

Visual experience and the laws of appearance

Abstract: Adam Pautz (2017, 2020) coined the phrase “the Laws of Appearance” for some underappreciated features of perceptual experience. Pautz suggests that the modal status of the Laws presents a puzzle: it is problematic to regard them as necessary, and also problematic to regard them as contingent. This paper presents possible counterexamples to the laws, suggesting that they are contingent as originally stated (§1). But the laws are readily modified so as to express constitutive features of normal human visual experience, and thus understood they are metaphysically necessary (§2). Analogous pictorial laws govern representational painting, and these can be explained by appealing to the representational format of the medium (§3). This invites the question whether there might be format-based explanations of the Laws of Appearance. If so, can the contingency of the format facts be squared with the necessity of the Laws? The paper answers “Yes” to both questions (§4).