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Phenomenologists on Perception and Hallucination: Husserl and Merleau-Ponty

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Abstract
There is a chasm in current analytic philosophy of perception between disjunctivists (and naïve realists), on the one hand, and 'conjunctivists' (intentionalists), on the other. For more than a decade, scholars of phenomenology have debated how classical phenomenologists such as Husserl and Merleau-Ponty are to be located vis-à-vis this chasm. While there seems to be an emerging consensus that Merleau-Ponty was a disjunctivist avant la lettre, how to interpret Husserl remains contested.

The philosophy of perception is an area in which we have seen a rapprochement between analytic philosophy and phenomenology in recent years. Scholars of phenomenology have been particularly concerned with the question of where to locate the classical phenomenologists vis-à-vis what Tim Crane has referred to as ‘the greatest chasm’ in current (analytic) philosophy of perception (Crane & French, 2016; cf. Crane, 2006). This chasm opens between so-called disjunctivists and naïve realists, on the one hand, and their ‘representationalist’ or ‘intentionalist’ opponents, on the other. Since the nature of perceptual experience is also a key topic in classical phenomenology, the question naturally arises: On which side of the chasm do we find the phenomenologists? In this article, I review and evaluate the proposals of various scholars of phenomenology, focusing on interpretations of Merleau-Ponty and (especially) Husserl. It will emerge that while there is something of a consensus that Merleau-Ponty was a disjunctivist avant la lettre, where to place Husserl remains a matter of dispute.

1 | PRELIMINARIES

To the uninitiated, the conflict at the heart of current analytic philosophy of perception seems to involve a bewildering multitude of combatants (disjunctivists, relationalists, naïve realists, intentionalists, defenders of the ‘highest common factor’ view, etc.). Simplifying somewhat, however, the main opposition is between philosophers who...
believe perceptual experiences are fundamentally representations, and those who hold that perceptual experiences – in non-hallucinatory cases – are fundamentally relations to bits of the external environment. According to the former view, experiences have correctness or veridicality conditions. Thus, an experience may represent the world as being different from the way it is – perhaps radically so. As Dretske put it, I can have a black horse experience in the presence of an actual black horse. But I can have the very same (type of) experience even when no horse is present – if I am hallucinating a black horse (Dretske, 1995, p. 24). The difference between a black-horse perception and a matching black-horse hallucination is not intrinsic to the particular experiences undergone, but is down to others factors such as the etiology of the experience, or its relation to other experiences.

\textbf{Relationalists} (or ‘naïve realists’), by contrast, think of an actual perception of a black horse as being a relation of ‘acquaintance’ with the animal itself (and some of its properties). Since it is the very experience one enjoys on such an occasion that is said to be fundamentally a relation of acquaintance, it is not possible to have an experience of the very same kind in a hallucinatory case (because in such a case, there is no animal with which one is acquainted). The relationalists thereby commit themselves to the view known as ‘disjunctivism’, according to which there is a fundamental difference between genuine perceptual experiences and their possible hallucinatory counterparts.\footnote{Although the term ‘chasm’ might suggest an unbridgeable gap between the relational and representational camps, it seems it is possible to maintain that perceptual experiences are fundamentally both relations and representations (Logue, 2014; cf. McDowell, 2013; Schellenberg, 2011). While some relationalists deny altogether that perceptual experiences are representations (or have correctness conditions) (Brewer, 2006; Travis, 2004), I take it that all classical phenomenologists would have opposed such a view. This follows already from the key phenomenological insight that every perceptual experience bites off more than it can chew, as it were: every experience anticipates currently unperceived details (surface markings, occluded bits, rear sides, etc.), and those anticipations may turn out to be incorrect. So the only question it makes sense to ask is whether, additionally, phenomenologists may have been committed to relationalism and/or disjunctivism. Since the recent scholarly debates I will be reviewing have almost exclusively focused on the question of whether Merleau-Ponty and Husserl were committed to disjunctivism, this too will be my focus here.}

Two final comments before we get started. First, I shall take disjunctivism to be the view that veridical perceptual experiences differ intrinsically – qua experiences – from hallucinatory ones. I shall not be concerned with the question of how to think of perceptual illusions. Hallucinatory and illusory experiences both contrast with veridical perceptions. But illusions are genuine perceptions in which a perceived object appears to have at least one property it doesn’t have, whereas hallucinations are normally understood not to be perceptions at all: the ‘objects’ with which they seem to give us perceptual contact do not exist.

Secondly, however, classical phenomenologists such as Husserl and Merleau-Ponty do not always distinguish sharply between illusion and hallucination. Often they simply speak of illusions, also when the context makes it clear that they are actually talking about (what we would call) hallucinations.\footnote{Thus, in some of the quotes below, the term ‘illusion’ appears. The passages in question mostly concern hallucination, however, or perhaps a broader category of ‘perceptual error’ that includes both illusion and hallucination. I shall take these quotes to be about hallucination, bracketing the question of whether they are also concerned with perceptual illusion.} At first blush, Merleau-Ponty’s disjunctivist commitments seem obvious. It is easy to find remarks in the Phenomenology of Perception that have a disjunctivist or relationalist ring to them. ‘The difference between illusion and perception is intrinsic’, Merleau-Ponty writes (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 310). And he emphasizes that ‘To see red is to see an actually existing red. ... if there is no red or blue over there, then I say that I have not really seen them’ (ibid.: 393). However, in and of themselves such remarks are in fact open to a non-disjunctive reading. For even a (non-disjunctivist) representationalist can agree there is an ‘intrinsic’ difference between a perception and its
hallucinatory counterpart. For instance, they might say that a black-horse perception is a conjunction of a black-horse experience and a certain etiology involving an actual black horse; whereas an indistinguishable black-horse hallucination is a conjunction of a black-horse experience and a very different etiology – one that will not involve the actual presence of a black horse. Given this, non-disjunctivist representationalists – or conjunctivists, as I shall say from now on – can of course agree that if I really perceive a black horse, one such must be present. Following on from that, they can accept that there is a sense in which a perception differs ‘inextricably’ from a hallucination – it is just not a difference in the experience undergone.

Commentators often reject such non-disjunctive (or conjunctive) readings of the relevant passages in Merleau-Ponty (Allen, 2019; Romdenh-Romluc, 2011, p. 161), however. There are at least two lines of thought that make it overwhelmingly plausible that Merleau-Ponty is indeed articulating a disjunctivist view. The key idea behind the first argument is that unless Merleau-Ponty is committed to disjunctivism, certain passages in the *Phenomenology of Perception* are blatantly fallacious. Thus, consider what Merleau-Ponty say about a familiar (Cartesian) picture of experience:

> It has often been said that consciousness, by definition, does not allow for the separation between appearance and reality, and this was understood in the sense that, in terms of our self-knowledge, appearance would be reality. If I think I see or sense, then I see or sense beyond all doubt, whatever may be true of the external object. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 308)

On this view – which is not Merleau-Ponty’s – there can be no distinction between what seems to me to be true about my experience and what is true. Merleau-Ponty claims, however, that if this were correct, ‘then it is impossible for illusion and perception to have the same appearance …. The truth of perception and the falsity of illusion must each be marked by some intrinsic characteristic…’ (2012: 308).

How, though, is that supposed to follow? From:

1. If an experience appears to me to be *F*, then it is *F*,
2. illusions (i.e. hallucinations) and perceptions cannot have ‘the same appearance’.

Considered in isolation, the claim that (2) does follow ‘is a non sequitur’, as Rasmus Thybo Jensen points out (Jensen, 2013, p. 481). All that follows from (1) is something like (3):

3. If the experiences in hallucination and perception appear to be type-identical, then they are type-identical.

(2) only follows from (1) on the assumption that:

4. hallucinatory and perceptual experiences are not type-identical.

For if they are not identical, and (1) is true, then they cannot appear to be identical. In other words, Merleau-Ponty seem to be assuming disjunctivism about perception and hallucination. Since Merleau-Ponty holds that ‘illusion essentially does not present itself as an illusion’ (2012: 308), (2) must be rejected, and so – given disjunctivism – must (1):

We must surely deny perceptual consciousness full self-possession and the immanence that would exclude every illusion. If hallucinations are to be possible, consciousness must at some moment cease to know what it does. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 360)
What I have summarized here is essentially the line of thought reconstructed in Jensen (2013). If this is indeed Merleau-Ponty’s reasoning, it seems his disjunctivist-sounding remarks should be read as straightforward affirmations of a disjunctivist view.

There seems to be a second, more direct way to establish Merleau-Ponty’s disjunctivist and relationalist commitments. Consider the following passage:

Perception is just that kind of act where there can be no question of separating the act itself and the term upon which it bears. Perception and the perceived necessarily have the same existential modality, since perception is inseparable from the consciousness it has or rather that it is of reaching the thing itself. There can be no question of maintaining the certainty of perception by denying the certainty of the perceived thing. If I see an ashtray in the full sense of the word “see”, then there must be an ashtray over there. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 393)

Let me try to unpack what Merleau-Ponty is saying here. First of all, ‘act’ in phenomenological parlance means the same as ‘intentional experience’ (Husserl, 2001, p. 101). Thus, Merleau-Ponty is first of all saying that perception is a kind of experience the obtaining of which requires that its object exists. In other words: if the object does not exist, you cannot have that kind of experience. Secondly, this is so because perception is ‘the consciousness … of reaching the thing itself’. In other words, perceptual experience just is conscious contact with the thing itself. And that is why it makes no sense to think that you could have that kind of experience even if the thing did not exist. If the object did not exist, there would be nothing for you to be in experiential contact with. Now, if veridical perceptual experience fundamentally is the kind of experience that yields contact with an existing ordinary thing itself, it follows that a hallucinatory experience must be of a different kind. And thus when Merleau-Ponty is saying that the difference between hallucination and perception is ‘intrinsic’, he means they differ fundamentally qua experiences.

In sum, it seems clear that Merleau-Ponty has disjunctivist (and relationalist) commitments. Unsurprisingly, this is also the conclusion many commentators reach (Allen, 2019; Berendzen, 2013; Jensen, 2013; Romdenh-Romluc, 2011, ch. 6).

3 | HUSSERL: AN ONGOING CONTROVERSY

When we turn to the founder of the phenomenological movement – Edmund Husserl – things become more complicated. A. D. Smith set off a debate that is still ongoing when, in a 2008 paper, he proposed that Husserl was committed to disjunctivism. Smith made this suggestion with trepidation, stating the he feared many would regard his proposal as ‘silly’. And indeed, despite some qualified support for Smith’s thesis, the majority of commentators agree that Husserl could not have been a disjunctivist (Bower, 2020; Cimino, 2021; Romano, 2012; Staiti, 2015).5 However, the anti-disjunctivist readers disagree among themselves over the correct characterization of Husserl’s positive views.

3.1 | A. D. Smith’s disjunctivist interpretation

Very briefly stated, A. D. Smith motivates his disjunctive reading in the following way. According to Husserl, every existing thing has its ultimately harmonious system (or ‘manifold’) of possible experiences that pick out ‘precisely this thing and no other’ (Husserl, 1998, p. 127). Two qualitatively identical things have different ‘manifolds’. However, as Smith reads Husserl, there is no ultimately harmonious system of experiences pertaining to a hallucinated object, as there will always be a possible experience that reveals the unreality of the hallucinated object. Since Husserl also believes that each perceptual experience is essentially a member of whatever system or manifold of which it is a member, a commitment to disjunctivism follows. For, any veridical experience of an object will then belong essentially
to an ultimately harmonious system of experiences of which no hallucinatory experience is a member. Thus, there is an essential difference between perceptual and hallucinatory experiences. According to Smith, this is precisely the conclusion Husserl draws or 'is at least committed to' drawing (Smith, 2008, p. 331).

While Smith's disjunctivist reading has received tentative support from Hopp (2011, ch. 6; 2020, ch. 8) and Overgaard (2018), most commentators have rejected it. Some argue that Husserl is neither a disjunctivist nor a conjunctivist (i.e., a non-disjunctive representationalist), while others take him to be a conjunctivist. I start with the former interpretations.

### 3.2 | ‘Neither-nor’ interpretations

The general idea behind ‘neither-nor’ interpretations is that it is fundamentally wrong-headed – even ‘anachronistic’ (Cimino, 2021, p. 776) – to try to locate Husserl on either side of the contemporary analytic debates. To some extent, this sort of response is understandable. For instance, if one thinks of both disjunctivists and their representationalist opponents as arguing over how best to save ‘direct realism’, then Husserl the transcendental idealist would surely embrace neither position.

However, the core issue between disjunctivists and their opponents can be articulated independently of the metaphysical realist commitments of their typical defenders. The issue is: is there a fundamental difference between genuine perceptual experiences and their possible hallucinatory counterparts? It is not obvious why it should be thought wrong-headed to ask what Husserl’s view of the matter is. After all, it seems clear enough what Merleau-Ponty thinks, and Husserlian hardliners are usually comfortable comparing Husserl with Merleau-Ponty. So: does Husserl agree with Merleau-Ponty or does he not? Similarly, the charge of ‘anachronism’ can be dismissed, since, as Bower (2019) and Riccardi (2016) have argued, disjunctivist and relationalist ideas were floated by several of Husserl’s contemporaries, including fellow phenomenologists Scheler and Daubert.7

‘Neither-nor’ interpreters suggest, however, that, from a Husserlian point of view disjunctivism and conjunctivism are equally ‘untenable’ (Staiti, 2015, p. 133; cf. Cimino, 2021). According to Staiti, the problem is that disjunctivism and conjunctivism both presuppose that perception and hallucination ‘denote two distinct classes of act that can be distinguished without any reference to time’ (2015: 133). However, from a Husserlian point of view, hallucination is ‘exclusively a retrospective phenomenon’ (Staiti, 2015, p. 132). Staiti’s claim seems to be that Husserl thinks the object of a current perceptual experience always exists – indeed he claims it is ‘nonsensical’ to suggest the object of a current perceptual experience might not exist (Staiti, 2015, p. 133). It is only in retrospect that an experience can be a hallucination and thus have an object that does not exist.

As Overgaard (2018) argues, the view Staiti ascribes to Husserl seems blatantly incoherent. The view appears to entail the following. If I experience an object at time $t_1$, then at $t_2$, the object exists. Yet later, at $t_3$, the experience at $t_2$ may be revealed to have been a hallucination whose object did not exist. So, at $t_3$ it is revealed that the object did not exist at $t_2$. We have now said both that the object did and did not exist at $t_2$.

It would be a violation of the principle of charity to attribute such an incoherent view to Husserl unless there was no other way of interpreting what he says. But there is. In fact, it is clear that Husserl thinks the object of a current perceptual experience need not exist, and that he rejects the notion that hallucinations are ‘exclusively retrospective’ phenomena. Thus, in Thing and Space, Husserl writes:

> To perceive a house means to have the consciousness, to have the phenomenon, of a house standing there in the flesh [leibhaft dasstehenden]. How matters stand with the so-called existence of the house, with the true Being of the house, and what this existence means – about all that nothing is said. ... The perception, the phenomenon, of the house as standing there in the flesh is at once the belief that it is standing there. If we presentify the example of an unmasked hallucination, then we find in place of belief disbelief. Moreover, other examples offer themselves, ones in which we are at first perceptually
doubtful whether it is a case of perception or hallucination. ... Yet in all these cases the phenomenon of the standing there of the Object in the flesh persists or can persist. (Husserl, 1998, pp. 12-13)

In this passage, pace Staiti, Husserl seems to be suggesting that:

1. a (current or past) perceptual experience of x is compatible with x's non-existence;
2. it is not nonsensical to wonder whether an experience one is having might be hallucinatory; and
3. it is possible currently to experience a hallucination one knows to be hallucinatory.

Of course, a defender of the 'neither-nor' interpretation need not accept Staiti's claim that Husserl thinks hallucinations are retrospective phenomena (Cimino, 2021). But the interpretation faces a more fundamental difficulty. The question at issue is whether a genuine perceptual experience must differ, qua experience, from a possible hallucinatory counterpart. Disjunctivists say 'yes', conjunctivists say 'no'. For the latter, we must seek the (undeniable) difference between perception and hallucination elsewhere than in the intrinsic features of the experiences involved. Now, it is puzzling how 'neither-nor' interpreters think they can maintain that '[d]isjunctivism is entirely ruled out' (Cimino, 2021, p. 758) while also rejecting conjunctivism. If Husserl's view is that there need be no intrinsic experiential difference between a perception and a hallucination, then he is a conjunctivist. If he thinks there must be such a difference, he is a disjunctivist. The only alternative is to reject the question altogether, but on what conceivable grounds might Husserl have done that?

Until neither-nor interpreters have clarified these matters, they have not succeeded in articulating an alternative to the disjunctivist and conjunctivist readings. These, then, are the real contenders, and I will focus on them from now on.

3.3 | Conjunctivist readings

Claude Romano (2012) interprets Husserl as being committed to a 'conjunctive' view that Romano rejects in favor of a view he calls 'disjunctivism'. Unfortunately, however, Romano articulates these views in misleading ways that fail to connect with the analytic debates. Husserl's 'conjunctive' view is thus said to entail that a token experience can 'at the same time' be a perception and a hallucination (Romano, 2012, p. 440), though just how that is supposed to be possible, and what it might have to do with Husserl and/or the sort of conjunctivism discussed in this paper, remains elusive. Romano's 'disjunctivism', in turn, is a view that denies that genuine perceptual experiences and hallucinatory ones can be 'indistinguishable at the moment they are experienced' (ibid.: 440). Clearly, very few disjunctivists are Romano-style 'disjunctivists', and for obvious reasons. Introspectively indistinguishable hallucinations seem logically, metaphysically, nomologically, and even practically possible.

In my discussion of conjunctivist interpretations of Husserl, I shall therefore leave Romano aside and focus on Bower (2020), who presents a much stronger conjunctivist case and has the additional advantage of providing detailed arguments against A. D. Smith's original disjunctive reading.

The core of Bower's extended criticism (Bower, 2020, pp. 558–69) of A. D. Smith's proposal is the following. First, it is not possible to set hallucinatory experiences apart from genuine perceptual ones in the way Smith suggests Husserl attempts (cf. above). A genuine perception can fail to be a member of an ultimately harmonious manifold of experiences. Think of the experiences of a simple geometrical illusion like the vertical-horizontal illusion, in which a vertical line looks longer than a horizontal line of the same length. There is no ultimately harmonious set of experiences of a pair of equally long lines (one vertical and one horizontal), because the illusion persists even after one has exposed the illusion by measuring the lines. Thus, it seems there will be an irresolvable tension between the recurring illusory experiences and the experiences revealing the actual lengths of the lines.
Furthermore, it seems hallucinations can be members of ultimately harmonious concatenations of experiences. Suppose you hallucinate a mosquito for a brief moment, and then the mosquito seems gone. Must that experience be part of a system of experiences that is unharmonious? We lose track of mosquitoes all the time (unfortunately), and some of those that go missing might cease to exist altogether. Experiencing a mosquito one is unable to locate a moment later need not generate any inconsistency or disharmony.

To say that the notions of harmonious and unharmonious systems of experience do not map onto the distinction between perception and hallucination is not to say that Husserl could not have thought otherwise. Husserl was not infallible. He might have believed that perceptions are essentially members of harmonious systems of experiences, and hallucinations essentially members of disharmonious ones. Yet Bower’s point (I think) is that given the implausibility of the view, the principle of charity requires us to avoid attributing it to him unless forced to do so by his text. And the interpretation is not, as it happens, forced upon us (Bower, 2020, p. 576).

More importantly, even if Husserl did try to capture the difference between perception and hallucination in the way Smith suggests, it would still not follow that Husserl was committed to disjunctivism. At most, Husserl would be committed to the claim that a genuine perceptual experience and its possible hallucinatory counterpart have different relational properties. They would differ in terms of the experiential systems of which they were members. But disjunctivism is the view that there is an intrinsic difference between a genuine perceptual experience and a matching hallucinatory one.

In any case, Bower cites a number of passages in which Husserl seems to make anti-disjunctivist claims. Such passages, indeed, are not hard to find. In the Logical Investigations, for example, Husserl states that ‘differences of ... veridical and delusive perception, do not affect the internal, purely descriptive (or phenomenological) character of perception’ (Husserl, 2001, p. 83). Indeed, ‘the object’s real being or non-being is irrelevant to the true essence of the perceptual experience’ (ibid.: 104). On the basis of such statements, one might well contend with Bower that ‘Husserl’s views commit him to conjunctivism’ (Bower, 2020, p. 577).

3.4 | Disjunctivism again

In the wake of Bower’s paper, defenders of disjunctive interpretations of Husserl must meet a double challenge. First, they must be able to explain away the many apparently anti-disjunctive remarks in Husserl’s works. That is, those remarks must be shown to be amenable to a disjunctivism-friendly reading. Second, advocates of the disjunctive reading must provide some positive reason to think Husserl did have disjunctivist commitments.

Overgaard (2018) has suggested that the former challenge can be met in the following way. Suppose Husserl is talking about hallucinations that are subjectively indistinguishable from genuine perceptions. If so, it is hardly surprising that he say it does not affect the ‘purely descriptive (or phenomenological)’ character of an experience whether the experience is hallucinatory or perceptual. If there were a phenomenologically detectable, descriptive difference, the two experiences would hardly be indistinguishable! Indeed, it seems that for all that is evident to a reflecting phenomenologist, it would make no difference whether the experience was perceptual or hallucinatory – it would, as Husserl says, be ‘irrelevant’. And when Husserl is saying that it is always possible that a perceived object may turn out not to exist, we can again read him as inferring from the indistinguishability of perception and hallucination that one can never rule out the possibility that an experience is a hallucination (whose object does not exist). For all one can tell, as one is enjoying or undergoing the experience, one can never be certain it is not a hallucination. Importantly, all these readings are perfectly compatible with disjunctivism. All one needs to assume is that a hallucinatory and a perceptual experience can differ intrinsically in ways that will not be revealed by just having the experience or reflecting (naturally or phenomenologically) on it. But all disjunctivists who, unlike Romano, accept that hallucinations and perceptions can be indistinguishable – that is to say, virtually all disjunctivists – happily embrace that assumption.
Even if it is reasonable to read Husserl as also accepting the assumption in question – which it may not be (cf. Bower, 2020, pp. 571–2) – the disjunctivist interpretation still has to overcome the second hurdle. What positive reason is there to think Husserl was committed to disjunctivism?

Overgaard (forthcoming) suggests that such a reason emerges when we draw into the discussion Husserl’s analyses of sensory imagination (Phantasie). Husserl highlights two key differences between perception and sensory imagination (from now on simply ‘imagination’):

1. Perception presents its objects as given ‘in the flesh’ (leibhaft); imagination does not.

Let me comment briefly on each of these. According to (1), when you perceive an object it seems to be there, given or made manifest to you in its actual presence. When you merely imagine an object, it does not seem present or given in the same way. According to (2), a perception of a cup (say) is always of a particular cup. It thus makes sense to ask of two perceptions of a cup with features F1...Fn whether they are experiences of the same individual cup, or of two qualitatively identical ones. This question makes no sense in the case of imagination (Husserl, 1973, p. 169); hence acts of imagination do not single out individuals (Husserl, 2005, p. 665).

Now, while it is clear that hallucinations must be grouped with perceptions as far as the first difference is concerned, it seems Husserl must think hallucinations are like acts of imagination with respect to the second difference, Overgaard suggests. In outline, the argument is the following.

First, Husserl thinks objects of imagination cannot be individuals because they do not exist. It is, he says, the ‘characteristic of actually existing, which ... first of all makes something concrete and individual’ (Husserl, 2005, p. 665). Since Husserl believes hallucinated objects do not exist (Husserl, 1998, p. 12), he is committed to saying that they are not individuals either. The further commitment of disjunctivism follows if Husserl believes perceptions are essentially of individuals, while hallucinations are essentially not, and if this difference is intrinsic to the experiences undergone in the two cases.

According to Overgaard, Husserl’s view is that it is an intrinsic feature of perceptual experiences that they pick out individuals, and he is committed to the view that it is intrinsic to hallucinations that they do not. Consider a series of hallucinations (interrupted, let us say, by periods of genuine perception, sleep, etc.) each of which is of a cup with F1...Fn. It makes as little sense to ask whether the experiences are of the same individual cup or of different, qualitatively identical cups, as it does in the case of imagination. This seems to indicate that the hallucinatory experiences do not have the sort of content that gives them intentional directedness towards individual objects.

But is it not possible to hallucinate an individual – one’s mother, for instance? It certainly seems to be possible. What is more, Husserl himself refers to a case in point – hallucinating an absent individual (Husserl, 2005, p. 147). This suggests that the difference between hallucination and perception that we have found is not essential.

Overgaard points out, however, that Husserl also speaks of imagining individuals (Husserl, 2005, p. 539). Yet Husserl is undoubtedly of the view that acts of imagination as such do not have individual objects. So is Husserl’s view incoherent? Overgaard suggests not, and draws attention to a passage in which Husserl says that imagination gives "something" that can be fashioned in the form of an individual and that becomes intuitive only with respect to its sense content, which is indeterminate as far as individuality is concerned. ... Rather, it has the form: something with this and that intuitive content. (Husserl, 2005, p. 665)

Husserl further suggests that individuals are ‘fashioned’ out the material imagined when one decides or accepts that what one has imagined is indeed a particular person (Husserl, 2005, p. 679). According to Overgaard, it is natural to think Husserl would offer a similar account of cases in which we hallucinate individuals: the experience as such is of ‘something-with-such-and-such-features’, but we can give the hallucination direction toward an individual by
accepting or taking the experience to be of that individual. If this is right, Husserl would be committed to the view that the contents of hallucinatory and perceptual experiences differ essentially. Thus, A. D. Smith’s thesis would be vindicated: Husserl was committed to disjunctivism. Yet it must be said that Husserl nowhere seems to acknowledge such a commitment. That fact alone makes it unlikely that this will be the final word on the matter.

4 | CONCLUSION

While there is widespread agreement that Merleau-Ponty was a disjunctivist avant la lettre, how to interpret Husserl vis-à-vis the conjunctivism-disjunctivism ‘chasm’ remains controversial. Heroic attempts to place Husserl outside the ambit of the chasm can be put to one side, at least for the time being, and so the real battle is between conjunctivist and disjunctivist readings. Both are live options, and the discussion will probably not be settled anytime soon.

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ENDNOTES

1 Other phenomenologists that have been enlisted in this conflict (on the disjunctivist/naive realist side) include Johannes Daubert (Bower, 2019), Max Scheler (Riccardi, 2016), and Emmanuel Levinas (Bower, 2017).

2 I am simplifying matters. One complication is that one may be a disjunctivist while embracing representationalism and rejecting relationalism (Tye, 2007). Perhaps more surprisingly, it seems one may be a naïve realist while rejecting disjunctivism (Ali, 2018). Still, the simplification is not unreasonable: The vast majority of relationalists are disjunctivists, and arguably the majority of representationalists reject both disjunctivism and relationalism.

3 Husserl, for example, writes that if the existence of the perceived object belonged to every perceptual experience, then ‘talk of a perception whose object did not exist would indeed be countersensical; illusory perceptions would be unthinkable’ (Husserl, 1998, p. 12). See also the passage from Merleau-Ponty (2012, p. 360) quoted in the next section.

4 I am disregarding exotic cases of so-called ‘veridical hallucination’, in which (e.g.) a mad scientist causes a subject to hallucinate a black horse just when such an animal is actually present.

5 Drummond (2012) and D. W. Smith (2012) could be included as well. Since they are more concerned with articulating and defending their own views than with interpreting Husserl, however, I shall set them aside.

6 The view, roughly, that (when all goes well) we experience ordinary, mind-independent objects directly, not indirectly via some more immediate awareness of mind-dependent sense-data.

7 Outside the phenomenological movement, Frege may have advanced similar ideas (Travis, 2005).

8 It is puzzling why Staiti thinks the conjunctivist would accept that hallucinations and hallucinations are distinct classes of ‘act’ (i.e., experience), when the core of the conjunctivist view is that they can be type identical. However, I do not have space to discuss this matter further.

9 This enigmatic characterization of ‘conjunctivism’ is picked up by both Staiti (2015) and Cimino (2021), which may partly explain their hasty rejection of the conjunctivist reading.

10 It seems a hearty dose of LSD may be sufficient to induce them (cf. Sacks, 2012, p. 108).

11 One might question whether Husserl could accept experiential differences that are not evident on reflection. But it seems to me that he can and does. As I am about to suggest in the main body of the text, Husserl thinks genuine perceptual experiences pick out individuals. So perceptions of qualitatively identical but numerically distinct things would ‘have similarity of the objective direction, i.e., direction toward something similar, but not identity as a direction toward something identical, towards one and the same object’ (Husserl, 1998, pp. 131–2). Yet Husserl maintains that it can nevertheless seem evident to one that two such experiences single out the same individual object: ‘For example, I have a perception, perhaps of a house from the front. I then walk around to see the back side, and when I perceive it I say: it is the same house; the earlier and the current perception grasp the same house. But I have been deceived, perhaps it was another...
house, which I did not notice while I walked round as I had to do. It was semblant evidence [Scheinevidenz], which could be false’ (Husserl, 1998, p. 23; cf. 131). (I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to clarify this point.)

REFERENCES


**AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

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