

Qualia and the Representational Theory of Phenomenal Character

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Representationalism is an influential theory about the nature of phenomenal character. Extensive formulations of the theory can be found in (Dretske; 1995) and (Tye; 1995). Much has been written on representationalism since the publication of these books. However, straightforward and concise characterizations of the theory are hard to find. In this paper I attempt to give one such. As you can infer from the references, I have based myself on quite an extensive amount of literature. My own characterization of representationalism is the result that you get when you try to distill from it a coherent and philosophically distinctive theory. It has been my aim to clarify what exactly representationalism is a theory of, which problems it aims to solve, and how it distinguishes itself from other, alternative, views. Before going into the theory itself, I shall provide a short sketch of the philosophical context within which representationalism should be understood. In the second part, I shall elaborate on representationalism. I conclude with some problems and complications.

1 Consciousness, Character, and Qualia

We are conscious beings. A powerful way to characterize this fact is to say that there is *something it is like to be* us (Nagel; 1974). Put differently, existence comes, for us conscious creatures, essentially as a condition that is in and of itself *distinctive*. For a rock, to be or not to be does not come with any marked difference. For us conscious creatures, however, it does. Look around you and see how a world of different colors and shapes manifests itself. Attend to your other senses, and notice how dimensions of other kinds of peculiar qualities are revealed. A world of phenomena discloses itself to

you. The world reveals to you its appearance. However, only as long as you are conscious are you able to receive glimpses of it. Because you are conscious, you are not only aware of the world that surrounds you, you are also aware of yourself. You experience yourself as a creature with thoughts and feelings. You have the lucid sense of being animated. You are a self-conscious creature surrounded by a world that is constituted by all kinds of different qualities. It is this distinctive state that marks your conscious existence. Let us express all this by saying that you are *phenomenally conscious*.

In addition to the distinctive state as such, note all the various differences that make their appearance *within* it. We notice smells, sights, sounds, etc.; different qualities that, from moment to moment, enter into our conscious episodes. Is there not a difference between the smell of coffee and the sound of falling raindrops against the window? Does not each color has its own distinct appearance? Does not the world feel to you as made up of different textures? We might say that all these qualities have, each of them, their own unique *phenomenal character*. Phenomenal character determines how things appear and feel to us. One could say that what it is like to be in a phenomenally conscious state is simply a matter of how that state is phenomenally characterized. The nature of phenomenal character will be one of the main issues of this paper.

Many philosophers now believe that consciousness, the awareness of ourselves and the world around us, cannot exist independently from our bodies. They believe that when the body stops functioning, when it dies, phenomenal consciousness automatically goes with it. If this is true, then our bodies must somehow be responsible for the coming into existence of conscious experience. There must be something about the way our bodies function, about the way they are constituted, that explains why phenomenally conscious states come into being. However, it has proved to be very difficult to come up with a satisfactory account of how this works. Indeed, some have even supposed that phenomenal conscious cannot be something bodily, something physical, after all.

In his influential work *The Conscious Mind* David Chalmers argues that phenomenal consciousness cannot in fact be something physical (Chalmers; 1996). One of the arguments that he gives in support of this is what has come to be know as the ‘Zombie Argument’.¹ According to the zombie argument, it is logically possible for there to be creatures that are completely identical to us in every bodily aspect without being, at the same time, phenomenally conscious. These creatures talk and behave in the same way as we do, and

¹The term ‘zombie’ was first introduced in the literature by Robert Kirk (Kirk; 1974). See also (Block; 1978)

have complex brains that allow them to respond appropriately to sensory stimuli. In short, they are physiologically identical to us in every respect. However, for these creatures, when it comes to the process of living, *there is nothing it is like*. To come into existence as a zombie does not mark anything distinctive. To them, to be born and to die is as close to nothingness as anything can be. According to Chalmers, the possibility of such creatures shows that physical processes by themselves are never sufficient to realize phenomenal consciousness. After all, zombies are identical to us in every *physical* respect but are nevertheless not phenomenally conscious. To get physical systems that are also conscious, somehow an extra ingredient is needed.²

Another influential argument in support of the thesis that phenomenal consciousness is not physical is Frank Jackson's Knowledge Argument (Jackson; 1982). According to the knowledge argument, no matter how much we know about the physical processes that constitute a conscious organism, no matter how perfect and complete, it will never give us any knowledge about the phenomenal character of its conscious states.³ Suppose you have a friend that has the unique ability to see colors that no one else can see. Indeed, the physiologist to whom you have taken him for investigation of his condition, has told you that your friend has a unique extra kind of photoreceptor that is sensitive to electromagnetic microwaves. Apparently, each time your friend reports to see the special colors, his extra photoreceptors turn out to be stimulated by microwaves. Now, it seems that no matter how much you come to know about the physiological workings of your friend, you will never know what it is like to see the colors that your friend sees. The phenomenal fruit is not known by the physical tree. According to Jackson, this can only mean that, since *ex hypothesi* you know everything there is to know about

²Whether or not such creatures are really possible is controversial. The argument that Chalmers puts forward in support of the thesis that zombies are possible is that we can *conceive* of such creatures. That is, it seems that, unlike square circles, we do not have difficulty imagining such creatures. Some, however, have argued that we may not always be right about what we think we are conceiving (Tye; 1986). Others have questioned the very *validity* of the inference from conceivability to possibility (Hill; 1997).

³A similar argument is given in (Nagel; 1974). Also, we might say that the knowledge argument not only seems to show that physical knowledge does not give us knowledge about phenomenal *character*, but that it also does not show that an organism is phenomenally conscious *at all*. In this way the knowledge argument also closely resembles the zombie argument. However, Jackson himself thinks that Nagel's argument and the knowledge argument are really very different arguments. Personally, I don't really see this. I do think however, and I shall elaborate on this shortly, that we can conceptually distinguish between questions that pertain to whether or not phenomenal consciousness is *present*, and questions about the specific *character* of phenomenally conscious states.

the physical, phenomenal consciousness must be *non-physical*.

Both Chalmers and Jackson draw conclusions about the *metaphysical* nature of phenomenal consciousness. They both argue that phenomenal consciousness is non-physical. This is partly what makes their arguments so controversial. However, one can believe in the physical nature of phenomenal consciousness and still recognize that there is a fundamental difficulty when it comes to providing a satisfactory explanation of this. This view is advocated by Joseph Levine.⁴ According to Levine, even if phenomenal consciousness is in reality nothing but the natural result of certain physical processes, there will nevertheless remain a significant *explanatory gap* when it comes to our understanding of this fact.⁵ This is illustrated by the simple fact that, for all we know, zombies at least *seem* possible to us. Somehow, the kind of impossibility-bells that start to ring as soon as we try to conceive of a square circle do not go off when we try to conceive of a zombie. Although from this nothing strictly follows about the actual nature of phenomenal consciousness, Levine maintains that it *does* show that our comprehension may not be optimally suited to aid our further understanding of it. Levine himself uses phenomenal-physical identities such as ‘pain = the firing of c-fibers in the brain’ to make his point.⁶ According to Levine, even if identities such as these hold true in the physical world, *we* still would not know *why* that is so. How can it be that the firing of c-fibers is *one and the same thing* as the phenomenal feeling of painfulness? What is it about the firing of c-fibers in the brain such that it is a conscious experience with a particular phenomenal character? Although in reality pain may be nothing but the firing of c-fibers in the brain, we simply do not have a grasp of how this is possible.

In light of these considerations, we can distinguish *two questions* that a successful physicalistic theory of phenomenal consciousness must answer. The first of these we might call the ‘Existence Question’. It concerns why, given all the (micro)physical facts that constitute biological organisms, there should appear anything *at all*, rather than nothing. What is the mechanism that causes sheer matter in motion to ignite and light up into the experiential firework of our phenomenal world? The second question we might call the ‘Character Question’. The character question is not so much concerned with the circumstance *that* things phenomenally appear, but with the way *how* they appear. The conscious episodes that constitute our daily lives acquaint us with various ranges of different qualities, each of which have their own

⁴See (Levine; 1983) and (Levine; 1993)

⁵A similar view is held by the philosopher Colin McGinn, see e.g. (McGinn; 1989)

⁶Elsewhere, Levine presents a similar story about functional accounts of consciousness (Levine; 1995).

unique phenomenal character (compare the color of a rose with the smell of tobacco). The character question is concerned with the factors that determine, or condition, phenomenal character.

In what follows we shall be mainly concerned with this second question, the one which deals with the phenomenal *character* of phenomenally conscious states. More specifically our interest is in examining a theory called ‘Representationalism’. Representationalism is a philosophical theory that aims to provide an account of what phenomenal character is.⁷ In other words, it purports to give us an answer to the character question. But before we start our examination, I want to say a little bit more about this problem of phenomenal character. For it may not be sufficiently clear yet why, indeed, there might be something problematic about the way things appear to us.

How could there be anything mysterious about the way the world, and the things in it, appear to us? After all, chocolate tastes the way it does simply because chocolate tastes that way. And roses smell and look the way they do simply because roses smell and look that way. More generally, the reason why the world appears the way it does is simply because the world *is* that way. In other words, how things get their phenomenal character is not something that is immediately relevant to the problem of how biological systems generate phenomenal consciousness. The mystery of consciousness is not *how* things appear but only *that* things appear.

Things might not be as straightforward as they seem. Consider the fact that as human beings we perceive the world through five different senses. The phenomenal appearance of the world does not simply hang in thin air, but is thoroughly *mediated* by the complex physiological processes that constitute our sensory systems. Hence, it seems then that what we perceive is (presumably) the product of a complex physiological process. Notice also that the kind of appearances that come with each of your different senses differ radically from one another with respect to their phenomenal character. Attend to the things that you see, and attend to the things that you hear, and compare what you find in each of these instances. Is not seeing entirely different from hearing? Does not each come, as it were, with its own “style”? Seeing seems to be characterized by a general quality of “visualness” and hearing seems to be characterized by a general quality of “auditoriness”. A similar thing holds for the other sensory modalities. Each of them has its own peculiar phenomenal atmosphere.

In response to this, one might suppose that how the world appears to us is largely determined by the kind of senses that we happen to perceive

⁷Explicit statements about representationalism as an account of phenomenal character can be found in (Tye; 2002, Ch. 3) and (Carruthers; 2000, Ch. 5).

with. More specifically, one might suppose that each of the senses themselves shape the phenomenal character of our conscious states in such a way that the phenomenal qualities that they give rise to are not so much the result of *what* the senses perceive, as much as they are a direct result of *how* they perceive.⁸ Alternatively, one perhaps imagines that phenomenal features are really only the *effects* that external objects cause *in us* as a result of the manner in which they strike our senses. That is, given the intricate causal chains that underlie the physical process of perception, one might be tempted to think that what we are presented with in experience is in fact merely the end result of the causal chain and not the original thing that initiates it by stimulating our senses.⁹ In any case, the idea here is that the physiological process of sense-perception itself gives rise to its own unique set of phenomenal feels. We might call such phenomenal features ‘qualia’. More specifically, as I shall explain later, they are often defined as intrinsic, non-representational properties of experiences.¹⁰

The problem of qualia (if there are such) is that they do not seem to bear any *intelligible relation* to the physical world. First of all, they do not tell us anything about how the world is. After all, how they appear to us is not the result of *what* our senses perceive, but is a result of how the senses are *affected, caused, or struck* into activity. It seems as though they just present us with what you might call “phenomenal noise”. Also, since these phenomenal features do not bear directly on how the world is, there are no traces of them in the physical universe prior to the origination of phenomenal consciousness in biological creatures. Therefore, the difficulty consists in how to trace qualia back to the non-phenomenal realm out of which they emerge. Qualia only exist to the extent that they appear in consciousness. Outside of consciousness there is simply nothing else like them. The fact that, on this picture, qualia particularly arise as the result of certain (cosmologically recent) physiological processes or activities does not help make their phenomenal character appear more intelligible. For the question remains as to why these activities give rise to one set of qualia rather than another, or indeed, why they should give rise to any qualia at all. Again we are faced with an explanatory gap. If there are such things as

⁸The adverbial theory of perception seems to be committed to such a view. See e.g. (Chisholm; 1957).

⁹The British empiricists, for example, seem to have thought along these lines. See e.g. (Locke; 2008, Book II, Ch. VIII and IX), (Hume; 2003, Book I, part IV, Ch. II), and (Reid; 1915, Ch. 2 and 3).

¹⁰There is a lot of confusion that surrounds the term ‘qualia’. For two very useful articles, see (Martin; 1998) and (Crane; 2000). Definitions of qualia as specifically intrinsic and non-intentional can be found in (Peacocke; 1983) and (Block; 2003).

qualia, they just seem to pop up spontaneously into existence. Depending on whether they actually *do* anything, they seem either strongly emergent or simply epiphenomenal.¹¹ In either case, what makes qualia appear the way they do is simply a brute fact that resists further explanation.

2 The Representational Theory of Phenomenal Character

One difficulty that arises in getting a clear articulation of representationalism is the fact that there are several different versions of it. Also, different philosophers seem to have different ways of taxonomizing these different versions.¹² Related to this is also the circumstance that there is an important *ambiguity* in talk about the “representational” status of phenomenal character. The ambiguity is between the *content* that is represent-*ed* and the *vehicle* that is doing the represent-*ing*. I will come back to this later. Let me stipulate first that I am mainly concerned here with a version of representationalism that has been proposed by Fred Dretske and Michael Tye (Dretske; 1995), (Tye; 1995, 2002), a view that is sometimes known as ‘strong representationalism’.

According to strong representationalism, the phenomenal character of a phenomenally conscious state is wholly *given* by the *representational content* which is carried by that state. It is important to note that this is not a supervenience thesis about the relationship between the phenomenal and the representational. Instead, according to strong representationalism the phenomenal can be *reduced* to the representational. In this way it hopes to *explain* phenomenal character in terms of representational content. According to strong representationalism, phenomenal character is nothing over and above representational content; i.e., the representational *exhausts* the phenomenal. Therefore, there can be no difference in phenomenal character without there also being a difference in representational content. Strong representationalism may be characterized by the following two theses:

1. **The Representational Thesis:** *Phenomenally conscious states have representational content.*

¹¹See (Chalmers; 2006) and (Kim; 2006) for the concept of emergence and its possible relationship to phenomenal consciousness. See (Jackson; 1982) for an epiphenomenal account of qualia.

¹²Compare e.g. (Byrne; 2001), (Block; 2003), (Chalmers; 2004), (Kind; 2007), (Seager and Bourget; 2007), (Tye; 2009), (Fish; 2010), and (Bourget and Mendelovici; 2013)

2. **The Identity Thesis:** *The phenomenal character of a conscious state is identical to the representational content of that state.*

The first thesis gives us representationalism, while the second thesis gives us *strong* representationalism. In what follows, I shall try to elucidate what is meant by these theses. It will also allow me to say something more about the ambiguity that I mentioned that comes with talk about the “representational” status of phenomenal character.

2.1 The Representational Thesis

The representational thesis states that phenomenally conscious states have representational content. Another common way to express this is to say that phenomenally conscious states have “intentional” content. But what exactly does this mean? One influential account of the representational thesis is given by Alex Byrne (Byrne; 2001). According to that account, to say that phenomenally conscious states have representational content means nothing more than that phenomenally conscious states make the world *seem a certain way*. For example, suppose you perceive a certain shade of blue and smell some pleasing odor, then it will seem to you as if the world contains something blue and something pleasingly smelling. Also, change the color and the smell, and how the world seems to you will also change. More generally, change any aspect of the phenomenal character of a conscious state, and how the world seems will automatically change with it.

Can this really be what (strong) representationalists mean by the representational thesis? What does it mean to deny that phenomenal character fixes the way the world seems to us? Is this not almost trivially true? Does not talk about phenomenal character in terms of “what-it-is-like” already imply that we really mean to talk about the way things seem and feel to us? In any case, it is hard to see how the representational thesis, interpreted in this way, can be the kind of thesis that is philosophically substantial; something which philosophers can disagree about.¹³ It is also worth noticing that although Byrne identifies the representational with the phenomenal, he also thinks that this is compatible with the view that there are such things as qualia. However, when you read the literature carefully, you will find that strong representationalism is put forward precisely as a way of avoiding having to deal with such entities. The kind of identity that strong representationalists suppose to hold between the phenomenal and the representational

¹³Some explicitly deny the representational thesis, but it does not seem to me that they deny that phenomenal character is responsible for making things seem a certain way. See e.g. (Travis; 2004) and (Brewer; 2006).

must therefore be something different from the kind of identity that Byrne supposes to hold.¹⁴ In short, we need a construal of the representational thesis that is somehow *stronger* than the seemingly trivial thesis that phenomenal states make things seem a certain way.

A close reading of the literature on representationalism suggests that what is usually meant by the representational thesis is that phenomenal states are intrinsically *truth-conditional*.¹⁵ This idea comes from a certain strategy to deal with the ontological problems that seem to arise out of phenomenal states that are illusory or hallucinatory.¹⁶ It offers an alternative to the strategy that is described by the Sense-data Theory, which was a popular theory of perception in the beginning of the 20th century.

The sense-data theory, as it is now usually understood, is essentially committed to what is known as the ‘Phenomenal Principle’.¹⁷ The principle states that when there phenomenally appears something to have property *p*, there must actually *be* something that *is p*. Suppose you have a hallucination as of a pink elephant. This means that although there phenomenally appears to be a pink elephant in front of you, no such thing is actually there in your physical environment. The phenomenal principle says that, since something pink and elephant-shaped appears to you, there must actually *be* something that has those properties. Since there is no physical pink elephant, that which is pink and elephant-shaped must instead be something mental, a mental sense-datum that is pink and elephant-shaped.

On this approach, phenomenal states do not have the ability to “lie” to us, since what phenomenally appears must always in some sense actually be the case. Therefore, in cases where we do feel deceived by appearances, we cannot blame the appearances themselves, but only ourselves for having formed false judgments about them. On this view, phenomenal states are in and of themselves *not* truth-conditional. Only our beliefs have the property of being true or false, not our experiences.

The idea that whatever appears must actually exist does not sit well with many philosophers. Especially because it involves a commitment to non-physical entities, and because many philosophers want to think that everything there is is physical. The representational approach to illusions and hallucinations is designed to solve these ontological extravagances. According to the representational approach, phenomenal states are a kind of belief-states. Beliefs can be either true or false. Moreover, from the fact that *p* is

¹⁴See (Fish; 2010, Ch. 5) for a formulation of this difference.

¹⁵see e.g. (Dretske; 2003), (Jackson; 2004), (Seager and Bourget; 2007), (Tye; 2009), and (Crane; 2009)

¹⁶See (Anscombe; 1965) and (Hintikka; 1969), and (Harman; 1990).

¹⁷See (Robinson; 1994).

believed to be true, it does not follow that p is actually true. Furthermore, if a belief turns out to be false, we do not need to commit ourselves to the existence of what was falsely believed. Therefore, if one treats phenomenal states as themselves capable of being either true or false, one has a way to circumvent the phenomenal principle. Phenomenal states that are illusory or hallucinatory are like false beliefs and, consequently, what phenomenally appears in them need not actually exist.

Thus, according to the representational approach, phenomenal states are in and of themselves truth-conditional. In other words, when you are under a perceptual illusion or when you are suffering from hallucinations, the source of error *does* lie in the phenomenal states themselves rather than in any judgments about them on your part. The representational approach to phenomenal states accomplishes that we do not have to deal with phenomenal items that are purely mental.

But a question remains: how does this bear on phenomenal *character*? After all, on the face of it, it seems that the fact that some things have the ability to be true or false does not in and of itself explain “what they are like”. However, there *is* an intimate link between truth-conditionality and phenomenal character. This will become clear if we take a closer look at the ambiguity that is involved in talk about the “representational” status of phenomenal character. This also brings us to the Identity Thesis; the second main thesis of strong representationalism.

2.2 The Identity Thesis

In talking about representation, we can either mean the *vehicle* that is *doing* the represent-*ing*, or we can talk about the *content* itself that is represent-*ed*. The thesis that phenomenal states carry representational content similarly lends itself to two different interpretations. Either, it means that phenomenal qualities are the vehicles that do the representing, or it can mean that phenomenal qualities themselves directly present us with aspects of the content itself. In order to keep clear about this distinction, we may want to distinguish between *vehicle-based representationalism* and *content-based representationalism*.¹⁸

It should be clear that on a vehicle-based approach to phenomenal character, there is no problem in holding that what appears to us in illusion and hallucination does in fact exist. To see why this is so, consider the expression ‘The Eiffel tower is made of plastic’. Although this proposition is in fact false, the set of words by which this proposition is expressed on paper, the pattern

¹⁸I borrow this distinction from Brad Thompson (Thompson; 2008)

of ink that you see above, nevertheless exists. Similarly, on a vehicle-based reading of phenomenal states, one could say that in cases of illusion and hallucination, although that which the phenomenal configuration in question *stands for* is in fact nonexistent, the “phenomenal ink” itself nevertheless exists. Clearly then, one can only circumvent the phenomenal principle by giving a representational account of phenomenal character that is content-based. As a matter of fact, this is exactly what strong representationalism is committed to. This brings us to the identity thesis.

But first, recall what has been said about qualia. As I have tried to explain, the problem of qualia is that they do not seem to bear any intelligible relationship to the non-phenomenal world out of which they (allegedly) arise. In light of what has been said, one might frame part of the qualia problem in terms of the question to what extent a phenomenal state really presents us with a kind of ink pattern; a set of phenomenal features which are really just representational vehicles. Phenomenal character would then consist of properties that are, in a sense, merely *symbolic*. The relation between qualia and the physical world would then be similar to the relation between a symbol and the content that it stands for.¹⁹

Consider the following two linguistic expressions:

- i Amsterdam is the capital of the Netherlands
- ii アムステルダムはオランダの首都です

Both (i) and (ii) express the proposition that Amsterdam is the capital of the Netherlands. This is the content of (i) and (ii). Notice that, qua symbolic structure, (i) and (ii) have very different *appearances*. What is also important is that there is no intrinsic relation between (i) and (ii) and the content that Amsterdam is the capital of the Netherlands. After all, (i) and (ii) are *in and of themselves* merely two random patterns of ink with no intrinsic meaning of their own. It seems that (i) and (ii) only carry a content because they have been *assigned that role* by the English and Japanese language communities. We could say therefore that symbolic structures such as (i) and (ii) are intrinsically *non-representational*, and that they only get their representational status by being part of some representational system. Also, it seems that *anything whatsoever* can be assigned the role of standing for something else. This basically means that the intrinsic properties of these symbols themselves can never explain the particular content that they stand

¹⁹Ned Block uses the term ‘mental paint’ to refer to qualia that play a merely symbolic role. He distinguishes these from qualia that are *not even* symbolic; he labels these ‘mental oil’ (Block; 2003). I prefer the terms ‘phenomenal ink’ and ‘phenomenal noise’.

for. Indeed, closely examining such intrinsic properties does not even allow us to deduce that they stand for anything *at all*. When it comes to an explanation of the symbolic status of some object, the intrinsic qualities of that object are neither *necessary* nor *sufficient*. Heck, if we did not know any better, we might even come to think that there is some kind of explanatory gap between symbols and their meanings!

If there are such phenomenal features as qualia shaping the phenomenal character of our conscious lives, then the situation seems similar to the one described above. If we suppose that certain phenomenal features are merely representational vehicles, then such phenomenal features are really a kind of symbols that only contingently relate to their representational contents. This means that the intrinsic qualities that define their character are neither necessary nor sufficient to explain the contents for which they stand.²⁰ However, not only is it impossible to get from phenomenal symbol to represented world, there is also, as I have already pointed out, no obvious link between world and symbol. For as Jackson's knowledge argument supposedly shows, nothing physical can teach us about what qualia are like. Of course, this has partly to do with the fact that qualia are by definition non-representational; i.e., no instances of them exist in the non-phenomenal realm.

According to the knowledge argument, the non-phenomenal world cannot tell us what qualia are like. But conversely, and equally problematically, qualia themselves also do not show us how the *world* really *is*. To the extent that qualia shape phenomenal character, the world that appears to us is merely a symbol. And as we have seen, there is no intrinsic connection between a symbol and that which it stands for.

Strong representationalism aims to eliminate these problems by holding that phenomenal character is *identical* to representational content (the identity thesis). This implies that there are no phenomenal features that are not in fact representational in a content-based manner. It also means that each and every phenomenal detail of a phenomenal state, each "phenomenal pixel", directly presents us with a condition that must be fulfilled in order for the phenomenal state to be veridical.²¹ In short, if you smell the scent

²⁰This is basically what spectrum inversions amount to (See e.g. (Shoemaker; 1982) and (Shoemaker; 1990)). The idea here is that the phenomenal colors that appear to us in vision are in fact representational *vehicles*, and relate only *contingently* to the environmental features that they stand for within the representational economy of an organism. On this view, phenomenal color does not in and of itself bear on representational content. Qualia realists might say a similar thing about other phenomenal features.

²¹Frank Jackson gives a lucid expression of this idea: "...there is a marked contrast between, on the one hand, the way familiar representational devices like maps and sentences represent, and, on the other, the way perceptual experiences represents. There is a gap between vehicle of representation and what is represented in the first kind of case that does

of a rose, then in order for your experience to be veridical, there must be something *like that* out there in the world.

This explains why from the point of view of strong representationalism there is an intimate connection between truth-conditionality and phenomenal character. On a content-based account, phenomenal characters do not merely contingently relate to their contents. This is because phenomenal characters *are the contents themselves*. To the extent that phenomenal states are veridical, phenomenal character simply shows us how the world *is*. Sydney Shoemaker puts it intuitively when he says that strong representationalism solves the problem of phenomenal character by “kicking phenomenal character downstairs, into the external world” (Shoemaker; 2003, 256). On this view, there are no such things as qualia; phenomenal features that are only instantiated as a function of representational processes. Therefore, if strong representationalism is true then we do not have to account for any mysterious emergent or epiphenomenal qualities that spontaneously pop up into existence; qualities that have as much resemblance to the world out of which they arise as a symbol has to the content for which it stands. Phenomenal characters are simply a “subset of objective physical properties” (Dretske; 2003, p. 67). They simply tell us what the world looks, sounds, tastes, smells, and feels like. Again, the mystery of phenomenal consciousness does not lie in *how* things appear, but in the fact *that* they appear at all.²²

3 But Is It True?

We now have available to us a straightforward characterization of strong representationalism. The only thing that is left is determining whether it is also a good theory. This brings us to an evaluation of some of the arguments that

not exist in the second. In the case of maps and sentences, we can distinguish the features that do the representing – the gaps between the isobars on a weather map, the presence of the letters ‘c’, ‘a’, and ‘t’ in that order of a sentence, the green colouring on parts of a map, etc. – from what they represent: a pressure gradient, a certain animal, areas of high rainfall, etc. We can, for example, describe the gap between the isobars without any reference to what it represents. In the case of perceptual experience, we cannot. When I have an experience of a round, red shape, *that* is what it represents. My very description of the vehicle of the representation delivers how it represents things to be. I may or may not accept that things are the way they are being represented to be, but there is just one way that things are being represented to be, and that way is an essential feature of the experience.” (Jackson; 2004, p. 109-110)

²² “A representational theory of experience doesn’t, I admit, solve the “hard” problem of consciousness. It bridges *this* explanatory gap only by opening up an equally puzzling gap somewhere else: how do electrical and chemical events in gray soggy brain stuff manage to represent bright orange pumpkins?” (Dretske; 2003, 71-72)

strong representationalists put forward in support of their views. We shall be especially concerned with the so-called “Argument from Transparency”. I believe the argument does not establish what strong representationalism wants it to establish. In addition to this, I shall evaluate the representational thesis by giving some examples of phenomenal states that, on the face of it, do not seem to be truth-conditional in the way that is required. I conclude with some doubts regarding the explanatory power of a strong representational approach to phenomenal character.

3.1 The Argument from Transparency

One of the main arguments for strong representationalism is the observation that experience seems to be *transparent* (Tye; 2002). As your eyes follow these words, you are aware of the phenomenal whiteness of the page and the words with which this sentence ends. You are aware that different phenomenal characters make their appearance to you. Nothing out of the ordinary; you just have a visual experience of the page that is in front of you. But now the task is as follows. Rather than attending to the page and the words, try to shift your attention to the experience itself. That is, try not to focus on what your experience is *of* but try to focus on the experience itself *apart* from that. Try not to pay attention to the *content* of your experience, but try to see if you can discern the *experiential medium* (the representational vehicle) that facilitates this representation. Can you do this? Can you find any phenomenal qualities that belong to the experience itself rather than the things your experience is of?

Strong representationalists claim that you will not be able to do this. According to them, there are no such extra phenomenal features discernible to us. Experiences are transparent to us. That is, introspection of one’s experience only reveals phenomenal aspects of what the experience is *of*; there are no further phenomenal features over and above these. In other words, we are not aware of any properties of experience. What having a certain experience is like is entirely given by what the experience is *of*. Apart from that, nothing else shapes what it is like to have a certain experience. In other words, there are no such things as qualia. Phenomenal character is *identical* to representational content, and is therefore wholly *exhausted* by such content. One could say that all we are presented with is the message, but not the medium. There is no “phenomenal noise” or “phenomenal ink” intervening, so to say. All we can discern are the qualities objects are represented as having.

What exactly are we being asked to do when we are being asked to shift our attention from what our experience is *of* to the experience itself? And how does our failure to do this plead for the strong representationalist’s

supposition that there are no such things as qualia?

There are several things one can think of in response to the first question. If we analyze a sentence such as ‘I am seeing the tree’, we notice that it is on a par with sentences such as ‘I am handing over the bottle’ or ‘I am catching the ball’. These sentences have in common that they all make mention of a subject, an act, and some object. In the last two examples, one can easily discern the act from the object. When you hand over a bottle, you can easily distinguish between the bottle itself, and the act of you handing over it. In general, it seems that we can easily distinguish objects and the acts that are applied to them. It is natural to suppose that a similar thing holds for perceptual acts, and that we should be able to distinguish the perceived object from the act of perceiving it. Thus, this may be one way to understand what is meant when we are being asked to shift our attention to the experience itself; forget the experiential objects for a moment, and try to focus and the act of seeing itself.

Alternatively, we might imagine the task we are being asked to perform as follows. Normally, we take the objects of vision to be “out there”. That is, we take vision to present us with a three-dimensional scene with various depths and distances that is “beyond our skulls”. Philosophical reflection, however, may convince us that what we are acquainted with in visual perception is really an internal mental panorama that is *two-dimensional*; i.e., an internal mental flat-screen without depth or distance.²³ On this account, perceptual experience only makes us indirectly aware of the external world by making us directly aware of an inner mental representation of that world. The world that was always so familiar to us turns out to be nothing but a projection on an internal mental flat-screen.

If we adopt this picture of experience, we might conceive of the task we are being asked to perform as follows. Instead of just being in our usual state of mind, in which we are wholly immersed in our experiences and take the world that we perceive as being “out there”, we must try, as it were, to “take a step back” and detach ourselves from our experiences, so that they may reveal themselves *as* merely projections on a internal mental flatscreen, something whose properties we can then inspect.

When you actually try any of these things, i.e., inspecting your experience *qua* experience, you will find that you indeed encounter some sort of strange resistance. According to Michael Tye, when we actually encounter this resistance, we basically discover that all there is to see are how things are represented as being. As soon as we try to introspect our experience *qua*

²³See for example George Berkeley’s *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* (Berkeley; 2008)

experience, we find our attention immediately reinforced to have its focus exclusively on the objects that the experience is of. Our gaze seems to be stuck onto the objects of the experience and cannot detach itself from them. It seems we cannot simply inspect and explore our experiences in the way we would inspect and explore ordinary objects. Normally when we want to examine some object, we can walk around it or pick it up so as to examine its different aspects. But such a procedure seems impossible when it comes to our experience. It seems somewhat comparable to the ever shifting of the horizon as we try to approach it; as much as we try to come closer, its appearance remains unaltered. Similarly, as much as we try to introspect our experiences, they forever escape us. The only difference is that when we try to inspect our experience, we try to *create* some distance instead of diminishing it. But as soon as we try to step back, the experiential objects themselves seem to move with us. We cannot escape; besides the visual scenery that is presented “in front of us”, there is simply nowhere else to look and nothing else to see!

The argument from transparency basically states that when you introspect your experience, all you find are the intentional objects that the experience is *of*. Apart from that, there is nothing else phenomenally present to you. But does this observation really establish that there are no such things as qualia?

The strong representationalist appeals to the observation that, apart from the things that an experience is of, nothing is phenomenally present that indicates the properties of the experience itself. However, a similar point can also be made in the opposite direction. Instead of trying to attend to your experience apart from the objects your experience is of, see if you can attend to these objects themselves apart from your *experiencing of* those objects. That is, can you find any object that is not in fact experienced by you? I don't think you can. In other words, although introspection only reveals the properties the experience is of, these properties themselves are all nevertheless necessarily *experienced* properties. But what does this mean?

First of all, it does not in and of itself imply that all phenomenal qualities consist in their being experienced. The fact that, necessarily, an experienced property is an experienced property, does not mean that an experienced *property* is necessarily an *experienced* property. Moreover, even if certain properties consist in their being experienced, it is unclear whether this allows us to say that such properties are properties of experiences. For to say that a property *p* can only be instantiated as experienced merely seems to imply that ‘being experienced’ is an essential property of *p*; it is unclear if this also allows us to say that *p* is a property of an experience. However, I believe that if we allow that certain phenomenal qualities are only instantiated as

features of an experience, such properties might reasonably be regarded as properties of experience. In any case, if there indeed are such phenomenal qualities, strong representationalism will be in trouble anyhow.

Before going into this, we should ask whether we should indeed suppose that certain phenomenal qualities can only be instantiated as contents of an experience. Also, I should explain why such phenomenal qualities might be regarded as properties of experiences. Let me start with the first question. Are there phenomenal qualities that depend for their instantiation on being experienced? That is, are there phenomenal qualities that only exist *within* experience and not outside of it? It is fairly clear that there are such phenomenal qualities. Consider, for example, the feeling of pain. It seems that pains can only exist as contents of an experience. Ask yourself, can there be pains when there is nothing around to feel them? It seems natural to suppose that they cannot. After all, pains that are not felt cannot really be painful. But pain *is* painfulness! In short, pains consist in their being experienced. So painfulness is essentially a *phenomenal* quality; it can only exist to the extent that its phenomenal feel is consciously suffered by some entity. In short, painfulness *is* the *feeling of* painfulness. A similar thing holds for bodily sensations in general, and other affective states such as emotions and moods. These all come with their own unique phenomenal characters, and can only survive as the inhabitants of phenomenal states of experience.

Can we really maintain with respect to pains and other affective states that experience is transparent? I have already said that, given the fact that p is essentially experienced, it does not follow that p is a property of an experience. After all, the fact that my car has the property of being red also does not mean that my car is a property of redness. However, if pain is not a property of an experience, then what else could it be a property of? Although, as we shall see, strong representationalists seem to think otherwise, I believe there are simply no sensible alternatives available. Perhaps it should also be pointed out that the word ‘experience’ might signify different things to different people and that, therefore, the notion of a ‘property of experience’ can also be taken to mean different things.²⁴ For example, one might take ‘experience’ to mean the experienced *objects* rather than the brain-states that represents these objects. If this meaning is adopted, then *all* phenomenal qualities that we experience are ‘properties of experiences’. Clearly then, in this sense there are properties of experiences.

Of course, in and of itself this admission is not necessarily problematic for

²⁴Daniel Stoljar points out that G.E. Moore used the term ‘experience’ to refer to experienced *objects* while contemporary theorists such as Ned Block and Sydney Shoemaker use it to refer to brain-states (Stoljar; 2004).

the strong representationalist, for he or she can say that although the qualities that we experience are properties of experiences, they are only properties of experiences as long as the experiences last, and that outside of experiences these qualities have an independent existence in the physical world. However, if it turns out that some of these qualities do *not* exist independently of being experienced, the strong representationalist must give an account of how exactly such phenomenal qualities are dependent for their existence on experiential processes. The only possible account, it seems, is that such phenomenal qualities are in fact the *result of* experiential processes. It is reasonable to regard them as properties of experience.

We may want to reject the application of the concept ‘property of experience’ to pains and other affective states. Perhaps because, although their phenomenal natures cannot exist apart from experience, they are still essentially qualities experiences are *of*. However, whether or not, for whichever reason, one denies that we are aware of ‘properties of experiences’, the phenomenal characters of affective states *do* present strong representationalism with a serious difficulty. This is because the experienced qualities of which they consist are *irreducibly* phenomenal. But before going into this, let me first address some issues that complicate the representational thesis which says that all phenomenal states are representational.

3.2 Do All Phenomenal States Have Truth-Conditions?

As we have seen, the representational thesis states that phenomenal states are intrinsically truth-conditional. For example, when you are visually presented with an apple tree in front of you, while in fact there is no such thing as an apple tree in front of you, then your visual experience is false. Phenomenal states represent to us how things in the world stand, i.e., they purport to represent what the world is like. But from the fact that a phenomenal state represents the world in a certain way, it does not follow that the world actually *is* that way. In this respect, phenomenal states are like beliefs; they are either true or false. Moreover, just like beliefs, when phenomenal states represent falsely, we need not commit ourselves to the existence of what is thus falsely represented. Furthermore, the truth-conditional status of phenomenal states is able to explain phenomenal character; phenomenal states that represent truly simply show us what the physical world *is like*.

Is it true that all phenomenal states have truth conditions? A closer look at the nature of bodily sensations, emotions, and moods shows that, at the very least, this is complicated. For example, it seems that when you are suffering from pain, then you *are* simply suffering from pain. That is, nothing in the world can make it the case that you are not suffering from

pain after all. In this sense, pains can be said to be *self-intimating*. In order for pain to be the case, mere appearance already suffices. Pains seem *presentational* rather than *re-presentational* and do not seem to admit of a distinction between appearance and reality.²⁵

Pains and other bodily sensations may not be the greatest obstacles to an unrestricted application of the representational thesis. For example, Michael Tye points out that we never just feel pain *tout court* (Tye; 2006). When we feel pain, the pain is always represented to be located at a particular place. That is, pains represent physiological disturbances in certain parts of our bodies. This allows pains to be treated in truth-conditional terms. Take for example someone who experiences a phantom limb pain in the right arm. Although the pain represents that there is some kind of physiological disturbance in the right arm, the representation is *false* since the person to whom this content is represented does not *have* a right arm. Of course to the person who suffers from it, phantom limb pain is still painful. However, the pain is nevertheless illusory because it provides inadequate information; it misrepresents how things in the world stand. In this sense, pains *are* truth-conditional. A similar thing holds for bodily sensations in general.

In response to this, one could object that even though pain states have the ability to misrepresent, it would nevertheless be mistaken to suppose that in cases of misrepresentation no actual pain exists. As I have explained, according to representationalism, when a phenomenal state misrepresents, one need not commit oneself to the existence of what was falsely represented. For example, when you have a hallucination as of a pink elephant, there is no reason to believe in the actual existence of what your hallucination is of. However, the situation is different with pain; even when the pain-state misrepresents how things stand, the painfulness of the pain is still there. And since painfulness *is* pain, it is absurd to deny the existence of actual pain in the case of misrepresentation. So although pains may, in a sense, be truth-conditional, this does not bring with it the kind of ontological parsimony that it does in other cases of misrepresentation.

But even if strong representationalism succeeds in treating pains and other bodily sensations in truth-conditional terms, is it also able to handle emotions and moods?

Let me note, first, that the discussion about whether or not emotions and moods can be accommodated by strong representationalism usually centers around the issue of whether or not emotions and moods are typically *about* or *directed at* something. Those who frame the issue like this might claim,

²⁵For convenience, in the remainder of this article I shall continue to refer to refer to pains and other affective conditions as ‘representational’.

for example, that e.g. emotions are not representational because they are not about anything. In the recent literature, the same issue about moods is taken up in (Kind; 2013) and (Mendelovici; 2013). This is however very different from the issue of whether or not emotions and moods have truth-conditions. To appreciate this difference, a distinction must be made between treating emotions and moods as representational *contents* and treating them as *attitudes toward* certain specific representational contents. Let me explain.

Talk of the representational capacities of our minds is often formulated in terms of ‘intentionality’, which is conceived of as the mind’s ability to ‘direct’ itself to, or be ‘about’, things other than itself. For example, one can think that Amsterdam is the capital city of the Netherlands, in which case one’s thinking is about, or directed towards, Amsterdam. Indeed, thoughts are paradigmatically intentional.

In relation to this, a distinction is usually made between intentional *acts* and intentional *contents*.²⁶ The idea here is that different intentional acts can be directed at one and the same content. For example, one can *believe* that Amsterdam is the capital city of the Netherlands, but one can also *wish*, *doubt* or *imagine* that Amsterdam is the capital city of the Netherlands. Similarly, one can say that perceiving and thinking are different ways in which the mind is directed at certain contents.

Contemporary discussions, such as the one between Kind and Mendelovici, seem to be centered mainly around the issue of whether moods (sensations, emotions) are essentially *about* something. The issue is about whether or not moods and emotions are species of intentional acts.²⁷ However, even if moods and emotions are always intentionally directed, this does not say anything about the different natures of emotions and moods themselves. For example, although it could very well be the case that instances of happiness and sadness must always be directed at something, this doesn’t tell us anything about what it means to be happy about *p* in contradistinction to being sad about *p*. To put it in terms of phenomenal character; there seems to be a phenomenal difference between being happy about *p* and being sad about *p*. But this phenomenal difference cannot be explained in terms of the content to which these affective states are directed, for they are directed at the same content.

The phenomenal difference between various moods and emotions, considered as intentional acts, cannot be fully accounted for in terms of the representational contents to which they direct themselves. So even if emo-

²⁶See e.g. (Crane; 2009) for a nice exposition.

²⁷To be sure, there is no doubt that at least *sometimes* we can be moody about this or that; the controversy pertains to whether or not moods are *always* in this way directed.

tions and moods are always intentionally directed, this doesn't yet account for the basis of their mutual phenomenal differences.²⁸ And it is the latter issue that we are concerned with.

You may be angry about the fact that someone has stolen your lunch. In this case, your anger is directed at a certain representational content, *viz.* that your lunch has been stolen. Of course, it is also possible that you are in fact happy about the fact that your lunch has been stolen, perhaps because now you have a good excuse to have lunch at that nice place in town that everyone is talking about. Whether or not you are happy or sad about this, there is a phenomenal difference that is not captured by the content to which your affective state is directed. The question is whether this phenomenal difference can be cast in representational terms. As I have tried to explain, this comes down to the question whether or not such phenomenal differences come with different truth-conditions.

So *can* emotions and moods be understood as in and of themselves truth-conditional? On the face it, it seems they cannot. Although it is clear that it can be either true or false that your lunch is stolen, a similar thing does not seem to hold for your emotive state of anger that results from your belief that it has. Indeed, it seems that emotions and moods rather concern how we deal with things. That is, they pertain to how we react to things, not how we represent things as being. Therefore, emotions and moods do not seem to be truth-conditional, and hence, given what has been said, not representational. What could it mean to talk about unfaithful reactions? How things react to different circumstances cannot be evaluated in truth-conditional terms. Therefore, even if in actual fact it is not true that your lunch has been stolen, you can still be genuinely angry about it as long as you falsely believe the contrary. Although that which your anger is directed at can be a misrepresentation; the anger itself cannot. When you feel anger, there is nothing external to your anger that could reveal the anger as illusory. This is unlike the things you take yourself to see, for whether your vision of the pink elephant is veridical *does* depend on how the external world is. This does not seem to hold for affective states, for they are self-intimating; the

²⁸I suspect that the reason why philosophers worry about whether or not emotions and moods really are about something has to do with their purpose. If essentially emotions and moods are not about anything, then what purpose do they serve? Happiness without a reason is great, but also quite inexplicable. However, although this is a legitimate concern, it is not relevant for the issue of whether strong representationalism can adequately account for the *phenomenal character* of emotions and pains. After all, the phenomenal character is in the emotions and moods themselves, not in the contents at which they are directed (except, of course, when we are emotional about being emotional, or moody about being moody).

veridicality of their appearance is internal to the appearance itself. In short, emotions and moods are *real* irrespective of whether or not they are directed at misrepresentation.

Of course, we sometimes say that certain emotions are *inappropriate*, or that certain continuously reoccurring moods are *out of order*. But these are more like ethical or moral evaluations rather than truth-conditional ones. They are judgments about actual events in the world, rather than judgments about whether or not these events are adequately represented by representational systems. On the face of it then, moods and emotions seem to resist the strong representationalist's treatment.

Natural as it seems, the claim that emotions and moods are not truth-conditional may nevertheless be contested. According to Michael Tye, emotions and moods themselves are a kind of sensory representations (Tye; 1995). Not only are emotions and moods typically directed at certain representational contents that concern states of affairs in the world, they also provide representational content in and of themselves. Being in a state of anger involves all kinds of bodily changes; e.g., blood pressure rises, the voice becomes louder, muscles get tensed etc. Such bodily changes can in principle constitute the content of a misrepresentation. For example, it could be the case that you merely dream all these things. In any case, it seems possible that phenomenal representations might misrepresent such bodily conditions. If emotions and moods are wholly *exhausted* by such bodily changes, then emotions and moods ought to be considered fully truth-conditional after all.

Admittedly, Michael Tye has a very good point here. It is easy to overlook the genuinely physiological aspects of emotions and moods. Whether or not they are exhausted by these physiological aspects, however, is another matter. Suffice it to say that emotions and moods at least *complicate* the unrestricted application of the representational thesis on phenomenal states. To settle the issue, one could try to see whether there are perhaps other more straightforward examples of phenomenal states that are not genuinely truth-conditional (perhaps the state of imagining something?). But I shall not pursue this here. Instead, I would like to continue elaborating on a point that I already made earlier on, *viz.* the fact that, in the end, strong representationalism may not be able to fully *explain* all aspects of phenomenal character.

3.3 Explaining Phenomenal Character

As I have pointed out, strong representationalism aims to tell us what phenomenal character is. I have also pointed out that accounting for phenomenal character requires formulating an answer to the character question; *what are*

the factors that determine or condition phenomenal character? Does strong representationalism give a satisfactory answer to this question?

According to strong representationalism, phenomenal character is identical to representational content. It is this identification that is supposed to give strong representationalism about phenomenal character its explanatory power. This is partly because this identification involves a process of *reduction*; phenomenal character is reduced to how things are represented. That is, apart from how things are represented to us, there is nothing else shaping what phenomenal states are like. There are no phenomenal features that are non-representational. And so, if strong representationalism is true, there are no such things as qualia. Consequently, we do not have to worry that we need to explain that which is by definition inexplicable.

The explanatory power of this reductive identification furthermore consists in the fact that phenomenal character gets “kicked downstairs” into the external world. From the strong representationalist’s point of view, the phenomenal qualities with which we are acquainted in consciousness are “out there” in the world itself, rather than an exclusive product of a process of phenomenal representation. Sights, sounds, smells, *etc.*, are relegated to the external physical world, and so technically speaking, their phenomenal characters are not part of the *explanandum* that a theory of phenomenal consciousness must account for. The only thing that matters is how the organism represents certain contents to itself. The actual contents themselves are more or less secondary. Phenomenal qualities are *reduced* to non-phenomenal features in the physical environment, features that have the possibility of being instantiated independently of being represented by conscious organisms. Because these features were already instantiated long before conscious creatures entered the cosmic stage, a representational theory of phenomenal consciousness does not need to account for them. Phenomenal consciousness is nothing other than a process of representation, and since the contents that from time to time accidentally enter into it are not intrinsic to this process, there is no need to account for them in trying to explain the nature of phenomenal consciousness. Again, the issue is not *how* things appear, but *that* they appear.

Promising as it seems, it is not that obvious that *all* aspects of phenomenal character can be accounted for in terms of this reduction. Even if colors, sounds, tastes *etc.*, can be reduced to physical features of the external world, there will still remain certain phenomenal features that seem to resist such reduction. They are the phenomenal features that come with the affective states. They are the phenomenal aspects of bodily sensations, emotions, and moods. It seems obvious that these cannot be relegated to the external world, for they exclusively pertain to us as representing creatures. In a

world in which there are no representing creatures it is impossible for there to be such affective states, and therefore, in such a world the phenomenal qualities that accompany such affective states can also not exist. As I have already pointed out, the phenomenal aspects of affective states such as pains are for their instantiation *dependent* on certain experiential processes. This means that their phenomenal characters cannot be accounted for without consideration for the representational processes that give rise to them. It is only *because* certain representational processes occur that the phenomenal aspects of affective states manifest themselves. Therefore, their phenomenal character must at least in part be explained as a function of such processes.

How do strong representationalists deal with this? Fred Dretske has the following to say about pain:

Pain is not a mental event that is made conscious by one's consciousness of it. Just as a visual experience of a tree is an awareness of a nonconscious object (the tree) the pain is an awareness of a nonconscious bodily condition (an injured, strained, or diseased part). The qualities that we are aware of when we experience pain (thirst, hunger, nausea, etc.) are not qualities of a mental event; they are properties of the physical state of the body an awareness of which is the thirst, hunger or nausea...Though we can be – and most often are – aware that we are in pain, pains, like visual experiences, are awareness of objects, not objects of which we are aware. (Dretske; 1995, p. 102-103)

Although Dretske seems to acknowledge that pain is essentially an *awareness of* certain physiological conditions, he certainly does not say that pain-experiences make us aware of anything other than non-conscious physiological states. In other words, although pain-experiences (presumably certain brain-states) are always instances of experiencing certain physiological disturbances, *that which is* painful is, according to Dretske, not a feature of the pain-experience itself but a feature of those physiological conditions that the pain-experience is *of*. This is analogous to the claim that although a token of a visual experience is always an awareness of certain shapes and colors; this does not mean that this awareness itself has a particular shape and color. Of course, this is just the thesis that experience is transparent. To say then that pain-experiences are transparent is to say that the phenomenal character of a pain-experience is wholly exhausted by the manner in which the experience represents certain physiological conditions. Over and above this, nothing else is responsible for the painfulness of pains. Michael Tye gives a similar account:

Consider, for example, a pricking pain in the leg. Here, it seems phenomenologically undeniable that pricking is experienced as a feature tokened within the leg, and not as an intrinsic feature of the experience itself. What is experienced as being pricked is a part of the surface of the leg. (Tye; 1995, p. 113)

As is to be expected, the strategy that both Dretske and Tye adopt to account for pain, is to reduce its phenomenal character to the way things are represented. In this case physiological disturbances or tissue damages in the body. Recall that the explanatory gap arises from the absolute dissimilarity that appears to exist between brain states and phenomenal states. If the phenomenal character of affective states such as pain states can be successfully reduced to non-phenomenal physiological states, then strong representationalism offers a way to bridge the explanatory gap with respect to phenomenal character. From the point of view of strong representationalism, the firing of c-fibers in the brain is not identical to the phenomenal sense of pain. Rather, the firing of c-fibers in the brain contingently represents, or “tracks”, non-phenomenal disturbances in the body. In other words, the issue is not how phenomenal pain emerges from a physical brain-state, but how the brain comes to represent certain physiological disturbances. And according to strong representationalists, this latter problem is a lot more easy to solve than the first.²⁹

Not only is strong representationalism about the phenomenal aspects of affective states *wrong*, it also doesn't genuinely explain phenomenal character even if it *were* true. First of all, as I have already pointed out, the phenomenal character of pains and other affective states cannot be accounted for without reference to the representational/experiential processes that give rise to them. Strong representationists such as Dretske and Tye, however, seem to want to identify the representational contents of such affective states with non-phenomenal physiological conditions that are representation-independent. That is, they think that the phenomenal aspects of affective states can be accounted for without reference to the representational economy in which these phenomenal aspects essentially figure. However, as I have tried to make clear, these phenomenal aspects have no existence outside of their representational context. In other words, their very existence depends on phenomenal representation. So the phenomenal aspects of pains cannot be identified with certain representation-independent physiological conditions.³⁰

²⁹See e.g. (Seager and Bourget; 2007), (Cutter and Tye; 2011), and (Bourget and Mendelovici; 2013).

³⁰See (Block; 2006) for a similar critique.

To be sure, only in so far as representational contents are principally taken to pertain to representation-independent conditions does strong representationalism about affective states fail. However, one could perhaps allow for the possibility that representational processes can sometimes have themselves as their content. Such representational contents might be said to be self-referential. Indeed, one could say that bodily sensations, emotions, and pains are representational states whose contents pertain exclusively to the representational system itself *qua* representational system.³¹ In this way, one could identify qualia with representational contents that represent representational processes. Such contents have as their “subject matter” *phenomenally conscious states of being*, rather than non-phenomenal physical states of affairs. If this makes sense, then one could say that even phenomenal properties of experiences are in a way representational.

However, this will not save strong representationalism. Ultimately, the issue is not whether the phenomenal aspects of phenomenal states are representational or not. Even if they can be identified with certain kinds of representational content, this does not *explain* their phenomenal character. Strong representationalists can explain the phenomenal redness that you see when you look at an apple by reducing it to a non-phenomenal, representation-independent, feature of the physical environment. The redness is simply “out there” and is not contingent upon your phenomenal consciousness of it. However, the phenomenal aspects of bodily sensations, emotions, and moods, are *irreducibly* phenomenal. And so they cannot be accounted for by reducing them to something non-phenomenal. So even if the phenomenal aspects of affective states are identified with representational content, this identification is not explanatory because such representational contents are still irreducibly phenomenal.

Interestingly, elsewhere Tye acknowledges that instances of painfulness cannot be identified with bodily disturbances *simpliciter*. He says that we should “...apply the term ‘pain’ to tissue damage only in a certain context—the context provided by tissue damage being represented by a token of pain_E” (Tye; 2006, p. 166).³² In other words, Tye acknowledges that pain is indeed constituted by a process of representation. Nevertheless, he thinks that this should not make us commit ourselves to the existence of qualia, for he adds “Colors are identical with certain reflectance patterns *period*. Pain is not identical with tissue damage *period*. However, this difference does not require us to suppose that in the pain case, there are special, subjective qual-

³¹See e.g. (Kriegel; 2012) for an account of the notion of ‘self-representation’.

³²Tye distinguishes between pain_O, which is the object of the pain experience, and pain_E, which is the representational process that represents pain_O.

ities of a sort not found in an objectivist story about color” (Tye; 2006, p. 171). In other words, Tye maintains that although pain is constituted by representation, we do not need to posit any phenomenal properties of experience. However, this is mistaken; pain only exists as a function of certain representational processes, and so they can be seen as phenomenal properties that belong to such representational processes.³³ To conclude, strong representationalism does not have the resources to accommodate phenomenal states of a purely affective nature.

Strong representationalism aims to reduce the phenomenal aspects of affective states to non-phenomenal representation-independent properties. Its credibility as a theory of phenomenal character depends on whether or not it succeeds in this. However, the qualitative aspects of bodily sensations, emotions, and moods are irreducibly phenomenal. Although pains and other affective states without a doubt have to do with physiological disturbances in the body, they are nevertheless essentially conscious. Pain states and other affective states are essentially states of conscious experience. Notwithstanding strong representationalism, and its appeal to transparency, their phenomenal characters are in essence properties of certain experiences, properties that are dependent on the goings-on of representational processes. Strong representationalism does not bridge the gap between the physical and the character of the phenomenal. Perhaps there is no satisfactory explanation of why certain representational processes give rise to their own peculiar character. Perhaps it is just a brute fact that some physical processes give rise to purely experiential properties of experience. Perhaps! But if this is the case, we should not resist, as strong representationalists do, but rest content in our ignorance.

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³³Elsewhere Tye tries to invoke a functionalistic explanation of the phenomenal aspects of pain (Cutter and Tye; 2011). But this will not help the strong representationalist. First of all, as many have pointed out, there are fundamental obstacles to a functional account of phenomenal character. See e.g. (Levine; 1995). Second, the incorporation of functional explanations of phenomenal character robs strong representationalism from its theoretical elegance and attractiveness. The prospect of a purely representational theory of phenomenal character is what makes strong representationalism an attractive theory in the first place. But without this prospect, strong representationalism loses much of its appeal (Aydede; 2014).

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