also contend that the position I advocate is especially compatible with a way of thinking that is currently gaining a lot of traction within the *cognitive sciences*. On predictive coding accounts, the generation of percepts is massively influenced by top-down effects. Since my position allows for experience both to be massively affected by background states and to exert empirical constraint, I believe that my position, in contrast to alternative ones, dovetails rather nicely with such accounts.

Furthermore, my position allows interventions in debates within *social philosophy*, particularly in the debate on implicit bias. What is important to me in this area is to make sense of the oft-advanced claim that ideology manages experience while at the same time to properly locate the irrationality biased perception involves. On my view, such irrationality does not lie in how experience contributes to the formation of one's beliefs. (Recall, on my view, experience plays its rational role no matter what.) Rather, the irrationality lies in the background views biased subjects embrace. Another, somewhat related avenue I would like to pursue involves exploring to what extent the idea that the rationality of transitions to perceptual judgments (and, by

extension, actions) is relative to the subject's background view can accommodate a distinctive feature of **feminist epistemology**: the idea that knowers are situated and that their rationality expresses itself from, and is informed by, the perspective of e.g. their gendered worldviews (recently, I have come to think that the Jaina doctrine of *anekāntavāda* – of the *non-one-sided nature* (of reality) – may be helpful in thinking about situated knowledge, too).

In my future research, I want to eventually explore the implications my account has in all the areas just outlined. Moreover, I want to also apply my account of doxastically variable experience to **moral perception**. (To say that experience is doxastically variable is to say that it can be affected by what we believe.) In doing so, I want to draw on material from thinkers as diverse as Aristotle (on friendship), Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch (on love as just attention and unselfing), and the Buddhist monk Buddhaghosa (on unselfing, purification of vision and view), to ultimately develop a **cross-cultural account of moral progress** that emphasizes the importance of cultivating true friendships for the improvement of vision and view, and the importance of unselfing, understood as a transformation of experience and as a purification of vision and view that allows us to see others more clearly, justly, and more realistically, and thus enables us to act better toward them.

In the past, I have variously presented on Iris Murdoch's conception of love (construed as a moral concept) as just attention. In a forthcoming publication, I argue that her emphasis on unselfing, just attention, and the purification of vision and view neatly complements, and is complemented by, Aristotle's account of why in a flourishing life, (true) friendship is necessary. I have already presented on Buddhist elements in Murdoch's thought and will give another presentation on this topic at the upcoming Eastern APA. Moreover, since part of my background is a thorough education in Indian Studies, I am familiar with Indian culture, Indian philosophy (I have also taught in this area: see <https://rajarosenhagen.info/courses-taught>), and various Indian languages. Accordingly, I am in a very good position to fruitfully draw on Buddhist conceptions (and on Indian philosophical traditions more generally).

Incidentally, I think that applying my account to moral perception provides a particularly good test for it; ideally, doing so will show how well the account fares in an area of research for which it was not originally devised. Moreover, developing an account of moral progress that is informed by considerations within philosophy of science, epistemology, and contemporary analytic philosophy of perception and that draws on sources as varied as the ones I am considering is a project that has never been attempted. It is, I think, philosophically interesting and fruitful, but also important as it promises to draw well-deserved attention to the rich and largely unexplored resources non-Western accounts (e.g. of perception) make available for **philosophical theorizing**, which, I think, rather than as a parochial endeavor, should be understood as a **global, diverse, and inclusive enterprise**, in which different voices from different traditions ought to be acknowledged and considered.

A final project worth mentioning is a **book project** I am currently working on with two colleagues (Rachel Fedock (Arizona State, USA) and Michael Kühler (Twente, NL)): "**Love, Justice, Autonomy**". For this volume, we are soliciting original contributions that address, *inter alia*, the following questions: how are we to understand loving relationships? Especially, how can they be just and preserve and foster the lovers' autonomy? Do they involve partiality, and what socio-political implications do such relationships bear in light of various accounts of love, justice, and autonomy? Incidentally, this project (for a detailed proposal see the link near the bottom of <https://rajarosenhagen.info/research/>) grew out of a previous collaboration with said colleagues during which we organized a panel on love and justice at the 2016 SEP-FEP in London. In my contribution, "Murdochian Presentationalism," I combined my take on doxastically variable experience with a Murdochian account of just attention and used the resources of the resulting view to argue against unionist theories of romantic love.

In sum, in my future research, which generally grows out of the account of experience I develop in my dissertation, I will apply this account to a variety of rather different areas in philosophical research: epistemology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, philosophy of cognitive sciences/cognitive science, social philosophy, feminist epistemology, and comparative/cross-cultural philosophy.