

# ON SCHELLENBERG'S *The Unity of Perception*

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## 1 Introduction

In the first half of *The Unity of Perception*, Chapters 1-6, Susanna Schellenberg presents her account of the nature of perceptual experience while in the second half she develops an epistemology that draws upon her views in the philosophy of perception discussed in the first half. In this review, I will focus on the first two parts of the book, i.e., Chapters 1-5. The edifice of Schellenberg's theory is founded entirely on five arguments presented in these two parts—these are the Particularity Argument (pp.24-5), the Singular Content Argument (p.66), the Perceptual Content Argument (p.115), the Relational Content Argument (pp.117-8), and finally the Argument for Mental Activism (p.150). Therefore, the success or failure of these arguments will be crucial for the fate of the edifice.

One way to look at Schellenberg's theory of perception is to see her as fighting at three different fronts; she begins by arguing that perception is constituted by particulars attempting to rule out the views according to which perception is constituted only by general items. In this front, her main target is the generalist forms of representationalism according to which perceptual experience is constitutively a matter of representing a certain content which is, in turn, constituted only by general items like properties and relations—in the rest of this paper by 'properties' I mean properties and relations.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>If Schellenberg's arguments are sound, they will rule out non-representationalist formulations of generalism as well.

Having ruled out the generalist view, in the next stage, she argues that perceptual experience has to have content. By doing that, she attempts to rule out naive realism according to which perceptual experience is constituted by the perceived objects and properties rather than representational contents. So, according to her, perception has to be constitutively a matter of representing things, and it has to be constituted by particulars. Finally, she goes on to argue that perceptual content has to be characterized in terms of certain Fregean modes of presentation. At this stage, Schellenberg’s target is (mainly) the Russellians who so far have been fighting along with her against naive realists and generalists. Schellenberg claims that her view is superior to Russellianism for multiple reasons.

My general worry is that none of Schellenberg’s arguments in the three fronts are successful. Thus she fails to rule out any of the three mentioned rivals. All the five mentioned arguments rely on a shared premise which seems to be false (§2.1). Apart from that, these arguments rely on an underspecified notion of ‘constitution’; there seems to be no sense of the term that makes all the premises of her major arguments true without trivializing their conclusions (§2.2). In §3 the worry is that the problems that Schellenberg brings up for the Russellian are problems for her own view as well. Schellenberg also believes that an advantage of her view is that it entails the possibility of seeing an object without seeing it as being a certain way. Finally, in §4, I argue that this is not possible.

## 2 The Particularity Argument

Schellenberg’s starting point is what she calls the ‘Particularity Thesis’ (PT).

A subject’s perceptual state  $M$  brought about by being perceptually related to the particular  $\alpha$  is constituted by  $\alpha$ . (p.14)<sup>2</sup>

This might look innocent and uncontroversial. However, for it to be substantial and interesting, it should be understood as the denial of the view that perceptual experience is entirely constituted by general items. One such view holds that perceptual contents are existential propositions; when I perceive a red and round apple, on this view, I perceptually represent the proposition  $\ulcorner \exists x(\text{Red}_{(x)} \ \& \ \text{Round}_{(x)}) \urcorner$ . The proponent of the PT, however, believes that particulars, including the perceived object itself, partially constitute one’s perception.

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<sup>2</sup>All references to Schellenberg’s work are to [Schellenberg \(2018\)](#).

Schellenberg believes that the arguments that so far have been put forward in support of the PT all suffer from multiple defects. So, she presents a novel argument for the PT. She also believes that her argument is more fundamental in that it explains the epistemological, phenomenological, etc., roles of perception that all the other arguments for particularity rely on (p.22). Here is how she argues for the PT.

### **The Particularity Argument**

- I. If a subject S perceives particular  $\alpha$ , then S discriminates and singles out  $\alpha$  (as a consequence of being perceptually related to  $\alpha$ ).
- II. If S discriminates and singles out  $\alpha$  (as a consequence of being perceptually related to  $\alpha$ ), then S's perceptual state  $M$  brought about by being perceptually related to  $\alpha$  is constituted by discriminating and singling out  $\alpha$ .
- III. If S's perceptual state  $M$  brought about by being perceptually related to  $\alpha$  is constituted by discriminating and singling out  $\alpha$ , then S's perceptual state  $M$  brought about by being perceptually related to  $\alpha$  is constituted by  $\alpha$ .
- IV. If S perceives  $\alpha$ , then S's perceptual state  $M$  brought about by being perceptually related to  $\alpha$  is constituted by  $\alpha$ .

Schellenberg's opponent, let's call her Gen, believes that perception is not 'constituted' by particulars. Let's consider some of the premises of the argument and examine different ways that Gen might block the derivation of IV.

## **2.1 Premise (I)**

- (I) If a subject S perceives particular  $\alpha$ , then S discriminates and singles out  $\alpha$  (as a consequence of being perceptually related to  $\alpha$ ).

Premise (I) is crucially important for Schellenberg since it is the first premise in four other central arguments of the book as well—i.e., the Singular Content Argument (p.66), the Perceptual Content Argument (p.115), the Relational Content Argument (pp.117-8), and the Argument for Mental Activism (p.150). So, the success or failure of all the five will crucially depend on this premise.

Schellenberg's defense of Premise (I) is that it is not clear how one could perceive, e.g., a cup without discriminating it from its surround (p.25). A prima facie challenge for this premise is that,

as a matter of fact, one could have a visual experience of an unstructured and uniformly colored wall that fills out one's entire visual field. It seems that in such a case one perceives the wall and its color without 'discriminating and singling out' a particular, contrary to Premise (I). Here is how Schellenberg responds to this challenge:

The particularist can argue that the subject employs perceptual capacities insofar as she is discriminating the part of the uniformly colored wall to her right from the part of the wall to her left. (p.27)

Schellenberg's response is not persuasive. Even if one could divide one's visual field into different parts, as Schellenberg does, that does not automatically result in one's visual field being constituted by different *particulars*. In this case, different parts of my visual field do not seem to constitute different particulars *just in virtue of being to my left or right*. Thus, for this to be a non-arbitrary verdict Schellenberg needs to tell us how she individuates particulars such that the left and right parts of the uniformly colored wall turn out to be different particulars without trivializing the issue in question. There must be a principled reason for why the wall is constituted by different particulars and why the left and right of the wall, rather than its center vs. surround, or any other arbitrary compartments of the wall constitute different particulars. An implication of this view is that if there is a particular that fills out one's entire visual field and is uniform in terms of its visually salient properties, it will be metaphysically impossible to visually perceive it—and similarly for other modalities. This of course is not an evident claim and needs to be argued for.

Even if Schellenberg could present such a theory of particulars, Premise (I) has a deeper problem. In order to see why let's distinguish two notions of discrimination. By 'discrimination' one might refer to the sort of discrimination that perceptual psychologists are interested in. I will use 'discrimination<sub>s</sub>' to refer to this sort of discrimination. The typical cases of this are discrimination between edges, areas with different luminance properties, and other kinds of changes that the neurons in the (early) visual system are sensitive to. These are the cases that Schellenberg relies on to motivate her view that perception requires discrimination (pp.25&31). This kind of discrimination, at least *prima facie*, seems to be sub-personal. It is empirically plausible that some neurons, e.g., ganglion cells, respond differentially to various stimuli in their receptive fields and thus discriminates<sub>s</sub> lines, edges, etc.<sup>3</sup> However, it is not clear that discrimination<sub>s</sub> could, non-

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<sup>3</sup>For instance, see [Palmer \(1999\)](#).

metaphorically, be attributed to the subject. When neurons in my visual system differentially respond to the changes in illumination, and thus enable me to perceive, say, an edge, though it seems correct to say that I perceive the edge, it does not seem correct to say that I discriminate<sub>s</sub> the edge, in the same way that it does not make sense to say that I fire when neurons in my V1 do. Moreover, if this is the kind of discrimination that Schellenberg is referring to, then in the uniformly colored wall case there is no reason to believe that even the visual system does discrimination<sub>s</sub> let alone the perceiving subject. The wall is supposed to be uniform in terms of its visually salient properties—e.g., color and luminance.

But there is another sort of discrimination which is a cognitive, and personal-level activity, and thus attributable to the subject—I will use ‘discrimination<sub>p</sub>’ to refer to this sort of discrimination. To discriminate<sub>p</sub> *a* from *b* is to activate the knowledge that *a* is distinct from *b*.<sup>4</sup> Discrimination<sub>p</sub> is a personal level cognitive activity which entails knowledge and its requirements. Yet, Schellenberg’s favorite sort of discrimination is far more primitive than the capacity for knowledge; according to her, the intended sort of discrimination “need not be cognitive (and typically is not)” (p.38) and we share this capacity with “non-rational animals and kids as young as four months old” while these subjects are unable even to refer to object (p.34). Finally, she seems to be thinking that perception is non-conceptual while knowledge seems to require concepts (p.53).

A subject who is unable to refer to *a* and *b* and lacks concepts a fortiori will be unable to activate the knowledge that *a* is distinct from *b*. But, if such a subject, as Schellenberg contends, could perceive objects in the same sense that we do<sup>5</sup>, then it is possible to perceive an object without discriminating<sub>p</sub> it.

Therefore, no matter which notion of discrimination she goes with, Premise (I) will be false. Schellenberg might argue that there is another sort of discrimination that is both personal and primitive. But she does not provide any evidence that we possess such a capacity. The evidence that she brings up is only relevant to discrimination<sub>s</sub>. Moreover, the uniformly colored wall case suggests that there is no such middle ground discrimination.

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<sup>4</sup>Williamson (1990).

<sup>5</sup>“...perception is a low-level mental faculty that we share with animals” (p53).

## 2.2 Premise (II)

II. If S discriminates and singles out  $\alpha$  (as a consequence of being perceptually related to  $\alpha$ ), then S's perceptual state  $M$  brought about by being perceptually related to  $\alpha$  is constituted by discriminating and singling out  $\alpha$ .

Schellenberg defends Premise (II) by relying on the following principle:

(C) If S is in a mental state in virtue of engaging in a mental activity, then that mental state is constituted at least in part by that mental activity. (p.25)

In order to assess this claim it is helpful to make it clear what 'partial constitution' amounts to. According to a strong reading, B is (partially) constituted by A iff B is metaphysically (partially) individuated in terms of A. On a weak reading, however, B is (partially) constituted by A just in case A is a (partial) cause of B. Then here are the two corresponding versions of C:

(CI) If S is in a mental state in virtue of engaging in a mental activity, then that mental state is partially **individuated** by that mental activity.

(CC) If S is in a mental state in virtue of engaging in a mental activity, then that mental state is partially **caused** by that mental activity.

These two theses make very different claims. I am going to assess them one by one.

Consider the following scenario.

### Scenario 1

I am wondering if Amir is taller than me. I imagine Amir standing next to me to find out who is taller. Then I go on to form the belief that Amir is taller than me.

One might think that there is a sense according to which I could be in a mental state—the state of believing that Amir is taller than me—in virtue of engaging in a mental activity—i.e., imaging him standing next to me. Even if I form my belief in virtue of imagining Amir standing next to me, my belief that Amir is taller than me is not metaphysically type-individuated, not even partially, in terms of my imagining Amir standing next to me. I could have formed that belief by engaging in several other mental activities. If the belief that Amir is taller than me is metaphysically type-individuated in terms of these mental activities, then different instance of this belief could not be metaphysically type-identical. The nature of my belief nonetheless seems to be independent from

the activity of imagining Amir standing next to me; the explanatory power that this belief possesses does not seem to depend on whether I formed it by imagining such and such or by calling Amir and asking him how tall he is. So, CI seems to be false. But there is a stronger reading of CI available which is plausible. One might read CI as:

(CI\*) If S is in a mental state **metaphysically in virtue of** engaging in a mental activity, then that mental state is partially **individuated** by that mental activity.

CI\*, at least prima facie, sounds plausible—it might even be analytic. However, it is not clear that S perceives  $\alpha$  **metaphysically in virtue of** discriminating and singling out  $\alpha$ . Personal level mental states do not seem to be metaphysically constituted by sub-personal mental activities that underlie them (discrimination<sub>s</sub>); otherwise my visual experience of the apple before me would have to be metaphysically constituted by numerous sub-personal activities that underlie my perception of the apple. That sounds absurd. At the same time, we are not given any good reason to believe that there is a personal level discrimination such that one perceives metaphysically in virtue of such discrimination.

Nevertheless it seems that, in Scenario 1, my token belief is partially caused by my activity of imagining such and such. If we rewrite the Particularity Argument in terms of ‘partial causation’, its conclusion will be the following:

If S perceives  $\alpha$ , then S’s perceptual state  $M$  brought about by being perceptually related to  $\alpha$  is partially caused by  $\alpha$ .

This sounds like a plausible claim. However, it is by no means sufficient to support what Schellenberg has been trying to argue for. Gen can happily agree that if S perceives an apple, her perception of the apple is caused by that particular apple. But that does not compel Gen to accept that her perceptual state is metaphysically partially constituted by the perceived apple or that her perception is constituted by the perceived particular in any sense of ‘constitution’ that forces her to go beyond her generalist account of perception. This, of course, is not to say that perceptual experience is not metaphysically constituted by the perceived object. Rather, my claim is that Schellenberg’s argument fails to provide support for that view regardless of how plausible the view independently is.

That CC is significantly weaker than what Schellenberg needs could be seen in the three other central arguments of the book as well. In the Singular Content Argument, the Perceptual Con-

tent Argument, and the Relational Content Argument, Schellenberg, respectively, argues for the following theses:

(SC) If S perceives  $\alpha$ , then S's perceptual state  $M$  brought about by being perceptually related to  $\alpha$  has the property that its content is constituted by  $\alpha$ . (p.66)

(PC) If S perceives  $\alpha$ , then S's perceptual state  $M$  brought about by being perceptually related to  $\alpha$  is constituted by content  $c$  in virtue of S representing  $\alpha$ . (p.115)

(RC) If S perceives  $\alpha$  [...], then S's perceptual state  $M$  is constituted by relational content  $rc$  in virtue of S being perceptually related to  $\alpha$  and of S representing  $\alpha$ . (p.118)

If we rewrite these in terms of causation, we will have the followings:

(SC\*) If S perceives  $\alpha$ , then S's perceptual state  $M$  brought about by being perceptually related to  $\alpha$  has the property that its content is partially caused by  $\alpha$ .

(PC\*) If S perceives  $\alpha$ , then S's perceptual state  $M$  brought about by being perceptually related to  $\alpha$  is partially caused by content  $c$  in virtue of S representing  $\alpha$ .

(RC\*) If S perceives  $\alpha$  [...], then S's perceptual state  $M$  is partially caused by relational content  $rc$  in virtue of S being perceptually related to  $\alpha$  and of S representing  $\alpha$ .

Even if, according to SC\*, a perceptual state's content is caused by a particular, that, contra SC, is not sufficient for that state to have singular content (assuming that it makes sense to talk about a "content being caused by a particular" since it does not make sense to say that Russellian propositions or Fregean modes of presentations are caused by particulars; at least on Schellenberg's view abstract objects, e.g., modes of presentation, are not causally efficacious). PC\*, even if true, will not show that  $M$  has to be a representational state. Similarly, it seems that in RC, what Schellenberg needs is a stronger notion of constitution—i.e., metaphysical constitution. What Schellenberg is interested in is the nature of perception rather than a mere causal relation between the perceptual state and the perceived object. At any rate, the causal reading, i.e., RC\*, seems too weak to get at the heart of the controversy between Schellenberg and Gen.

Moving from a constitutive claim, in the weak sense of constitution, to a constitutive claim in the strong sense, which we may call *the causation-constitution fallacy*, is not rare. Some enactivists make a similar move; what they intend to show is that perceptual experience is metaphysically constituted by "an activity of exploring the environment drawing on knowledge of sensorimotor



dependencies and thought”<sup>6</sup>. However, what they end up showing is only a causal claim to the extent that perception is caused by such activities.<sup>7</sup>

A well-known problem for naive realism is that some patterns of brain activities seem to be sufficient for a subject to have a hallucination as of an object. But then the same patterns of brain activities would be sufficient for the subject to have the same type of phenomenology even when the activity is caused in the normal way by the perceived object. This means that the hallucinatory phenomenology screens off the phenomenology of the veridical case—hence *the screening-off problem*.

Recently, it has been suggested that this is not really a problem for the naive realist.<sup>8</sup> The reason, according to this view, is that the hallucinatory phenomenology is ‘constituted’ by deviant causal activities in the brain. But, in the veridical case, there is a *normal* causal connection between the object and the subject rather than a deviant one. Therefore, in the veridical case, the brain activities will not be sufficient to produce the same type of hallucinatory phenomenology. After all, the hallucinatory phenomenology is ‘constituted’ by deviant causal activities.

This line of argument is another instance of the, by now familiar, causation–constitution fallacy. What the view intends to show is that the hallucinatory experience is metaphysically constituted by deviant causal activities which are absent in the veridical case. But what has actually been shown, in the way of argument, is that hallucinatory experiences are weakly constituted—i.e., caused—by deviant causal activities. But just because hallucinations are caused by deviant causal activities does not entail that they are metaphysically constituted by deviant causation. Even if it turns out that deviant causation is a necessary condition of hallucination that does not show that hallucinatory phenomenology is metaphysically constituted by the deviant causation.

In a similar way, Schellenberg’s arguments for the particularity of perception, perceptual content, singular content, and relational content all rely on premises that make use of the notion of constitution. These arguments, at best, are sound only if ‘constitution’ is understood in a very weak sense. But with such a weak notion of constitution, her constitutive claims will be trivial and fail to distinguish her position from that of her opponent. On the other hand, her argument for supporting the ‘constitutive’ claims, understood in the strong sense, relies on a false principle—i.e., (C)—and thus is not sound. Obviously there are other notions of constitution—e.g., as necessary condition, supervenience, etc.—that one might appeal to. However, none of these seem to be both

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<sup>6</sup>Noë (2004, 228).

<sup>7</sup>Block (2005).

<sup>8</sup>This is the view defended in Moran (2019).

week enough to make all the relevant premises true *and* strong enough to fix the metaphysical nature of perceptual experience.

### 3 Schellenberg Against Russellian Content

So far Schellenberg has argued against, on the one hand, the generalist accounts of perception, and on the other hand, naive realism. So, she has to adopt a view according to which (i) perceptual experience is constituted by representational contents, and (ii) perceptual content is constituted (only) by particulars. Among the different ways that such a view could be formulated, Schellenberg argues that perceptual content is constituted by *de re* modes of presentations of objects and properties. This rules out, among others, the Russellian views according to which perceptual content is constituted by the perceived objects and their properties. She believes that her view is superior in that it does not face several difficulties that the Russellians do.

One of the problems that Schellenberg brings up for her Russellian opponents is that gappy Russellian propositions lack enough structure to account for hallucinations of multiple objects (p.83). According to her, Russellian gappy contents could not differentiate the content of a hallucination of a green dragon playing a red piano from the content of a hallucination of a green elephant riding a red bicycle. The idea seems to be that both experiences will have the following content:

⟨ ..., Green & ..., Red ⟩

One might think that this is a problem only if one's experience as of a green dragon playing a red piano has such a poor content. But such a poor content hardly suffices for an experience to be an experience as of a green dragon playing a red piano. An experience as of a green dragon playing a red piano will represent other things—i.e., the dragon-shape, the piano-shape, etc.—which will be enough to differentiate it from the other experience.

But if this is a problem for the Russellian it will be a problem for the Fregean as well; the Fregean assigns the following content to both experiences and thus the two experiences would not have different contents.

⟨MOP(-), MOP(Green) & MOP(-), MOP(Red)⟩

Schellenberg might argue that this problem would not arise for the Fregean because the first gappy mode of presentation—i.e.,MOP(-)—will be different from the second gappy MOP(-). How-

ever, if there is such a difference, it could not be a difference between the two gapps. Rather it has to be a difference in the MOP's. But to allow for different gappy MOP's would be parallel to the Russellian's adding more properties to the contents of the experiences. Therefore, for every  $\langle \text{MOP}(-), \dots \rangle$ , the Russellian could have a corresponding Russellian proposition of the form  $\langle -, \text{PROPERTY}, \dots \rangle$ . And if the Fregean could use different  $\text{MOP}(-)$ 's to differentiate the contents of various hallucinatory experiences, the Russellian could use the corresponding Russellian transforms to do the same.

But this does not solve the problem since the real problem is not how these two views distinguish the contents of *hallucinations*. As a matter of fact, they need to say how they discriminate the contents of veridical perceptions in the first place; they need to tell us how the content of an experience of a red circle and a green square is different from that of a red square and a green circle. Representing the contents of the two experiences as:

$$C_{e1}: \langle \text{MOP}(\text{Circle}), \text{MOP}(\text{Green}) \ \& \ \text{MOP}(\text{Square}), \text{MOP}(\text{Red}) \rangle$$

$$C_{e2}: \langle \text{MOP}(\text{Square}), \text{MOP}(\text{Green}) \ \& \ \text{MOP}(\text{Circle}), \text{MOP}(\text{Red}) \rangle$$

does not solve the problem. The real issue is the old 'problem of binding'. The two views need to tell us how a property gets bound up by one object rather than the other. Therefore, this is neither a problem only for the Russellian, nor does it have anything to do with hallucinations in particular.

Another problem for the Russellian, according to Schellenberg, is to explain how a gap could be bound up by a property (p.83). Again, regardless of whether this is a genuine problem for the Russellian, it is not clear why a similar problem does not arise for the Fregean. If it is unintelligible how a gap could be bound up by a property, the same is true about how a gap could be grasped or represented under a mode of representation.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, Schellenberg argues that the Russellian, in the non-veridical case, has to be committed to the view that subjects represent uninstantiated properties. This sounds implausible to Schellenberg because uninstantiated properties are not causally efficacious (p.84). Moreover, she finds this problematic because it brings with it a platonic 'two realms' metaphysics (p.83). But again the Fregean faces a similar problem. The Fregean has already lapsed into the platonic 'two realism' metaphysics by adding the Fregean modes of presentation to her metaphysics over and above objects and their properties. The problem for the Fregean is even worse; the Fregean modes of

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<sup>9</sup>Evans (1982).

presentations are supposed to be abstract entities, apart from the objects and their properties; and if one's perception cannot represent abstract entities, not only in the hallucinatory case, but also in the veridical case the Fregean will be in trouble. The Fregean, with her realm of abstract modes of presentation added to the objects and their properties, does not seem to be on firm grounds to blame the Russellian for his platonic metaphysics.

## 4 Seeing Without Seeing-as

One of the advantages of her view, Schellenberg argues, is that it entails that it is possible for S to see  $O$  without seeing it as  $\psi$ , for some  $\psi$ .

The thesis that perception necessarily involves seeing something as something posits that perception has a sentential or proto-sentential form. If I see a green leaf, I am not necessarily aware of the leaf as green. I may just be aware of green at a particular location. When I see a landscape the content of my perception may be map-like, pictorial, or iconic without involving any kind of proto-sentential form. Map-like, pictorial, or iconic content need not have any kind of attributional structure and does not have any kind of sentential or proto-sentential form. (p.69)

Schellenberg's argument for seeing without seeing-as seems to be this: S can see a green leaf without seeing the leaf as green. Therefore, seeing a green leaf does not entail seeing the leaf as green. Therefore, seeing does not require seeing-as. Quite obviously, the second move is invalid. What this argument shows is that one could perceive  $O$  without perceiving it as  $\psi$  while  $O$  is in fact  $\psi$ . This is to say that (one kind of) perceptual error is possible which is not an entirely trivial claim but is orthogonal to whether seeing entails seeing-as. To show the possibility of seeing without seeing-as it is not sufficient to show that when one sees a green leaf one need not see it as green. Instead, what one needs to show is that it is possible that one sees the leaf but there is no  $\varphi$  such that one sees the leaf as  $\varphi$ . To put it more accurately,

### Seeing without seeing-as

$\diamond\exists S\exists O\exists t [S \text{ sees } O \text{ at } t \ \& \ \neg\exists\varphi (S \text{ sees } O \text{ as } \varphi \text{ at } t)]$

For this to be true it must be possible for someone to have a visual experience of an object

without seeing it as having any attributes such as color, shape, etc. This seems hard to imagine.<sup>10</sup> When one has a visual experience (as) of  $O$ , there is some  $\varphi$  which one sees  $O$  as  $\varphi$ , however there need not be a canonical  $\varphi$  such that for seeing  $O$  to count as seeing-as it has to involve the canonical  $\varphi$ . It is important to note that this by itself does not commit one to the view that the subject must also possess the specific concept ‘ $\varphi$ ’. Moreover, contrary to Schellenberg’s claim, this need not commit one to a sentential format of perceptual representation.<sup>11</sup> At least, contrary to what Schellenberg says, it seems that pictorial (and maybe map-like) representations could not be free of representation-as; I can’t imagine how a picture could represent a green leaf without representing it as some  $\varphi$ . Finally, contrary to what Schellenberg says, it might be easier to conceive of a sentential or proto-sentential representation of an object in the absence of any representation-as. The sentence ‘ $O = O$ ’ (or the simple demonstrative *that* in the proto-sentential case)– could refer to  $O$  without representing it in a certain way–assuming that the demonstrative is a device of direct reference rather than a device of quantification.

Also, the fact that sometimes in perception we do not perceive objects is not an objection to the seeing as seeing-as view, contrary to what Schellenberg claims (p.68). According to the view that seeing entails as seeing-as:

$$\Box \forall S \forall O \forall t [S \text{ sees } O \text{ at } t \supset \exists \varphi (S \text{ sees } O \text{ as } \varphi \text{ at } t)]$$

This does not entail that perception necessarily has to be of objects.

## 5 Conclusion

I have argued that (i) Schellenberg’s Particularity Argument, Singular Content Argument, Perceptual Content Argument, Relational Content Argument, and finally the Argument for Mental Activism fail. Hence, she fails to rule out (or to show that her view is more plausible than) any

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<sup>10</sup>One might think that people with some psychological conditions–blindsighters, for instance–do see without seeing as. Nevertheless, (i) it is not obvious that blindsighters see in the first place, at least in the sense of having a visual *experience*. But Schellenberg seems to think of her view as a general thesis about “perceptual experience”, rather than a limited thesis about such abnormal cases (p.68); her example is the case in which she sees a green leaf (without seeing it as green), rather than someone with some special psychological conditions. (ii) I have argued elsewhere that it is not true that blindsighters see without seeing-as (see: [Shahmoradi \(ms\)](#)).

<sup>11</sup>It is also important to note that seeing as seeing-as does not commit one to a propositional view of perceptual content.

of the three alternative views she argues against (§§2-3), and (ii) she is committed to implausible theses about perception (§4). Despite all that, Schellenberg’s ambitious project is philosophically stimulating and provocative. It covers a broad range of topics both in philosophy of mind and epistemology and helps the reader get a grasp of the different options that are available for reconciling particularism with the view that perceptual experience has content. This provides a lot more for discussion than I could cover in a short review.<sup>12</sup>

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