

## Raja Rosenhagen, Ph.D., Ashoka University, **Research Statement**

My research interests have grown into their present shape from the beginning of my career as a philosophy student. As an undergraduate, I began my studies pursuing a Major in Indian Studies and Minors in Philosophy and Psychology. Half-way through, after having taken an extensive number of courses in all three subjects, I changed my Major to Philosophy (nevertheless keeping up with Hindi, Sanskrit, and taking further Psychology classes) and thus began to take philosophy even more seriously than before. Until then, I had already attended a large number of classes on various topics, including several classes on Plato, modern European philosophy, and analytic philosophy.

After shifting my main focus to Philosophy, initially, my main interests were in philosophy of science and logic. In my M.A. thesis, I argued that Bas van Fraassen's Constructive Empiricism fares better than Logical Empiricism in terms of his account of scientific theories and in terms of his arguments against scientific realism, but that he provides no good account of how to deal with the so-called *theory-ladenness of observation*. While van Fraassen may succeed in providing an account of science that empiricists are comfortable with, he does not address the question of how empiricists ought to think about experience in the first place.

For me, this discovery initiated a shift of interest toward the question of how to characterize experience and, thus, a shift from general philosophy of science to epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of mind and philosophy of perception. This became the first main cluster of my research interests, which I pursued at length in my dissertation. In it, I defended the claim that the kind of presentationalist account of experience developed by Anil Gupta is superior to the two currently dominant kinds of views on perceptual experience: relationalism and representationalism. Drawing, in part, on my background in philosophy of science, I looked at the contemporary debate between representatives of these camps through the lens of the following question: can proponents of the various positions accommodate effects that background doxastic states (such as belief) could have on experience—effects such as theory-ladenness, expertise, cognitive penetration, or projection effects (like *wishful experiencing*, say)?

Proponents of the most prominent relationalist accounts of perceptual experience, I showed, cannot currently accommodate many conceivable effects that beliefs (and other doxastic states) may have on the phenomenal character of experience. And although representationalists can accommodate such effects in principle, I argued that the defender of the best-developed account of this kind, Susanna Siegel, manages to do so only at a cost that struck me as too high—viz. by undermining what she takes to be experience's rational role: justifying beliefs. On Gupta's presentationalist view, in contrast, the rational role of experience—which he dubs the *Hypothetical Given*—is to make rational background-view relative transitions to, e.g., perceptual judgments. I argued that with some minor modifications, experience can play this role no matter what background effects beliefs may have on our experience, as long as it is granted (as everyone does) that our experience is not determined by such effects and can still diverge from our expectations.

The defense I mounted for the presentationalist account and its core element, the *Hypothetical Given*, was novel, drew on philosophy of science, contemporary philosophy of perception and epistemology, and also served to rehabilitated a thinker—Norwood Russell Hanson—whose insightful work on theory-ladenness, I think, has been unduly neglected. It also suggested that the fundamental debate between relationalists and representationalists about whether or not experience has representational content is not as important as it is commonly taken to be. Indeed, I take it to be a significant fact that

the *Hypothetical Given* is compatible with either view (while entailing no commitment to representationalism or relationalism and being, in fact, at odds with elements of each).

In the closing chapter of my dissertation, I suggested that many debates in which experience plays an important role must be reconstrued, given that they typically depend on conceptions of the rational role of experience that I think we should reject. Thinking about these debates in light of the account I recommended thus promises to have transformative effects in them.

The second cluster of my philosophical interests is an analogue of the first in that it concerns the question how to think about experience as laden not with theory, but with value, and how such value-ladenness affect our conception of moral perception and action. This interest intensified through my growing fascination with Iris Murdoch's conception of love as just attention. I became convinced that love so construed is not just a central concept in morals, but also relevant epistemically. My interest in Murdoch, together with my background in Indian Studies, has in the meantime led me to also investigate Buddhist conceptions of experience, Jaina philosophy, and strands of the Bhakti tradition (allowing me to reconnect with my background in Indian Studies). My most recent interest in Philosophical Counselling, finally, is also related to this cluster of interests. For arguably, one way to construe the role of a philosophical counsellor is by seeing them as helping their counselees realize the ways their experience, and their responses to it, are shaped by various background states—which, in turn, may open up ways to understanding and change.

My administrative work as Associate Dean during the pandemic was very taxing, so I currently have a fairly large number of projects that I wish to finish up. Each of them is related to the two clusters sketched above. Most closely related to the first one are: a) a paper on the early reception of Hanson's view: *Off to a Bad Start. The Early Reception of Hanson's Notion of Theory-Ladenness*, b) a response to Gerhard Schurz on theory-ladenness: *No Theory-Neutral Observation Necessary*, c) a paper on cognitive penetration, predictive coding, and presentationalism: *Predictive Coding and Presentationalism – Natural Bedfellows?*, d) a paper on structural parallels between *anekāntavāda* (a central concept of Jaina Philosophy) and the *Hypothetical Given*: "*Anekāntavāda and the Hypothetical Given: Two Peas in a Pod?*", e) a paper on the application of the structure of reasoning implemented by the *Hypothetical Given* to practical reasoning: *Theoretically General, Practically Generalizable: the Hypothetical Given*, and f) an edited volume on the Prospects of Anil Gupta's *Reformed Empiricism*.

With respect to the second cluster, most closely related to it are the following paper projects: a) *RRME & EMRR: Rational Role of Moral Experience and Empiricist Moral Realism Reconstrued*, b) *Buddhist Elements in Murdochian Ethics*, c) *Murdoch on Love and Privacy*, d) *The Power of Love*, e) *Polyamory in a Murdochian Key*, f) *Inputs from Murdoch and Rosenberg for Philosophical Counselling* [R&R with minor revisions], as well as g) *Dual Character Concepts and the Idea of Perfection* (see <https://rajarosenhagen.info/research/> for a complete list and abstracts). I have also mapped out the plan for a monograph, tentatively entitled *Philosophy in the Key of Love. Murdochian Dialogues*. In it, I intend to integrate my interest in the two clusters mentioned above in by arguing how thinking about love as an epistemic notion and taking on board related insights from Buddhism and Jainism allows us to generate a conception on which moral and epistemic progress go hand in hand.

Currently, I am on sabbatical, which I am spending as a Visiting Lecturer at the University of Pittsburgh. My aim for this year is to get a good number of my pending paper projects out and to perhaps make some headway on the monograph and the edited volume as well. My general sense is that I have my work cut out for me—I certainly do not expect to run out of things to write about anytime soon.