

**NATURALISING PHENOMENOLOGY:  
USING PHENOMENOLOGY TO CLOSE THE  
EXPLANATORY GAP**

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**PhD.  
THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH  
2005**

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I declare that the work to follow is my own work and that it has not been submitted for examination on any previous occasion.

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## Abstract

Naturalists and Phenomenologists have contrasting conceptions of philosophy and its purpose. The naturalist takes philosophy to be a discipline that is continuous with the natural sciences, while phenomenology defines itself by its opposition to such a view of philosophy. My thesis project argues that this opposition is unfounded.

The phenomenologist takes the world we consciously experience to be a world of subjective facts. My thesis begins by introducing the phenomenologist's conception of a subjective fact. I call a situation "a subjective fact" when it essentially involves a subject of experience. I go on to explain why phenomenologists thought the world we experience is a world of subjective facts.

Naturalists hold that all facts are objective facts, and it is generally supposed that no fact can be both subjective and objective. I argue that it is the contrast between these two kinds of facts that led phenomenologists to conclude that a naturalistic theory of mind will have no place in it for subjective facts.

A central claim in my PhD thesis is that a fact can be both subjective and objective. I argue that a naturalist could accept the existence of subjective facts if s/he could admit the existence of situations that essentially involve relations to subjects of experience. If a naturalist is to accept the existence of situations of this kind, a naturalist account must be given of what it is to be a subject of experience.

A creature becomes a subject of experience, I claim, when it tokens representations with reflexive content. I offer an account of what it is for a representation to have reflexive content in terms of a special kind of representation I call 'an implicit self-representation'. I offer a naturalist account of implicit self-representation by appealing to the role this notion of representations plays in embodied and situated accounts of perception.

I conclude that naturalism can admit into its ontology subjects of experience. The phenomenologist says naturalism must exclude subjective facts with the result that our relation to the world gets misdescribed. I argue that naturalists can admit subjective facts, thereby opening up the possibility of a naturalised phenomenology.

## Introduction

Naturalism takes science to be our best guide to what exists. Naturalistic theories of mind have however always had difficulties making room for consciousness. Consciousness seems to us to be something that is essentially *subjective*. As such it strikes us as something that must of necessity resist the kind of objective descriptions of the mind we get from science. Those features of the mind which make consciousness subjective seem to point to a *limit* in our scientific conception of the mind. They seem to indicate the existence of something which cannot be accounted for by science. It is undeniable that there is something subjective about our conscious mental life. Yet subjectivity looks to be something which by its very nature must elude description in scientific terms. Must we conclude then that science cannot be our only guide to what exists, and hence that naturalism is false?

The idea that consciousness has a nature which resists scientific explanation is almost a working assumption of Edmund Husserl, the founder of a school of philosophy known as Phenomenology. Husserl's Phenomenology sought to describe all of the ways in which consciousness literally constitutes the world as it is perceived by us. To the extent that consciousness plays a role in generating the world we experience, Husserl thought that consciousness must be something that science can never explain. Later phenomenologists like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty were to add to Husserl's critique of naturalism. They were to concur with Husserl's thought that consciousness plays a role in shaping the reality we inhabit, so that there is something about this reality which can never be given an objective description.

Part of the aim of my thesis is to argue that there is something importantly right about this critique of naturalism. I agree with Husserl and the later phenomenologists that the world we perceive is shaped and given form through our ways of perceiving and interacting with it. However I argue that it is recognising this point which holds the key to defeating the argument against naturalism which I sketched above. I take up the idea that consciousness (and indeed our existence as persons more generally) play a role in shaping the reality we experience. I use this idea to develop a naturalistic account of the conscious mind.

The approach I shall take to thinking about consciousness in what follows I will call “naturalised phenomenology”. Other philosophers have claimed to be doing naturalised phenomenology (see for instance Petitot *et al* 1999). What relation, if any, does my project bear to these philosophers?

Francisco Varela (1996) proposed a method for studying consciousness he dubbed “neurophenomenology”. Neurophenomenology makes use of first-person data gathered from subjects engaging in careful reflection on their experiences to study brain processes. Varela proposed the following working hypothesis:

‘Phenomenological accounts of the structure of experience and their counterparts in cognitive science relate to each other through reciprocal constraints.’ Varela (1996: 351)

The idea I take it is that the descriptions of conscious experience supplied by phenomenology are to act as a constraint on the account of consciousness we get from science. They are the explanandum if you like which it is the task of science to explain. However science equally counts as a constraint on what phenomenologists say about consciousness. This is to say that

science could reveal some description of conscious experience arrived at through phenomenological reflection to be mistaken.

The idea that phenomenology might contribute to a science of consciousness is one we also find in Flanagan (1992). Flanagan suggests that the appropriate method for studying consciousness, which he dubs “the natural method”, is to listen carefully to what phenomenology, psychology and neuroscience have to say about consciousness and then to see ‘whether and to what extent the three stories can be rendered coherent, meshed and brought into reflective equilibrium.’

Both describe exactly the approach I shall be following in my thesis. However neither Varela nor Flanagan are particularly clear on why they think phenomenology can help when it comes to settling on a scientific theory about consciousness. A working assumption in my project will be that when we sense an object, say a flower, and this object seems to us to be a certain way – the flower looks to be pink and seems to have a subtle scent to it – the appearance the flower presents to me is real. Appearances are subjective. An object cannot appear to be a certain way unless there is someone, a subject, to whom the object appears. Appearances are also real. This immediately generates a puzzle as to how something can be both subjective and real.

One response to this puzzle is to try to explain it away. Daniel Dennett (1991) for instance seems to be of the view that a flower appearing to me to be pink is just a matter of my reactive dispositions, in particular what I would be prepared to think and say about the flower and the way it seems to me. Dennett collapses the distinction between the way the flower seems to me and the way I think it seems to me. To collapse the distinction between a

thing seeming to be x and my thinking that it is x is surely a mistake. Merleau-Ponty captures the point well:

'Ordinary experience draws a perfectly clear distinction between sense-experience and judgement. It sees judgement as the taking of a stand, as an effort to know something valid for me at every moment of my life, and for other minds, actual and possible; sense experience, on the contrary, is taking appearance at its face value.' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 34)

We may not be convinced by Merleau-Ponty description of what is involved in making a judgement, but the distinction he draws between sense-experience and judgement is surely right. Judgement requires one to *actively* take a stand on a question. Perception doesn't, we simply take things as we find them.

Where Dennett takes what people say and think about their conscious experiences as his datum, I shall take as my datum to be explained, how things ordinarily appear to us. The problem consciousness presents to the naturalist is to account for why things ordinarily appear to us as they do or indeed why they should appear any way whatsoever. It is these questions that I will use phenomenology to address in what follows.

My thesis has three parts. The first three chapters are concerned with explaining the relation between naturalism and phenomenology. In chapter 1 I set out what I understand to be the commitments of naturalism. I go on to present Husserl's critique of naturalism. I argue that Husserl's argument is unsuccessful. It rests on an idealist construal of phenomenology. I sketch an alternative way of thinking about his phenomenological project which is neutral on the question of idealism.

Chapter 2 presents Heidegger's argument against naturalism. Heidegger's argument presents more of a problem for my proposal to use

phenomenology to develop a naturalistic account of consciousness. Heidegger gives us an argument against naturalism which doesn't rely on idealism. He argues that there is something phenomenology can describe – our ordinary lived experience – which will always be missing from a naturalistic account of the mind. In chapter 3 I connect this point with arguments that have been given which purport to establish the existence of an explanatory gap with respect to consciousness. I argue that the explanatory gap is located exactly where the phenomenologists attack naturalism. Phenomenology identifies just what it is that naturalistic theories leave out from their account of the mind.

The phenomenologists think that the hole they have identified right in the centre of the naturalist's account of the mind is one that cannot be filled. The remainder of my thesis take up this challenge on the naturalist's behalf. In chapters four and five I set out in detail a phenomenological account of conscious experience. Chapter 4 describes the account of perceptual intentionality we find in phenomenology. It is argued that the aboutness which attaches to our perceptual experiences cannot be understood as a causal or historical relation between perceiver and world. Instead there is a distinctively phenomenological species of intentionality which belongs to our experience purely in virtue of the ways in which they present the world as seeming to a subject.

Chapter 5 looks to phenomenology for an account of what it is to be a conscious creature. I present an account of consciousness according to which a conscious creature is always self-conscious. The self-consciousness doesn't require the creature to be constantly engaged in thinking about itself. Rather it is a pre-reflective form of self-consciousness.

I contrast this account of creature consciousness with the account we find in higher-order theories.

The second part of my thesis pins down more precisely exactly what it is that the naturalist is supposed to be incapable of explaining. The third and final part of my thesis returns to the opposition between naturalism and phenomenology. In chapter 6 I offer a response to the argument that has been given against naturalism thus far. I show how, contrary to the arguments of the first half of the thesis, the naturalist could in principle account for the conception of experience we find in phenomenology. The anti-naturalist argument the phenomenologist has given rests on a false conception of naturalism. In chapter 7 I take up the account of conscious experience that has been presented in chapters four and five and use this account to sketch in broad brushstrokes a naturalistic account of consciousness. Chapter 7 will show that phenomenology is something that can be naturalised and that the process is already well underway.



## **Acknowledgements**

I am deeply grateful to my family – Mum, Dad, Lynda, my sisters Louise and Gabi, Grandma L and K and Grandpa M. – for all the support they have given over the years. Thanks also to my girlfriend Catriona for all the weekends she has had to sacrifice to my PhD thesis, not to mention all of the decorating I managed to escape!

There are many people I would like to thank for their involvement in this project, most of all Denis Walsh. I have been extremely fortunate to enjoy his close supervision over the past five years. His warmth and generosity have been a constant source of support and his close and careful reading have helped me to a much clearer understanding of my project. I have also had the good fortune to work with Matt Nudds in the final stages of my project. He has an eye for the details that matter.

This project began nearly ten years ago (!) when I was working for my M-Phil at Birkbeck. Scott Sturgeon and Sebastian Gardner were my supervisors back then when the ideas herein were taking shape. Scott Sturgeon taught me so much about what good philosophy involves, in particular the importance of precision and careful expression, hopefully his influence is evident in what follows. Sebastian Gardner instilled in me a love for the phenomenological philosophers some of who will figure centrally in what is to come, and also for German Philosophy more generally!

Richard Holton and Stephen Priest helped me with the early chapters. I also benefited more than I can say from talking with Timothy Williamson and Huw Price during their time at Edinburgh. Thanks also to Peter Kail, in particular for helping me to see how much in philosophy turns on how one thinks about colour. Peter Milne, Dory Scaltsas, Rae Langton and Mike Ridge have all given me excellent feedback on the parts of the thesis I have presented to the department. Last but not least I extend my warmest thanks to Zohar Kohavi, Anna Marmodora, Edoardo Zamuner, Dan Heard, Dan Denis, Stasinios Stavreanas, Luca Taddio, Steven Horrobin, Jon Trigg, Richard Foggo, Adrian Wilding and to Jon Miller, John Sharpe and Paul Gathercole for your friendship over all these years.



## CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Introduction	ii-vii
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
<b>The Conflict between Naturalism and Phenomenology</b>	
Introduction	1
1. What is Naturalism?	3
2. Naturalised Epistemology	14
3. Husserl's Philosophical Project	18
4. Husserl's Argument against Naturalism	28
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
<b>Existential Phenomenology and the Argument against Naturalism</b>	
Introduction	36
1. The Departure from Husserl	37
2. Operative and Cognitive Intentionality	39
3. The Question of Being	44
4. Two Modes of Understanding	49
5. Heidegger's Realism	57
6. Being-in-the-World	62
7. The Argument against Naturalism	68
<b>Chapter 3</b>	
<b>Locating the Explanatory Gap</b>	
Introduction	78
1. The Explanatory Gap Introduced	80
2. Chalmers on Conceivability and Possibility	86
3. The Knowledge Argument and Subjective Facts	90
4. Locating the Explanatory Gap	95
5. Deflating the Knowledge Argument	101
<b>Chapter 4</b>	
<b>Consciousness and Intentionality</b>	
Introduction	107

1. Phenomenal Properties and Representational Properties	108
2. Intentionality and Phenomenology	117
3. Phenomenal Intentionality	124
4. Husserl's Theory of Intentionality	128
5. The Existential Phenomenologist's Theory of Intentionality	136
6. The Intentionalist Argument for Subject-Independence	145

## **Chapter 5**

### **Consciousness, Self-Consciousness and First-Person Knowledge**

Introduction	151
1. Pinpointing the Problem	153
2. Two Conceptions of Phenomenal Character	161
3. Consciousness and Self-Consciousness	167
4. The Dependence Thesis	180
5. Higher-Order Theories of Consciousness and the Dependence Thesis	193

## **Chapter 6**

### **Making Room for Subjective Facts**

Introduction	210
1. Two Arguments for Subjective Facts	213
2. The Anti-Naturalist Argument	221
3. Making Room for Subjective Facts	227
4. Location Dependent Representation	229
5. Refuting the Independence Assumption	237

## **Chapter 7**

### **Naturalising Phenomenology**

Introduction	245
1. The Project of Naturalising Phenomenology	248
2. The Phenomenal Intentionality Thesis	251
3. Against the Strong Reading of the Phenomenal Intentionality Thesis	259
4. Husserl and Merleau-Ponty on Phenomenal Intentionality	267
5. The Enactive Theory of Perception	274
6. Why Perception isn't Detection	286
7. The Feeling of Ownership	296
8. Towards a Naturalistic account of Pre-Reflective Self-Consciousness	299
Conclusion	303
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>305</b>

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Naturalists and Phenomenologists<sup>1</sup> have contrasting conceptions of philosophy and its purpose. The naturalist takes philosophy to be a discipline that is continuous with the natural sciences, while phenomenology defines itself by its opposition to such a view of philosophy. Merleau-Ponty tells us, in answering the question what is phenomenology:

‘Husserl’s first directive to phenomenology, in its early stages, to be a ‘descriptive psychology’, or to return to the ‘things themselves’, is from the start a *foreswearing of science*. I am not *the outcome* of the meeting point of numerous causal agencies which determine my bodily or psychological make-up. I cannot conceive of myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological or sociological investigation...’  
(1962, p.viii, *my emphases*)

From the phenomenologist’s perspective then, any attempt to build a naturalistic account of the mind based on phenomenological description will appear misconceived from the outset. By the end of my thesis I will have argued that it is the phenomenologist’s misgivings about naturalism that are misconceived. The phenomenologist’s anti-naturalist stance rests on a mistaken understanding of naturalism. I will show that in reality it is possible for a naturalist philosopher to accept many of the insights phenomenology has to offer. First we must get clear on how the phenomenologist argues against naturalism. This will be my aim in this chapter and the next.

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<sup>1</sup> In this chapter and throughout the thesis I will sometimes take the traditions of naturalism and phenomenology to be represented by two characters, “the naturalist” and “the phenomenologist”, who will speak on behalf of their respective traditions. Where there is a point of disagreement within either of these camps I will make reference to specific texts and thinkers, but when there are themes upon which all phenomenologists or all naturalists are agreed, I will use these two characters to give expression to these themes.

## The Conflict Between Naturalism and Phenomenology

This chapter will explore the naturalist and the phenomenologist's differing conceptions of philosophy. The principle difference between these two traditions concerns the relation each takes philosophy to stand in to science. Phenomenologists think that science occupies a subordinate position in relation to philosophy. They ask how scientific knowledge is possible, and set about identifying the conditions of the possibility of knowledge of the natural world. Naturalists for their part, take the task of philosophy to be to demonstrate how our thinking about some philosophical question can be made to cohere with the theories of the sciences. It is in this light that Ruth Millikan (1998) tells us:

'As a naturalist, I must understand my own self and mind as well as those of others to be part of nature. Thought, including my own thought, must be discovered in nature, rather than helping to establish nature.' (*ibid* p.65)

We can see already, just from these brief comments, that naturalists and phenomenologists approach philosophy in very different ways. The prospects for securing any kind of common ground look decidedly bleak.

In section 1 and 2 I will sketch what I take to be the key commitments of the naturalist with respect to metaphysics and epistemology, the key areas in which naturalism comes into conflict with phenomenology. Having sketched the commitments of the naturalist I will then consider how Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, challenged naturalism. First I will describe his philosophical method. We will see how the practice of this method leads Husserl to propose the radical metaphysical thesis that the world we experience is an accomplishment of certain conscious processes. I will propose two readings of this thesis, one of which is idealist and the other of

which is metaphysically neutral. The chapter will close by considering Husserl's argument against naturalism. I will argue that Husserl's challenge to naturalism rests on a commitment to idealism. Husserl takes his descriptions of conscious experience to entail idealism. If he is right, phenomenology and naturalism are almost certainly in irreconcilable conflict.

In Chapter 2 we shall see that existential phenomenologists reject Husserl's idealism. Unfortunately this will not clear the way for a naturalised phenomenology of the kind I wish to develop. There we shall see that existential phenomenologists advance a similar argument against naturalism to Husserl, the only difference being that they reject his commitment to idealism. Thus it would seem that the conflict between phenomenology and naturalism may be independent of the issue of idealism after all.

### 1. What is Naturalism?

Naturalists agree with Wilfred Sellars that "Science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not." (Sellars 1963, p173) Sellars is making the point here that there is no position outside of science from which we can answer ontological questions, questions about what there is. We shall see in the next section how naturalists extend this conclusion to cover epistemology: naturalistic epistemologists argue that there is no place outside of science from which to account for the possibility of our knowledge.

A naturalistic account of some property or entity will seek to locate that property or entity in nature. This it will do by explaining how that property or entity relates to the other properties or entities that the sciences of the day appeal to in their various theories.

## The Conflict Between Naturalism and Phenomenology

Consider the difficult case of colour. There seems to be two kinds of properties that we refer to in our discourse about colour. First, there are the properties we refer to in describing our colour experiences when we say, for instance, what coloured things look like. In addition, there are the properties that are appealed to by science. Commonsense tells us one story about what it is for a thing to be coloured: a thing is coloured when it look a certain way to viewers like us. Science tells us another story about what it is for a thing to be coloured. It may tell us, for instance, that a thing has a particular colour, in part, because it has a surface spectral reflectance property such that it reflects light of a certain frequency.<sup>2</sup> We have at the outset, two theories of colour; a naturalist must demonstrate how these two theories can be made to cohere.

The naturalist can achieve this task in one of three ways. S/he could argue either for (1) elimination; (2) peaceful coexistence, or (3) assimilation. I will consider each of these possibilities in turn.

In the nineteenth century it was widely supposed that no mechanistic explanation of life was to be had. Instead, philosophers and scientists posited the existence of a life force that animated living things, an *élan vital*. Nowadays, life is explained by mechanisms that bring about reproduction, adaptation and so on. With the advances in biology the theories of the past have been replaced by theories which render unnecessary the appeal to an animating life force. Might something analogous happen for our

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<sup>2</sup> Of course this cannot be the whole story, for the way coloured things look remains constant even with large changes in illumination. Green things for instance reflect a high percentage of middle-wave light and a low percentage of long-wave and short-wave light. Yet an object can continue to look green even though it is reflecting a higher percentage of long-wave and short-wave light than medium-wave light. What colour the object seems to have depends on the scene or the background against which the object appears. It is also true that two objects can seem to have different colours even though they are reflecting light of the same frequency. Again this happens because the colour we see something to have depends on the surroundings in which it is placed. See Varela, Thompson and Rosch 1991, ch.8, 160-5 for further discussion.

commonsense theories like our ordinary understanding of colour? Could it be that the theories of a future science of colour vision completely replace our commonsense theory of colour? It is this possibility of science revealing some category of commonsense to be explanatorily redundant that I have given the name "elimination".<sup>3</sup>

Our commonsense theory of colour performs a very different function from the theories of the colour scientist. We use our commonsense theory to talk about how objects look to us. While perhaps it is possible that we could give up our ordinary ways of talking in favour of those of the colour scientist, it is hard to see what explanatory advantages would accrue from such a change. When the theory of vital forces gave way to a mechanistic theory of life, talk of vital forces became explanatorily redundant. There was no longer any need for our explanations of life to appeal to such a concept. It is hard to conceive of something similar happening for the terms we employ in describing the ways coloured things look to us. How could a mature colour science make our ordinary ways of talking about colour redundant?

Setting aside the case of colour, it is the exception rather than the norm for science to come up with a theory that renders a previous theory wholly redundant. Sometimes, when an old theory  $T_1$  is replaced by a new theory  $T_2$ , it is possible to deduce  $T_1$  from the conjunction of  $T_2$  and bridging principles connecting the terms of  $T_1$  with those of  $T_2$ .<sup>4</sup> There are however many cases from the history of science where such a deduction isn't possible because the pair of theories are not consistent.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, even when we can deduce one theory from another, the result isn't necessarily that one theory is superceded by another.

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<sup>3</sup> The leading proponents of this form of naturalism are the Churchlands. See, for example, Churchland (1988).

<sup>4</sup> See Nagel (1961, ch.11) for an account of reductive explanation along these lines.

<sup>5</sup> This point was originally made by Feyerabend (1962).



Smith (1992: 30-1) suggests that while fluid mechanics, for instance, can be deduced from a molecular theory of matter taken in conjunction with Newton's Laws and Thermodynamics, the latter theories do not make fluid mechanics redundant. For the latter theories do not have the problem solving power of fluid dynamics. Complex fluid systems exhibit interesting regular but non-periodic behaviour. The more basic or fundamental theories from which the principles of fluid dynamics are deducible tell us about the microstructures of fluids. They do not account for the kinds of macroscopic behaviour that we learn about from fluid mechanics.

I conclude then, that elimination is only appropriate in those rare cases when one scientific theory supercedes or makes redundant another, as was the case with explanations of life that appeal to an *élan vital*. This doesn't seem to be the case for our colour concepts.<sup>6</sup> Thus we are still in need of some means of characterising the relation between our commonsense conception of colour and the conception of colour we get from science. Let us turn then to the second possibility which I labeled peaceful coexistence.

The naturalist who seeks the peaceful coexistence of commonsense and science pursues a strategy which is the polar opposite of elimination. Rather than seeking to displace commonsense in favour of science, the proponent of peaceful existence argues that the theories of commonsense are not in tension with those of science. Both, s/he claims, supply equally good

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<sup>6</sup> Thompson (2000) argues that we can only account for the distinction between unique or primary colours and binary colours by reference to our experience of colour. He begins by noting that our experiences of colours form a quality space ordered along three dimensions: hue, saturation and lightness. A structural feature of this quality space is that it contains what he calls 'psychological primaries' – the unique hues red, green and yellow. He follows Austen Clark (1993) in defining these hues as qualities whose mixture can match every sensed quality in the space but each of which cannot be matched by combination of the others. This is to say that a psychological primary can be matched only by itself. Thompson goes on to argue that the relations among colour properties in virtue of which they form a colour space cannot be explained in terms of surface spectral reflectance properties. Thus Thompson has supplied another argument for the claim I have just made that we cannot eliminate ordinary talk of colours in favour of the concepts our physical theory of colour supply.



## The Conflict Between Naturalism and Phenomenology

descriptions of reality. When we say things are 'really' coloured this statement should be understood as being made from the standpoint of commonsense, and when we say that colour is 'really' a surface reflectance property, the resulting claim is made from a scientific standpoint. If we relativise our claims to the standpoints from which they are made, the conflict between science and commonsense no longer generates a contradiction. The conflict will become something with which we can learn to live. This naturalistic strategy takes both science and common sense to act as guides to what there is. This is possible because commonsense and science operate from distinct standpoints. Here is Strawson describing the proposal:

'Looking at photographs in journals of popular science of patches of human skin, vastly magnified, we say, 'How fantastically uneven and ridgy it really is.' We study a sample of blood through a microscope and say, 'It's mostly colourless.' But skin can still be smooth and blood be red; for in another context we shift our standard back. Such shifts do not convict us of volatility or condemn us to internal conflict. The appearance of both volatility and conflict vanishes when we acknowledge the relativity of our 'reallys'.' (Strawson, 1979/1988: 110)

This strategy for securing peaceful coexistence fails when our commonsense and scientific theories both make appeal to distinct properties as the *cause* of some event. Commonsense might tell us that what caused a bull to charge at was its seeing my red scarf. While science might tell us that what caused the bull to charge was the firing of neurons in a certain part of the animal's brain. If we disallow causal overdetermination – if we do not allow a single event to have multiple causes – we must admit that we have here a case of competing causal explanations. Furthermore, if we concede that every event has some prior physical cause (or has the chance of its

occurrence determined by some prior physical cause) it looks like we are obliged to say that all the causal work is already carried out by the property which figures in our scientific explanation.<sup>7</sup> When the causal explanations our commonsense theory pretends to supply compete with those of science, it seems that commonsense must give way to science.

Let us agree that commonsense and science operate from distinct theoretical standpoints. This won't help us to reconcile the claims of commonsense with those of science when both purport to supply causal explanations of the same event. As soon as we are presented with two competing causal explanations we will be back with the question with which we started. We will be faced once again with the task of explaining how both our commonsense explanation and our scientific explanation can be true. I conclude then that peaceful coexistence isn't an option for the naturalist. This leaves us with assimilation.

Naturalisation by assimilation comes in two forms: reductionist and anti-reductionist. What they share in common is an ontological claim to the effect that science is our guide to what there is. A naturalistic theory achieves assimilation by showing that the properties and entities a commonsense theory quantifies over are either identical with, or, supervene on, the properties and entities described by the natural sciences. Anti-reductionists endorse the supervenience claim in one form or another. Reductionists endorse the identity claim, though they will do so in a way that enables them to acknowledge the possibility of a property being multiply realised, as we shall see.

Anti-reductionism originally arose as a reaction against the idea of a unified science as it is presented in Oppenheim and Putnam (1958). What

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<sup>7</sup> Kim has developed this worry at length. See for instance Kim (1993).

## The Conflict Between Naturalism and Phenomenology

anti-reductionists like Fodor (1974) were reacting against is the idea of physics supplying the basic laws for all the other sciences. Fodor advanced instead a view of nature according to which nature can be carved up in lots of different ways. Each science is relatively autonomous of other sciences, having its own conceptual apparatus, laws and explanations. In particular Fodor argued that what he called the “special sciences” couldn’t be reduced to physics. There are special sciences, Fodor tells us, ‘because of the way the world is put together: not all natural kinds (not all the classes of things of things about which there are important, counterfactual, supporting generalisations to make) are or correspond to, physical natural kinds.’ (Fodor, 1974/2001: 134)

Now it may be that Fodor is right when he says there is no predicate of physics lawfully coextensive with the predicate ‘is-a-monetary exchange’. Hence it may be true that there is no reduction of Gresham’s law (an example of Fodor’s) to physics. Still we might want to know why the events that fall under the laws of the special sciences happen also, token by token, to fall under physical laws. We want to explain why the events that are describable by the special sciences are token identical with physical events. Fodor’s argument for the autonomy of the special sciences relies on acts of monetary exchange or feelings of pain being realised by a heterogeneous class of physical states. No doubt this is true. Still we want to know how the explanations of some event we find in the special sciences and the explanation of that event proposed by physics can both be true.

This becomes still more urgent if we suppose that the physical world is causally closed, so that every event described by the special sciences has the probability of its occurrence fixed by some physical cause. Given the causal closure of the physical world, if we don’t explain why the relation of

token identity holds between the physical event and the event of my feeling pain epiphenomenalism will beckon. We will have to say that it is not my instantiating pain that explains my dropping the red-hot poker, but my being in a brain state B which is token identical with my experience of pain. The anti-reductionist needs some explanation in the terms of the lower level sciences as to why my instantiation of pain was the cause of my behaviour. Otherwise s/he will be unable to defeat the threat posed by epiphenomenalism.<sup>8</sup>

Jaegwon Kim (1998, ch.4) has proposed a reductionist route out of the problem I have just described. The problem, to recap, is to accommodate the kind of multiple realisability which is a feature of the events described by the special sciences whilst avoiding falling foul of epiphenomenalism. Kim proposes that we solve the problem as follows: first we give a functional specification of some higher-level property M and then we identify a physical property P which satisfies this specification. Consider the psychological property, being in pain. We can specify what it is for a creature to experience pain by identifying this experience with a type of state that stands in a causal relation to certain kinds of stimuli, and that typically brings about certain kinds of behaviour. We thereby identify our psychological property M (the property of experiencing pain) with a second-order property: the property of having a property that plays a causal role R. Next we look for a property that fits our causal specification: we look for properties or mechanisms which might play this causal role. Let us call the property in question a "realiser": it is a realiser insofar as it *realises* or *instantiates* the causal powers in terms of

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<sup>8</sup> There is an alternative open to the anti-reductionist, he could embrace ontological emergence. That is to say, he could deny that all physical effects are entirely determined by their physical causes, and thus deny the causal closure of physics. For a discussion see Crane (2001: §18). This seems to me an attractive move but to attempt its defence here would take me too far away from my main concerns in this chapter.

which we have defined our mental property *M*. We can say that a property *P* is a realiser for pain experiences when it plays the causal role in terms of which we specify what it is to be in pain. I shall call an explanation which proceeds in the way just described an "ontological reduction".

Now clearly there is plenty of room in this account for the property we identify as the realiser of causal role *M* to vary across and within individuals. Thus there is nothing in Kim's proposal which flouts the requirement that *M* be multiply realised. Nor is this account obviously vulnerable to epiphenomenalism. An ontological reduction tells us that *M* is located in nature by being individuated by causal powers which belong to *P*, *M*'s realiser. Since *M* is nothing over and above *P* whatever causal powers belong to *P* will also belong to *M*. I am assuming here that *M* inherits all of its causal powers from its realiser. Kim (1993 & 1998: 54) labels this assumption the causal inheritance principle. The causal inheritance principle says:

"If a second-order property *F* is realised on any given occasion by a first-order property *H* (that is if *F* is instantiated on a given occasion in virtue of the fact that one of its realisers *H*, is instantiated on that occasion), then the causal powers of this particular instance of *F* are identical with (or are a subset of) the causal powers of *H* (or of this instance of *H*)." (Kim, 1998: 54)

Any theory which rejected the causal inheritance principle would have to accept the possibility of second-order properties having causal powers which are not identical to those of its realisers or vice versa. It seems plausible to me to say that the first-order property couldn't have any causal powers that

didn't also belong to the second-order property it is realising.<sup>9</sup> If this is right then my experience of pain is no less causally efficacious than its realiser, since my pain and its realiser share all the same causal powers. Thus Kim seems to have found a way out of the difficulty the anti-reductionist ran into. I want to briefly raise a different worry one might have about Kim's account of realisation which will be relevant to the final position I argue for at the end of the thesis.<sup>10</sup>

It is tempting to think of the realisers of my psychological states as microphysical properties of me. On this understanding the naturalist pursuing assimilation is committed to identifying neurophysiological properties sufficient for the functionally specified psychological properties which they realise. Now it seems to me that the naturalist ought to be cautious before s/he lends her endorsement to such an assumption. Surely the nature of a psychological property's realiser should be left as an open empirical question. Some psychological properties may be realised by neurophysiological properties of individuals. Others may extend into the world.

There are two related principles we should bear in mind when thinking about the realisers of our physical states. The first is Andy Clark's 007 Principle. It says:

'In general, evolved creatures will neither store nor process information in costly ways when they can use the structure of their environment and their operations upon it as a convenient stand-in for the information-processing operations concerned. That is, know only as much information as you need to get the job done.' (Clark, 1989: 64)

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<sup>9</sup> Perhaps a second-order property could have some causal powers it didn't inherit from its first-order property. To assess this possibility would require some discussion of the possibility of ontological emergence, see footnote 8, but unfortunately this goes beyond my remit in this current chapter.

<sup>10</sup> The worry derives from Wilson (2004: ch.5 & 6)



The second principle is Mark Rowlands' Barking Dog Principle'

'If it is necessary for an organism to be able to perform an adaptive task  $T$ , then it is selectively disadvantageous for the organism to develop internal mechanisms sufficient for the performance of  $T$  when it is possible for the organism to perform  $T$  by way of a combination of internal mechanisms and manipulation of the external environment.' (Rowlands, 2003: 166)

Both these principles suggest that the environment may be used to carry out information processing tasks. I suggest then that we need a notion of realisation which registers this possibility.

I will follow Wilson (2004: ch.5) in making a distinction between three kinds of realisation. The first two are borrowed from Shoemaker (1981). Shoemaker distinguishes between core realisers and total realisers. Suppose that c-fibers are indeed the physical realisers of pain. Shoemaker points out that this cannot be the whole story. C-fibers produce pain only in conjunction with other parts of the central nervous system which are also activated when the subject is in pain. C-fiber stimulation can be at best what Shoemaker calls the "core realiser" of pain. Shoemaker takes the "total realiser" of pain to be the nociceptive system – the various nociceptors distributed about the body, and the other parts of the brain that are involved in sensing pain. Generally we can say the total realiser will include all of the conditions that are necessary and sufficient for a system to embed a core realiser. Now it is the total realiser which is sufficient for being in pain; the core realiser isn't, even though one couldn't be in pain without it. All of the parts of a total realiser which are not its core realiser I shall follow Wilson in calling "non-core parts".

Given the 007 and Barking Dog principles, a naturalist ought to say the following about the realisers of our psychological properties. S/he ought to allow for the possibility that the non-core parts of a total realiser may extend into the world. This is to say that the non-core parts of a total realiser may contribute to producing or sustaining a psychological property P even though these non-core parts are not located within the individual to whom P belongs.

With this proviso registered, I tentatively endorse Kim's strategy of assimilation by ontological reduction. A naturalist pursuing assimilation must show how a pre-scientific or commonsense theory fits with the theories of the science by first identifying the properties which are appealed to by commonsense with second-order properties. It will then set about showing how this second-order property finds realisation in some physical conditions which may extend into the world. In the next section I will briefly consider how a naturalist would approach problems in epistemology, before taking up the phenomenologist's argument against naturalism.

### 2. Naturalised Epistemology

Traditionally, epistemology has been conceived of as a normative inquiry. Among the central questions an epistemologist asks is when a belief should be accepted as true. This is not simply a factual question: a question about when *in fact* beliefs are accepted as true. It is a question that asks about what we *ought* to do if we are to believe only what is true. There are standards of epistemic responsibility we employ in deciding the answer to this question: standards which tell us what it is reasonable to believe and which of our beliefs it would be irresponsible to accept as true. Thus, when Descartes asks which of his beliefs he can know to be true, he is asking which of his beliefs it would be reasonable for him to continue to accept as



true. At least initially, what he discovers is that they are all equally subject to doubt, and thus it would be irresponsible of him, at this stage in his enquiry, to accept any of them.

Naturalistic epistemology seeks to answer the question of when it is reasonable for us to believe a proposition in non-normative or descriptive terms<sup>11</sup>. Any theory that appeals to evaluative or normative notions like “adequate evidence”, or “sufficient grounds” or “good reasons” will fail to meet this condition.

Some versions of naturalistic epistemology seek to give up altogether on epistemology conceived of as a normative enterprise. Quine (1969) exemplifies this attitude.<sup>12</sup> There are less radical conceptions of naturalised epistemology that do not require us to give up altogether on the task of explaining when it is reasonable to hold a belief. Most versions of externalist epistemology for instance are naturalistic in spirit, and also accept that our sensory experiences can act as reasons for our beliefs.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See for instance Goldman (1976/2000: 340).

<sup>12</sup> For Quine, naturalistic epistemology is to work from within psychology. Quine's naturalistic epistemologist asks how we can form representations and theories about the world starting from observations that radically underdetermine the final result. It is to psychology that we must look for an answer to this question: it is psychology that can identify the processes by means of which we transform our observations into theories. Quine's epistemologist is concerned only with the causal relations between sensory input and cognitive output. S/he doesn't worry whether our observations give us *good evidence* for our theories. This is a normative question involving us as it does in the evaluation of the support our evidence gives us for a theory. Quine's recommendation seems to be that philosophers should no longer concern themselves with questions of this kind. See for instance Quine 1969/2000: 297. Epistemology should become a purely descriptive science.

It is an open question whether a project that ceases to be concerned with justification is still a project in epistemology. See Kim 1988/2000 for a persuasive argument to this effect. However, to enter into this worry would take us beyond my current concern, which is to sketch the commitments of a naturalistic epistemology.

<sup>13</sup> Peacocke 1986, ch.9 develops an externalist view which does not seek to explain the justificatory role our psychological states play in non-normative terms, but nevertheless allows that whether a belief counts as justified may be something of which the believer is ignorant. McDowell 1995/2000 argues that hybrid externalist positions like Peacocke's are unsatisfactory, because they make the attainment of knowledge a matter of luck. Two thinkers can be in possession of identical reasons for their beliefs, and one of these thinkers succeed in knowing while the other fails to do so. This can happen because on the hybrid account of knowledge whether a belief is true or not is taken to be something external to the reasons one has which support one's beliefs. McDowell's solution is, very roughly, to

Generally, an externalist epistemology will hold that a belief's justification depends (wholly, or partly, depending on the strength of the view) on the process by which the belief was acquired. Whether or not a belief is justified is, for the most part, a matter beyond the ken of the believer. A belief's justificatory status is dependent on the processes by which it was formed. Thus Goldman (1986), for instance, has given a detailed account of justified belief as belief that is generated by a reliable belief-forming process. While Armstrong holds that a belief is justified when a law-like connection holds between the state of affairs in which a subject believes that  $p$  and the state of affairs that makes  $p$  true, such that given that a subject believes that  $p$ , it must be the case that  $p$ .<sup>14</sup> On both these views, our explanation of when a belief is justified is one that is not framed in normative or evaluative terms. Appeal is instead made to the processes that caused the belief, or to the law-like connection that holds between a representational state and the state of affairs that makes this state true. In both cases the result is an account of justification (a normative notion) framed in non-normative or descriptive terms.

For the naturalist then, the task of explaining how we get knowledge of the external world is placed squarely in the domain of psychology and cognitive science. For the phenomenologist, to locate philosophical problems about knowledge within the domain of science begs some important questions. The phenomenologist would object that we cannot appeal to psychology to explain how our knowledge of the external world is possible. For to do so, is to already assume that psychology can give us knowledge. We cannot

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develop an externalist view of justification which denies that truth is external to the possession of a reason.

<sup>14</sup> See Armstrong (1973: 166).

assume that knowledge is possible in order to explain how knowledge is possible without succumbing to the charge of circularity in our reasoning.

'If certain riddles are, generally speaking, inherent in principle to natural science, then it is self-evident that the solution of these riddles according to premises and conclusions in principle transcends natural science. To expect from natural science itself the solution of any one of the problems inherent in it as such...or even merely to suppose that it could contribute to the solution of such a problem any premise whatsoever, is to be involved in a vicious circle.' (Husserl, 1911/1981: 172)

Where Husserl talks of "riddles" we can take him to mean "problems concerning how thought and experience of an objective world is possible". These are problems that he thinks will be brought to our attention the moment we begin to reflect on our knowledge in a philosophical manner. The problem of knowledge is inherent in any enterprise that purports to supply us with knowledge, and science is undoubtedly among those enterprises. Science could give us a solution to the problem of how knowledge is possible only by assuming the very thing that is in question.

This is a difficulty that did not escape Quine's notice, and unsurprisingly he isn't particularly moved by it. He suggests that one would only be bothered by a circularity of this kind, if one aspired to set scientific knowledge on firm foundations.<sup>15</sup> But Quine suggests that no one should believe in such a project anymore. Hence, we have nothing to fear from the circularity

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<sup>15</sup> Interestingly enough, the essay in which Husserl makes this charge of circularity against naturalism is one in which he argues for such a foundationalist project. See Husserl (1911/1981). So it would seem that Quine's response is quite to the point. I will develop a different line of attack on the phenomenologist's behalf in what remains of the chapter, which, if I am right stands behind Husserl's comment here anyway. This line of argument does not require us to buy into Husserl's foundationalist epistemology. Later phenomenologists were to reject such a project, though we will see they continued to argue against naturalism.

that attends any attempt to explain the possibility of knowledge by appealing to scientific theories which themselves pretend to be knowledge.<sup>16</sup>

Let us set aside naturalism for now, and consider in more detail why Husserl might have thought that knowledge presents a problem that naturalism cannot solve without moving in a circle.

### 3. Husserl's Philosophical Project

Husserl's phenomenology has as its goal, the description of various conditions that are necessary and sufficient for an objective world to be experienced and thought about by us. His phenomenology locates these conditions within a subject's consciousness. We shall see that Husserl rejects naturalism because it fails to recognise the constitutive role he thinks consciousness plays in giving us perceptual experiences of an objective reality.

When phenomenologists assign a constitutive role to consciousness they are making a *transcendental* claim. Here is Kant defining a 'transcendental' form of enquiry in his *Prolegomena*:

'...the word "transcendental" ... does not signify something passing beyond all experience but something that indeed precedes it a priori, but that is intended simply to make cognition of experience possible'. (Kant, 1977: 373n)

Phenomenology is a transcendental philosophy. Its method is a priori; its goal is to identify the conditions that make our thought and experience of objects possible.<sup>17</sup> Already we see an important difference between the

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<sup>16</sup> See Quine, 1969/2000: 294.

<sup>17</sup> One important difference between phenomenology and Kant's transcendental project is that the conditions constitutive of all possible experience that the phenomenologist identifies are not purely formal conditions. Kant's transcendental enquiry proceeds on the basis of elaborate transcendental arguments. A transcendental argument begins by identifying some

phenomenologist's project and that of the naturalist. The naturalist is concerned with demonstrating that empirical answers can be returned to what s/he takes to be, empirical questions. The phenomenologist thinks there are questions that arise *prior* to any merely empirical question. These are questions concerning the conditions that must be in place if we are to have any experience of an objective world at all.

It is of course far from obvious that the naturalist has to accept the validity of the kinds of question phenomenology poses. Thus, part of my goal in the remainder of this chapter and the next will be to motivate the questions which phenomenology raises as ones with which the naturalist must engage.

Husserl's phenomenology begins with the setting aside of all beliefs whose truth we ordinarily take for granted. Husserl aspired to transform philosophy into a science whose claims, like the claims of the scientist, were absolutely grounded in evidence and universally accepted. The philosopher is to take nothing for granted; s/he is to 'put out of action'<sup>18</sup> all truths that are unquestioningly accepted, including the truths of sciences.

Many of the propositions whose truth we ordinarily take for granted will not satisfy this requirement – they will not be absolutely grounded in evidence. Some of the propositions we believe will have been accepted by us as true because this is the most natural attitude to take towards them. This is the case for many propositions that specify the contents of our sensory experience or of our memories. Other propositions we believe, will have been accepted at some point in the past on the basis of testimony. These

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feature of our thought or experience which is completely beyond doubt, and then proceeds to argue that certain conditions must be satisfied if our thought or experience is to possess this feature. Phenomenologists do not engage in transcendental arguments. Instead they offer descriptions of our conscious experience as it is experienced by us. What these descriptions uncover are ways in which our experience must be structured or organised if we are to experience the kinds of objects we do.

<sup>18</sup> Husserl (1932/1973: 48)

propositions will often be ones whose truth we have accepted on trust without attempting to verify their truth for ourselves. If phenomenology is to be a science, as Husserl believed it must be, the phenomenologist must begin by setting aside all propositions whose truth he has not established for himself. He must accept no propositions as true that he has not discovered to be absolutely grounded in evidence.

A proposition is absolutely grounded in evidence, Husserl thinks, when it is self-evident, which is to say that its falsity is unthinkable. Descartes' *cogito* is an example of such a proposition. If one tries to think the negation of the proposition 'I am thinking' one finds oneself trying to think something contradictory. We shall see in due course that Husserl thinks many other propositions qualify as what we might call *cogito-thoughts*. The first methodological demand that Husserl makes is that the phenomenologist is to refrain from making any claim that does not have the status of a *cogito*-thought. He is to accept only those propositions which are such that if we try to conceive of their falsity we find ourselves trying to think something that is obviously false.

No merely empirical proposition will satisfy this condition. For, no empirical proposition will be such that we cannot coherently conceive of its being false. We can, for instance, conceive of everything within consciousness staying the same but the world we experience proving to be nothing but "an illusion, a coherent dream".<sup>19</sup> The contents of my experiences leave open the possibility that the object I seem to experience at any given moment might not exist. Consider a visual experience I undergo of an apple. I can imagine God destroying the apple I am seeing while maintaining the activity in my brain so that it continues to appear to me that I

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<sup>19</sup> Husserl (1932/1973: §8)



am looking at this apple. If this is conceivable for one of my experiences, it is surely conceivable for every experience I have. Thus, I can imagine for each and every experience I have that the object of my experience doesn't exist, and God just makes it seem to me as if this object exists.<sup>20</sup>

Husserl calls the process of setting aside those of our beliefs whose truth can be doubted, "the phenomenological epoché". The aim of the epoché is to effect a change in our attitude to reality. Ordinarily when I encounter an object in experience, the books in front of me, the computer keyboard, the tables and chairs distributed about this room, I take these objects to exist. Husserl will say I "posit" their existence, by which he means I take a positive stand on the question of the existence of the things my experiences present to me. I take my experiences at face value unless I have a reason to do otherwise. The phenomenological epoché begins by my deliberately not taking a stand on the question of a thing's existence. This I do by attempting to doubt its existence. "Attempting to doubt" is not at all the same attitude as "actually doubting"; instead it is a matter of neither accepting nor denying, but remaining completely neutral on this issue of a thing's existence. The result is that we take no position on the issue of a thing's existence but instead put out of action, exclude or bracket the act of positing that would otherwise form a part of our experience.

Reality isn't excluded from the phenomenologist's study upon carrying out the epoché. It continues to form a part of the phenomenologist's inquiry but only as a correlate of our conscious thoughts and experiences. In effect the

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<sup>20</sup> J.J. Valberg uses this possibility to illustrate the argument from illusion in his (1992). It should be noted that this is not the kind of sceptical argument Husserl could employ, exploiting as it does the relation of dependence that holds between our experiences and their underlying neurobiology. It is part of Husserl's philosophical method, as we shall see, to make no use of any empirical truth and that includes claims about the relation between mind and brain of the kind that the above argument rests upon. Husserl does however make passing use of the argument from illusion in his (1913/1982: §46).

change that has taken place having performed the epoché is that we are no longer concerned with the *objects* of our thoughts and experiences considered as elements of the natural world. Instead our concern has shifted to the *contents* of our own conscious mind. We are to consider what our own conscious mind must be like if it is to give us experiences and thoughts which present us with an objective reality. We would have to say that reality was excluded following the performance of the epoché if we held that the contents of our minds didn't depend in any way on the existence of any element of the natural or social world. There is however nothing in the idea of the epoché which requires Husserl to endorse such a claim.<sup>21</sup>

Having performed the epoché and set aside our belief in the natural world, Husserl thinks that we will discover the role our own consciousness plays in constituting the reality we experience. We discover that the reality we ordinarily experience is a prodigious achievement of each of our conscious minds. Husserl thinks that by careful reflecting on our conscious experiences and thoughts the phenomenological philosopher can help bring this achievement to light. What grounds if any does Husserl have for claiming that the objective reality we experience is an accomplishment of our conscious minds?

On one natural reading of this claim Husserl is expounding a strong form of idealism. Many of the statements Husserl makes suggest he thinks a physical thing is nothing over and above the *sense* we have of it.<sup>22</sup> Husserl accepts that physical objects have an existence which transcends consciousness. We have a sense of physical things as sets of actual and

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<sup>21</sup> For a reading of Husserl which takes him to endorse methodological solipsism, the view that intentional content doesn't depend on any relation to the world, see Dreyfus (1982). For arguments against such a reading of Husserl see Zahavi (2004). I shall discuss this issue in more detail in chapter 4.

<sup>22</sup> See for instance his (1913/1982: §47-55). Also see A.D. Smith (2003: ch.4) for a reading of Husserl which stresses, and indeed defends, Husserl's argument for idealism.



potential points of view that we have taken up in the past, and could take up in the future. Husserl will often say things which suggest he thinks this is all there is to a physical thing's existence:

'...the whole spatiotemporal world...is according to its sense, a merely intentional being...It is a being posited by consciousness in its experiences...beyond that it is nothing.' (Husserl, 1913/1982: §49)

I will discuss Husserl's idealism in more detail in the next section when we consider his critique of naturalism. If Husserl is committed to idealism we shall see that his version of phenomenology and naturalism are in irreconcilable conflict.

There is however another way of understanding what the Husserlian phenomenologist is trying to do that is quite neutral on the issue of idealism. According to this understanding the Husserlian phenomenologist describes how we achieve a *sense* or *understanding* of an objective reality while appealing to nothing but the contents of consciousness. On this understanding of Husserl, he holds that consciousness contains conditions both necessary and sufficient for a subject to have a sense of an objective reality.<sup>23</sup> It doesn't follow that what it is for a physical thing to exist is nothing over and above the sense we have of that thing's existence. Metaphysical questions of this kind can safely be left to one side by the phenomenologist. Consider the following quote from Husserl which can be given an idealist reading, but can also be read along the lines just sketched:

'The world that exists for me, that always has and always will exist for me, the only world that ever can exist for me...derives its whole sense and its

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<sup>23</sup> It should be emphasised that there is no requirement that the understanding originates from a particular subject. It is quite consistent with this conception of phenomenology to insist that this understanding can be achieved only by a community of subjects. See Husserl (1932/1973) Meditation V for such an account.

existential status, which it has for me, from me myself...' (Husserl 1931/1973, 65)

An idealist reading of this passage would construe it as claiming that physical objects have an existence which derives entirely from a conscious subject. On this reading Husserl is claiming that a conscious subject literally *produces* the objects of his experience. Without conscious subjects the objects we experience wouldn't exist.

The alternative reading I am presenting interprets Husserl's locution "the world that exists for me" as meaning "the world as it is *understood* by me". Taken in this way Husserl is claiming that the *understanding* he has of the world derives from himself and his own consciousness.<sup>24</sup>

What is it to have an "understanding" of reality and what does it mean to say that this understanding derives from a subject's consciousness? To understand x, I suggest, is to make sense of x. One can make sense of x only if x means something for us. We cannot for instance make sense of a sentence in a foreign language we do not speak: because we do not understand the language the sentence won't mean anything to us. To have an understanding of reality, reality must mean something for a subject.

In what sense can reality be said to "mean" something for a subject? We sometimes use "meaning" when we are talking about things of "value" as for instance we talk about our friends or our careers as meaning something to us. Certainly we can find the things around us of value and in this sense imbue them with meaning. However this is not the only sense in which

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<sup>24</sup> This makes Husserl sound like he endorses individualism: the view that there is no necessary connection between a person's being in a particular mental state and that person standing in a relation to her physical and social environment. To attribute such a view to Husserl is to overlook the many places in which he insists on the role that other subjects play in giving us a sense of objective reality. For some discussion of this point see Zahavi (1999: ch.'s 9-11). Also see Husserl's currently untranslated lectures on intersubjectivity published in 1973 as Volume 13-15 of his collected works.

“meaning” is used when we say reality has “meaning for” a subject. An object can also be said to have “meaning for” a subject when the *thoughts* or *experiences* which are about this object have meaning for him.

Our thoughts and experiences are bearers of meaning. They get their meaning from whatever it is they purport to refer to. I shall say that a thought or experience has a “meaning for” a subject when the subject *knows* what it is that her thoughts and experiences represent. The meaning a thought or experience has for a subject derives from the distinctive kind of knowledge a subject has of what this thought or experience represents.

Any account of what it is for a subject to have knowledge of this kind must answer at least two questions. First it must tell us how it is that a subject’s thoughts and experiences can have representational content. Second it must tell us under what conditions a subject can be said to have knowledge of what her thoughts and experiences are about.

Husserl, I am suggesting, may be understood as claiming that both questions could be answered by putting in brackets or disregarding our empirical beliefs and studying our various conscious mental state just as they present themselves to us. He thought that phenomenology could identify the conditions necessary and sufficient for an experience or thought to possess a representational content without making reference to any relation a subject stands in to the natural world. Husserl held that our conscious mental states have their intentionality *intrinsically*. A mental state has what I am calling “intrinsic intentionality” if there is no relation to the natural world, causal or otherwise, that this mental state depends upon for its intentional directedness. It is this discovery that consciousness is intrinsically intentional which I shall take to be the central claim of Husserl’s phenomenology.

I began this section by attributing to the phenomenologist the view that consciousness “constitutes” its objects. I shall understand “constitution” to be the process by which a subject enters into an intentional relation with an object. The objects which Husserl took consciousness to constitute are, I suggest, what we would now call “intentional objects”.

Brentano introduced the idea of an intentional object to capture the sense in which an object exists in the mind when it is thought about or experienced.<sup>25</sup> Husserl rejected Brentano’s understanding of “intentional object” as an object that has a peculiar kind of mental inexistence. He claimed instead that the objects we think about or experience exist in the objective world, or at least that this is what we ordinarily suppose until we are shown otherwise. He nevertheless retains a notion of an intentional object. In the Fifth of his *Logical Investigations* he calls an intentional object, “the object as it is intended”, which he contrasts with the “object which is intended”.<sup>26</sup> It is the object as it is intended which, his phenomenology claims, the conscious subject constitutes. Husserl needn’t say the same about the object-which-is-intended. Since this object is bracketed he need make no claim about its metaphysical status.

I have introduced the idea of an intentional object to explain what it is Husserl’s phenomenology studies, having put in brackets all propositions relating to the natural world. I am claiming that what the Husserlian phenomenologist studies is the process by which an intentional object is constituted for a subject. I will take the goal of phenomenology to be the description of the conditions which must be satisfied if conscious mental states are to be intrinsically intentional. When the phenomenologist talks of

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<sup>25</sup> See Brentano (1995: 77-100).

<sup>26</sup> Husserl (1913/1970: Vol.2, V, §17)

consciousness as *constituting* its “objects” I take this to mean that consciousness contains the conditions that are necessary and sufficient for consciousness to be intentionally directed towards an object. Husserl’s phenomenology studies the process by which consciousness constitutes its intentional objects whilst bracketing or disregarding the objects of our thoughts and experience.

Thus we see there is a reading of Husserl’s phenomenology that allows for the phenomenologist to remain neutral on the question of idealism. If the phenomenologist’s descriptions of our conscious mental life *did* entail idealism, phenomenology would undoubtedly be in conflict with naturalism. However, the account of Husserl’s phenomenology just sketched doesn’t require us to take a stand on the question of idealism one way or another. Thus it remains possible that despite what Husserl says his account of the mind needn’t be taken to be in opposition with naturalism.

I shall argue in the final section that Husserl’s argument against naturalism rests on a commitment to idealism. We have just seen that his phenomenological project can be prized apart from any commitment to idealism. Thus there would seem to be some scope for separating Husserl’s anti-naturalism from his phenomenological project. If I am right, there is nothing in his phenomenological project that requires one to endorse idealism. If a Husserlian phenomenologist can remain neutral on the question of idealism, s/he should also be able to remain neutral on the question of naturalism. A position of neutrality is all I need for my project of building a naturalistic account of mind based on insights from phenomenology to get off the ground.

#### 4. Husserl's Argument against Naturalism

I shall attribute to Husserl a supervenience thesis which reverses the relation of dependence the naturalist takes to hold between our minds and the elements of which the natural world is composed. By reversing this relation of dependence Husserl will argue there is something naturalistic explanations must always take for granted. The naturalist will be accused of taking for granted the role that the conscious subjects plays in constituting, and thereby giving us experiences of the natural world.

The naturalist, as we saw earlier, takes natural science to tell us which properties and entities belong to the natural world. Let us call a property to which an appeal is made by science, a "natural property". I take the naturalist to be committed to the following supervenience thesis:

Naturalism's Supervenience Thesis (NST): Any world which is a duplicate of our own with respect to its natural properties is a duplicate simpliciter of our world.

NST entails the supervenience of psychological properties on natural properties. In particular it follows that once a world's natural properties have been fixed all of its intentional properties will also be fixed. NST predicts that it ought to be possible to give an account of intentional properties in terms of natural properties. It is this prediction that Husserl's argument against naturalism will try to challenge.

Husserl holds that the entities and properties which science describes exist only in relation to us. We constitute these entities and properties through certain of our intentionally directed mental states. Husserl will claim that the entities and properties with which our scientific theories populate the natural world depend for their existence on us, and our intentionally directed



mental states. I shall take Husserl to hold the following supervenience thesis:

Husserl's Supervenience Thesis (HST): Any world which is a duplicate of our own with respect to its intentional properties will be a duplicate of our own world simpliciter.

Husserl argument against naturalism is, in essence, that we cannot use the theories of the natural sciences to explain the intentional directedness of our conscious mental states. For HST tells us that the properties and entities the theories of the natural sciences identify depend for their existence on conscious subjects.

An analogy might help to get clearer on Husserl's point.<sup>27</sup> Suppose there is a God and that God created the universe with all of its laws of nature. Science couldn't explain God's existence by appeal to the laws of nature it has discovered. It is God that explains the existence of these laws of nature and not vice versa. Husserl wants to say something analogous about consciousness. We cannot appeal to the elements of which the natural world is composed to account for the existence of consciousness. It is consciousness and the intentional mental states of which it is composed that explain the existence of the natural world for us and not other the other way round.

Couldn't a naturalist agree with Husserl that intentional objects depend on consciousness for their existence because consciousness is intrinsically intentional, but nevertheless insist that intentional properties supervene on natural properties and not vice versa?<sup>28</sup> Why say that the relation of

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<sup>27</sup> Denis Walsh suggested this helpful analogy to me.

<sup>28</sup> In later chapters I will develop a position along these lines. Searle (1992) can also be understood as defending the position described here.



dependence between intentional and natural properties holds in the direction Husserl supposes?

I can find two possible lines of argument in Husserl in support of HST. Both turn out to rely on a strong form of idealism, one way or another. In his *Ideas 1* Husserl tells us that:

'Reality is not something absolute which becomes tied secondarily to something else; rather in the absolute sense, it is nothing at all...it has the essentiality of something which, of necessity, is only intentional, only an object of consciousness.' (Husserl, 1913/1982: 93-4)

Here Husserl seems to be saying that the natural world only exists in relation to conscious subjects. Apart from its relation to conscious subjects the natural world is, as he puts it, "nothing at all" (*op. cit.*). Husserl's supervenience thesis (HST) follows very naturally from this strong form of idealism. If natural properties have no existence except insofar as they are made the objects of consciousness, of course we will have to say that natural properties supervene on intentional properties.

If Husserl could show that such a claim is entailed by his phenomenological descriptions this would indeed spell trouble for the naturalist. If conscious subjects bring the natural world into existence they cannot themselves be a part of a natural world anymore than God could be part of the natural world if God is credited with the creation of the natural world. I have suggested that there is a way of reading Husserl's phenomenological project which allows the phenomenologist to remain neutral on the question of idealism. There is some evidence that Husserl thought otherwise, but whether he was right to do so, at the very least remains an open-question.

Husserl has a second argument available to him against naturalism. Here I am drawing on the passage quoted at end of my §3 from his (1911) lecture in which Husserl claims that naturalistic explanations are guilty of some kind of circularity. As he puts it: 'To expect from natural science itself the solution of any one of the problems inherent in it as such...is to be involved in a vicious circle' (*op. cit.*).

I have been developing a reading of Husserl's argument according to which the naturalist might be charged with taking for granted certain conditions originating with the conscious subject, which explain how a subject can have a sense of an objective reality. Thus construed, Husserl's worry would seem to be that the naturalist cannot explain the sense we have of an objective reality, since our sense of an objective reality is something s/he must take for granted. His thought seems to be that the naturalist cannot account for that which her explanations presuppose.

This line of argument depends on two claims:

(1) Naturalism must presuppose the sense we have of an objective reality.

(2) The presuppositions of naturalism cannot be explained by naturalism.

Let us consider (1) first. Naturalists say that science is our guide to what there is and what there is not. S/he assumes that there is a world that is there anyway which is available for study by science. Husserl says we have a sense of an objective reality only because our thoughts and experiences are intrinsically intentional. The world the scientist describes is available to us only because our thoughts and experiences have intrinsic intentionality. Insofar as the naturalist presupposes that there is a world there anyway that is available for scientific study, Husserl thinks she must also presuppose the

conditions which make it possible for our thoughts and experiences to achieve a relation to such a world.

None of this would be particularly damaging to the naturalist unless an argument can be made for the second claim. It must be shown that the naturalist cannot account for the conditions in virtue of which our thoughts and experience can exhibit intrinsic intentionality. Otherwise the naturalist can appeal to NST and claim that all of the intentional properties at a world are fixed by its natural properties.

Though the following argument does not appear explicitly in Husserl's writings, it nevertheless goes some way towards motivating the second claim which Husserl needs for his argument against naturalism to go through:

(P1) The intentional directedness of consciousness explains how a natural property can be made the object of a thought or experience.

(P2) The intentional directedness of consciousness is explained by a set of conditions ( $C_1, C_2, \dots, C_n$ ) which make it possible for consciousness to exhibit intrinsic intentionality.

(P3) Explanation is asymmetric: if A explains B, B cannot explain A<sup>29</sup>.

(CON) The natural properties which we make the objects of our thoughts and experience cannot be used to explain the set of conditions ( $C_1, C_2, \dots, C_n$ ) which make it possible for consciousness to exhibit intrinsic intentionality.

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<sup>29</sup> Consider by way of illustration, the familiar example of Jones' death by poisoning used by Achinstein (1983) in his discussion of Hempel's deductive nomological model of explanation (pp.168 & 170-1). Jones' eating a pound of arsenic explains his dieing within twenty four hours, but his dieing within twenty four hours doesn't explain his eating a pound of arsenic.

Perhaps Jones' wanting to die explains his eating the arsenic, but even granting this possibility the point that explanation is asymmetric stands: Jones' wanting to die and his actual death are two very different events, and thus two very different causes.

I have introduced (P3) as a way of making sense of (2), the claim that naturalism cannot explain what it must presuppose. This move depends for its success on the relevant presuppositions themselves playing an explanatory role. In this case the relevant presuppositions are the set of conditions which make it possible for our conscious mental states to exhibit intentionality. The presupposed conditions explain how it is possible for a mental state to have intentionality intrinsically. In particular they explain how the natural properties which the scientist identifies can be made the object of our thoughts and experiences.

Suppose that there is a set of conditions ( $C_1, C_2, \dots, C_n$ ) which explain how natural properties can be made the object of our thoughts and experiences. Husserl wants to say that we cannot appeal to the natural properties we make the objects of our thoughts and experiences to explain the set of conditions ( $C_1, C_2, \dots, C_n$ ). I have suggested that the reason we cannot do so is because explanation is asymmetric.

Does this argument establish the truth of HST? We have been looking for an argument that will establish that the complete set of intentional properties will fix the natural properties at a world, rather than vice versa. What Husserl needs, if the above line of argument is to secure HST for him, is the claim that there is no property which is not in some way dependent upon an intentional property. He needs to establish the falsity of what he calls "transcendental realism": the view that entities exist "in themselves" completely independently of becoming, or being able to become, the object of a conscious thought or experience. However, any argument Husserl could supply against transcendental realism would be an argument for some form of idealism. It would be an argument for the conclusion that there is *no* entity that exists in itself completely independently of becoming, or being able to

become, the object of a conscious thought or experience. This is idealism. So once again we find Husserl's argument against naturalism depending on his making a case for idealism.

I have considered just two possible arguments against naturalism which I have been able to find in Husserl's writings. No doubt there are others, but any argument Husserl can make against naturalism would require him to defend HST over NST. I cannot see a way for Husserl to do this which doesn't in some way rely on idealism. I have argued that the phenomenological project can be pursued without taking a stand on the question of idealism. If I am right the phenomenologist needn't take a stand on the question of naturalism either. For any argument the phenomenologist can make against idealism would require them to defend HST. But an argument for HST would require the phenomenologist to also argue for idealism, something which I have claimed goes beyond the remit of phenomenology.

Later phenomenologists like Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty rejected Husserl's idealism without giving up on his phenomenological project. Unfortunately for me, these philosophers were also opposed to naturalism. Eventually I will argue that the problem phenomenology raises for naturalism can help us to understand a problem naturalists have discovered for themselves, a problem that has come to be called the "explanatory gap".<sup>30</sup> We will see that the explanatory gap is located just where phenomenology attacks naturalism. I shall argue that if the gap in the naturalistic account of mind is to be bridged it will only be by showing how a naturalist can assimilate the descriptions phenomenologists offer of consciousness. Until we have found a response to the existential

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<sup>30</sup> See chapter 3.

phenomenologist's argument against naturalism, the path won't have been cleared for such a naturalistic account of mind.

I shall finish by briefly summarising the argument of this chapter. I have characterised phenomenology as concerned with describing the conditions in virtue of which our conscious thoughts and experiences exhibit intentional directedness. We have seen Husserl argue that these conditions originate from the conscious subject. The conscious subject is assigned responsibility for constituting the sense we have of an objective reality. I have argued that Husserl's argument against naturalism depends on endorsing idealism, the view that the natural world is in some sense dependent on us for its existence. We have also seen that the phenomenologist need take no stand on the truth or otherwise of idealism. I have argued on this basis that the phenomenologist need take no stand on the truth or otherwise of naturalism.

In the next chapter we will see how existential phenomenology mounts an argument against naturalism that is independent of any commitment to idealism. In chapter 3 I will connect this argument with a problem that naturalists have identified for themselves – the problem of the explanatory gap. There I will argue that a solution to the explanatory gap turns on making room for the descriptions of consciousness phenomenology supplies.

## Chapter 2

### Introduction

Phenomenologists have taken themselves to offer an account of the mind which refutes naturalism. I will be arguing that phenomenology has important insights to offer about what it is for a creature to undergo conscious experiences which any satisfactory naturalist theory of mind must incorporate. If phenomenologists are right these are insights the naturalist is precluded from recognising. To accept a phenomenological account of the mind it would seem is to already abandon naturalism. Thus a naturalistic account of the mind which takes its lead from phenomenological description look at best misconceived.

In the previous chapter we saw that Husserl's argument against naturalism relied upon accepting a commitment to idealism. I offered a characterisation of the phenomenological project which allowed the phenomenologist to remain neutral on the issue of idealism. Unfortunately for me, the phenomenologist's argument against naturalism doesn't depend on idealism. We shall see in this chapter how existential phenomenologists rejected Husserl's idealism while nevertheless remaining steadfastly opposed to naturalism.

Existential phenomenologists agree with Husserl that a naturalistic theory of mind depends for its truth on certain presuppositions it cannot explain. However it disagrees with Husserl about the nature of these presuppositions. The existential phenomenologist takes intentionality to be a defining characteristic of our *existence* as conscious subjects. Unlike Husserl's phenomenology it doesn't begin by bracketing all existence claims. Rather existential phenomenology takes as its subject matter our own existence in



the world. It then sets about identifying what it is about our existence that makes it possible for our thoughts and experiences to exhibit intentionality.

The presuppositions which it is argued naturalism cannot explain relate to our existence as persons. Heidegger calls our way of existing as persons 'being-in-the-world'. It is being-in-the-world which he and the other existential phenomenologists will argue explains how intentionality is possible. Our being-in-the-world is something the existential phenomenologist claims will always resist assimilation into the naturalist's explanatory framework. My aim in this chapter will be to reconstruct the existential phenomenologist's argument for this conclusion.

### 1. The Departure from Husserl

Existential phenomenologists part company with Husserl over his conception of subjectivity.<sup>1</sup> Husserl's phenomenology, they were to argue, rested on certain philosophical presuppositions which careful phenomenological description reveals to be ungrounded. Husserl lent his uncritical endorsement to a conception of the conscious subject inherited from Descartes.<sup>2</sup> He contrasts the "immanent" existence which he took to be characteristic of our occurrent conscious mental states, with the "transcendent" existence which is a feature of any physical or abstract object. This contrast between "immanence" and "transcendence" forms the basis for a Cartesian distinction between what is internal to a subject's mind and what is external. What is internal to a subject's mind is, at the time of its

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<sup>1</sup> We shall see in due course that this departure from Husserl enabled them to reject his idealism.

<sup>2</sup> For a criticism of Husserl along these lines see Heidegger's comments on Husserl's Encyclopedia Britannica Article reprinted in Sheehan and Palmer (ed.'s) (1997). For an excellent discussion of the difference between Husserl and Heidegger see Carman (2003: ch.2).

occurrence, known with complete certainty while what is external to a subject's mind can always be subjected to doubt.

For Heidegger, Husserl's adherence to a Cartesian conception of mind as an inner, private mental realm was a prejudice that doesn't accord with the phenomenology of our experiences. Rather than carefully reflecting on our existence as conscious subjects, Husserl simply accepts without question a traditional Cartesian understanding of the conscious subject. He does so because this understanding of subjectivity suits his needs; it fits with his desire to make philosophy into a science.

'Husserl's primary question is simply not concerned with the character of the being of consciousness, instead he is led by the following concern: *How can consciousness become the possible object of an absolute science?* The primary concern guiding him is the *idea of an absolute science*. The idea *that consciousness should be a region of an absolute science*, is not simply invented, rather it is the idea that has occupied *modern* philosophy since Descartes. The elaboration of pure consciousness as the thematic field of phenomenology is *not derived phenomenologically by going back to the things themselves*, but by going back to the traditional idea of philosophy.' (Heidegger, 1992: 147 (emphases appear in the original text))

The idea that the contents of the conscious mind are immanent is an ungrounded presupposition which Husserl, by his own phenomenological standards, ought to have set aside. The kinds of experience we undergo when we are behaving skillfully, for instance, don't admit of any distinction between what is internal to a subject's mind and what is external.<sup>3</sup> An

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<sup>3</sup> To put this claim in more familiar contemporary terms, Heidegger is claiming that the type of perceptual content which accompanies our skillful behaviours is "object-dependent". Perceptual content can be said to be object-dependent if it includes the entity experienced as a constituent. See McDowell (1986) for an object-dependent account of perceptual content. I will have more to say about Heidegger's description of skillful behaviour later in the chapter (see sections 2 & 4).

accurate description of perceptual experiences of this kind conflicts with any conception of the contents of the conscious mind as immanent as opposed to transcendent. When we are behaving skillfully we are absorbed in what we are doing, and our experience is taken up with the things in the world with which we are dealing. Such experiences do not seem to admit of any distinction between what is inside a subject's mind and known with complete certainty, and what is outside and known only dubitantly. Husserl's failure to inquire into the ways in which we and the things we experience exist led him to ignore the fact that many of our experiences do not permit a precise boundary to be drawn between what lies inside the mind and what lies outside. It is this failure which we shall see existential phenomenology sought to remedy.

### 2. Operative and Cognitive Intentionality

Existential phenomenology distinguishes itself from Husserl's project by inquiring into the nature of intentionality itself, and of the subject and object that form the relata of any given intentional relation. Like Husserl they undertake this inquiry by seeking to describe our experiences just as they are lived by us, free from any philosophical or scientific presuppositions. Among the presuppositions the phenomenological philosopher must set aside is the idea of the conscious mind as a self-contained, self-sufficient realm. This is a philosophical prejudice which should not be accepted without question if we are to describe our perceptual experiences as they are lived by us.

When we reflect on our existence as conscious subjects, and describe what we find free of any prejudice, we discover that there are two distinct ways in which we can represent the world. I shall call these two modes of representation "reflective" and "operative" respectively. Existential

phenomenologists describe each of these modes of representation as having its own distinct variety of intentionality, which I shall call “cognitive” and “operative” intentionality. They distinguish operative from cognitive intentionality by describing on the one hand, the different ways in which a *subject* exists when she takes up an operative rather than a cognitive relation to the world and on the other, the different ways in which an *object* exists when it is experienced operatively and cognitively.

Contrast the kind of relation to the world we take up when pointing at a coffee cup, and the relation to the world we take up when taking hold of a coffee cup and drinking from it. When I point at the coffee cup I experience it as at a determinate location in space separate from myself. Not so when I take hold of the coffee cup and drink from it. When I reach for the mug and grasp hold of it, I experience the mug not as an entity existing apart from me. Instead I experience the mug in terms of how I must behave if I am to successfully use it as a coffee-drinking receptacle. In both cases my experience has an intentional content that literally includes the mug as a constituent. In the latter case the mug guides the behaviour I direct towards it. The mug is experienced as something located at a position in egocentric space the coordinates of which are centred on my body. It is experienced as something calling for me to direct certain reaching and grasping behaviours towards it.

Operative intentionality attaches to our skillful behaviours. It is a feature of these behaviours that they do not seem to be the outcome of any act of reflection or deliberation on the part of the agent. Think of a skilled musician. She can use her instrument to perform a piece of music without having to consider at each moment what she is doing and what she is to do next. Thoughts of this kind would obstruct the fluidity of her performance. Instead

repeated and regular practice has brought her to the point where she has an ability to play without any intellectual effort. The knowledge of how to use her instrument has become second nature.

It would be a mistake to conceive of our skillful behaviours as mere reflex responses because they can be exercised without recourse to any act of reflection or deliberation. Rather skillful behaviours are a category of behaviour in their own right, falling somewhere in between merely mechanical bodily movements and reflective or deliberative actions. This can be seen by contrasting a reflex response with an act of grasping.<sup>4</sup> Our acts of grasping are directed towards their objects in a certain way. It is in this sense that they can be said to have intentionality, albeit of a different variety from cognitive processes as we shall see in due course. I move my body in a certain way in accordance with the object I am attempting to take hold of. My grasping act can of course fail if the object isn't as I anticipate it to be. The object might for instance fail to be the size, shape or weight I represent it to be when I initiate my movements towards it.

Of course reflex behaviours can also be said to succeed or fail; the lower part of my leg can fail to rise when I am struck just below the kneecap. However the failure of my reflex behaviour to occur has nothing to do with me; the relevant muscular contractions are not under my control. The same is not true of a grasping act. In the latter case it is *me* that directs my behaviour in a certain way in accordance with how *I* am representing the object, and it is *me* who succeeds or fails in grasping the object. I am responsible when my skillful behaviours do not succeed in achieving their goals in a way that I am not responsible for my body's reflex responses. My

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<sup>4</sup> Kelly (2000) offers this contrast in illustrating Merleau-Ponty's idea of motor intentionality. See Merleau-Ponty (1965: 40) for the claim that skillful behaviours form a category of behaviour in their own right.

skillful behaviours fail to achieve their goals in part because of the way in which I direct them.

So skillful behaviours should not be understood as reflex responses, but nor should they be treated as the outcome of deliberation or cognition. The agent represents an object in different ways when she experiences an object cognitively and when she experiences the same object operatively. Cognitive intentionality is the kind of intentionality that belongs to our propositional attitudes. By a "propositional attitude" I mean a state of mind which we can ascribe to a creature using a sentence of the form 'S  $\phi$ 's that P' where 'S' is the creature, ' $\phi$ ' is the psychological state and 'P' is a sentence or proposition which specifies  $\phi$ 's representational content.

Operative intentionality doesn't attach to states of mind. Instead it belongs to the activities in which a creature engages, in particular to its skilful activities. These activities still have success conditions. They involve the creature's directing its behaviour in a goal-directed manner. We cannot make sense of these behaviours except in terms of the goals which the creature was acting in-order to bring about.

The existential phenomenologist claims that we would be misdescribing these activities if we took them to be the outcome of states of mind which possess what I have called cognitive intentionality. When we represent an object operatively, we represent the object in a way which makes essential reference to the use we are making of that thing. The ways in which the thing is represented make essential reference to our dealings with that thing, and the goals we have when we are dealing with it.

It is true that some of a creature's propositional attitudes will be assessed for their truth or falsity by making reference to a creature's dealings with the world. If I form the belief that I must turn the door handle to the left in order



to open the door, we will have to make reference to my dealings with the world in order to assess this belief for truth. This however seems inessential to states that have cognitive intentionality in a way that it isn't for activities that exhibit operative intentionality. Many of my propositional attitudes represent situations that have little or nothing to do with my engagement with the world. Furthermore those of my propositional attitudes that do concern my dealings with the world, represent their objects differently from the ways in which I represent them when I am engaged in some skilful activity. When I form a belief or some other propositional attitude about the objects of my dealing, I do not represent the object in terms of which actions will be appropriate and which inappropriate. I represent the thing as belonging to an objective world. Whether or not I represent the thing correctly will be decided by facts about this objective world. My propositional attitudes will be made true by conditions which in many cases will not require us to make mention of me and my goals. This is never the case for activities that have operative intentionality.

I began this section by saying that existential phenomenologists depart from Husserl by making the existence of the subject and object, the relata of an intentional relation, the objects of their phenomenological descriptions. Now that we have some sense of the difference between cognitive and operative intentionality I want to consider what sense can be made of the claim that subject and object exist in different ways when a subject experiences the world operatively and cognitively. This will eventually enable us to see how existential phenomenology can avoid the charge of idealism. Having established that existential phenomenology is not guilty of begging the question against naturalism, as we have seen Husserl was I shall consider their argument against naturalism.



### 3. The Question of Being

In this section and the next I shall propose a reading of the claim that we and the things we experience exist in different ways when experienced operatively and when experienced cognitively. I will argue that our cognitive modes of experience reveal a world that is there anyway whether or not it is being experienced. While our operative modes of experience, by contrast, represent entities which are, in a sense to be explained, dependent on us and our ways of experiencing these entities. Thus the existential phenomenologist can defend a qualified realism about the objects of our experience. First we must make sense of the idea that persons and the objects of their experience exist in different ways depending on whether they are experienced operatively or cognitively. What do I mean by my talk of “objects and persons existing in different ways”?

It was Heidegger’s (1927/1962) magnum opus *Being and Time* which was responsible for ushering in questions about existence into phenomenology. In this work Heidegger asks what it means for something to be; he asks what “being” means? There is of course an important sense in which there is nothing univocal we mean by “being”. We use the term “being” in different ways to talk about identity, as when we say one thing *is* identical with or distinct from another thing, or to talk about predication as when we say one thing *is* such-and-such, or simply in saying that something *is* the case. Might there nevertheless be something that these different uses of “being” share in common?

I shall follow Carman (2003) and many others in reading Heidegger’s question ‘what does “being” mean’ as a question about a person’s understanding of “being”.<sup>5</sup> According to Carman’s reading, Heidegger is

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<sup>5</sup> See Carman (2003, pp. 17-18)

claiming that these distinct uses of the term “being” all draw upon a common *understanding* of being. Heidegger tells us that by “being” he means ‘that which defines entities as entities, that on the basis of which entities...are in each case already understood’ (Heidegger, 1927/1962: 8). Carman finds in Heidegger a description of our understanding of “being” as having two features. First we understand *what* an entity is; we know its nature or essence. Second we understand whether an entity is or not. In the most general and abstract terms then, Heidegger is claiming that to understand the meaning of “being” is to “understand what and that (or whether) something is” (Carman, 2003: 17).

Each of the senses of “being” mentioned above – the “is” of identity, predication and existence – require one to understand what an entity is and whether it is. One cannot correctly apply the “is” of prediction in asserting that the sun is shining for instance, if one doesn’t know what it is for the sun to shine or whether the sun is now shining. Equally one can correctly apply the “is” of identity to say for instance that ‘water is H<sub>2</sub>O’, only if someone in one’s linguistic community knows what “water” and “H<sub>2</sub>O” refer to and if someone knows whether these two terms pick out one and the same stuff.<sup>6</sup> Finally, one can correctly say that the dodo no longer exists only if one knows what a dodo is and whether there are any in the world. Let us suppose then that Heidegger is right and there is a univocal understanding of “being” underlying each of the three senses of “being” mentioned above. Let us suppose that in order to correctly apply “being” in any of the aforementioned senses one must understand what an entity is and whether or not it is.

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<sup>6</sup> I express the understanding that is required in these impersonal terms so as to do justice to the arguments of Putnam (1975) and Kripke (1980).

In line with Carman's reading of Heidegger, I shall take the existential phenomenologist's talk of an entity's different "ways of existing" to mean different ways of *understanding* what an entity is and whether it is. An entity "is" when we human beings can make sense of this entity as an entity, when we have an understanding of what it is and whether it is. Thus construed Heidegger is claiming that being and our understanding of being stand in a relation of reciprocal dependence. This is to say that without persons who have an understanding of being, there would be nothing which defines entities as entities. Equally, in the absence of anything which defines entities as entities there would be no understanding of being.

Consider our affective states of mind as example of how our understanding of being might help to constitute a thing's being, in this case our affective states of mind. When someone asks me how I feel and I give expression to my feeling, the understanding I arrive at shapes my emotion.<sup>7</sup> My feeling is the emotion it is because I understand it to be a particular emotion, a feeling of shame say rather than pride. The more fine-grained the discriminations I can make among my feelings, the richer my emotional life. A person that can only distinguish between feeling good and feeling bad will clearly enjoy an impoverished emotional life compared with someone who can make some of the many distinctions there are to be made within these broad categories. Moreover if my understanding were to change so too would my emotion. Consider a person who interprets a feeling he is experiencing as love. Later he realises that the feeling was no such thing and with this realisation his feeling changes, he no longer feels that he is in

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<sup>7</sup> See Taylor (1985, essays 2 & 4) for extended discussion of this claim. For a careful discussion of Taylor's account of self-interpretation see Moran (2001: ch.2).

love. The change he undergoes in what he feels is the result of a change in his understanding.

My feelings are always feelings about something<sup>8</sup>; they are responses to the situation I find myself in. Feelings of shame for instance, are responses to situations which are in some way shameful or humiliating. Sartre discusses at length a case in which a person experiences shame having been caught looking through a keyhole.<sup>9</sup> The shame this person feels is a response to the situation of being caught and how the other person will see him as a result. They see him in a way that he does not want to be seen, and this explains why he feels shamed or humiliated.

A property of a situation like shamefulness is a property defined by our emotional response to a situation. I have just suggested that a person comes to feel a particular emotion like shame when he arrives at a particular understanding of his feelings.<sup>10</sup> Suppose that (a) feelings are responses to the situations they are about, and (b) our feelings are given shape, they are constituted, through the beliefs or understanding we form about them. It will follow that there are some properties, for instance the properties we are responding to when we are emotionally affected by a situation, which are shaped by the understanding we have of ourselves. For these properties,

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<sup>8</sup> Searle (1983) offers as examples of states of mind that lack intentional content, undirected nervousness and anxiety. Taylor (1985: 48) points out that what marks out these states of mind is "the felt absence of object". The inability on the part of the subject to find an object which his feeling is about is a feature of the situation a subject is in when he undergoes such an experience. Instead of thinking of intentionality in terms of direction towards an object, Taylor suggests we think of intentionality as giving a subject a sense of a situation. This is something our feelings accomplish whether or not they are directed towards an object.

<sup>9</sup> Sartre (1943/2000: pp.'s 259- 302).

<sup>10</sup> Taylor claims that the beliefs I form and the descriptions I would give of my feelings articulate, or make explicit, those features of the situation that are of relevance or importance to me. The person caught in the performance of a voyeuristic act for example feels shame because he *desires* that others see him as dignified and he knows that this is not how voyeurs are viewed. His feeling is a response to the view the other person has of him as worthless, as deserving of little or no respect.

there will be no separating the property from our understanding of it: our emotional response is shaped by our understanding, and the property which our feeling is about is defined by our emotional response.

Let us see if we might be able to extract from my discussion of affective states some salient features which might help make sense of Heidegger's claims that being and our understanding of being stand in a relation of reciprocal dependence. I have said that:

(1) There are some situations (e.g. shameful situations) which are shaped or constituted by our affective responses to them, and

(2) Emotions are shaped by the understanding we form of them.

I have inferred from these two claims that there are some situations which are shaped by our understanding. If Heidegger is to generalise this claim to being as such – what an entity is and whether it is – he must say the following:

(1\*) Being as such is constituted by our cognitive and non-cognitive responses to it, and

(2\*) The relevant responses are shaped by our understanding.

We have taken this brief excursus into Heidegger's existential phenomenology in order to make sense of the claim that we and the objects of our experience have different ways of existing when experienced cognitively and when experienced operatively. We are now well placed to make sense of this claim. The idea seems to be that our operative and cognitive modes of experiences are constituted by different modes of understanding. The existential phenomenologist wants to claim that these

different modes of understanding not only shape different experiences, but also shape or constitute what an entity is and whether it is. Our cognitive and operative modes of understanding shape the “being” of those entities we experience cognitively and operatively.

In the next section I will explore the difference between these two modes of understanding. We shall see how our operative mode of understanding gives us a sense of ourselves and the objects we experience that is “pre-objective”. We make sense of the objects of our operative modes of experience in terms of our ways of dealing with them. To make sense of an entity in terms of one’s dealing with it is to represent the entity from the point of view of a person with particular interests and concerns. In this sense the contents of our operative experiences can be said to be pre-objective. By contrast our cognitive mode of understanding gives us a sense of ourselves as existing apart from the world. It is through our cognitive mode of understanding that we discover a world that is there anyway apart from our particular interests and concerns.

#### 4. Two Modes of Understanding

Heidegger’s well-known distinction between readiness-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*) and presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*) is introduced to characterize the sense in which one and the same entity can exist in different ways. This distinction is intended to pick out two different ways in which we can understand entities – we can understand an entity as ready-to-hand or as present-at-hand. We understand an entity as ready-to-hand when experiencing it operatively. I shall call the understanding in virtue of which entities can be experienced as ready-to-hand, “operative understanding”. When we experience an entity cognitively we understand it as present-at-



hand. I shall call this mode of understanding – the mode of understanding we draw on in experiencing something as present-at-hand – “cognitive understanding”.

An entity is understood as ready-to-hand when a subject knows how the entity can be used to achieve some end. For recall that operative intentionality was introduced to characterise the kind of intentionality that belongs to our skilled behaviours. It is a characteristic of such behaviours that the agent has mastered the skillful activity to the point where she can exercise her skill without the need to deliberate on or think about what she is doing. She can act appropriately in response to the twin demands of the situation she is in and the activity in which she is engaged. The agent can exhibit this kind of sensitivity to a situation only if she knows what an entity is for and how it is to be used.

It is a feature of ready-to-hand entities that they are defined by their function – the way in which they should be used. Heidegger tells us that it is not just artifacts which are ready-to-hand. Nature is also ready-to-hand: ‘The wood is a forest, the mountains a quarry, the river is water power, the wind is wind ‘in the sails’.’ (1962: 70) Our understanding of natural entities is also in an important sense defined by our dealings with those natural entities.

When we have an understanding of an entity as ready-to-hand we understand how that entity is normally used. A musical instrument such as a piano is ready-to-hand for a musician who knows how to play it. To say what a piano is we must describe the way in which pianos are normally used.

An entity like a piano doesn’t have a function apart from other entities that are ready-to-hand for us. A piano has its particular function only in the context of the activity of playing music, and this is of course a context that includes a lot more than just pianos. It includes such things such as scored



sheets of music, musical notation, piano teachers, chairs, rooms, orchestras etc. A subject must have an understanding of how all of these things are to be used and relate to each other before he can be said to have an understanding of a piano. Any entity that is experienced as ready-to-hand has a place in a network of other entities that are experienced as ready-to-hand. One can relate to an entity as ready-to-hand only because one has a broader understanding of the place that this entity occupies in a nexus of equipment. This is an understanding one has only by knowing how the entities which compose a nexus of equipment are normally used.

We cannot describe what a ready-to-hand entity is by listing the properties in virtue of which it occupies a particular position in space and time. To say what a ready-to-hand entity is we need also to make mention of how it is normally used. We have just seen how this requires us to also make mention of the place it has among other entities which are experienced as ready-to-hand. To use Heidegger's famous example of the hammer: a hammer is something with which to hammer in nails in order to fasten together pieces of wood towards the end of constructing a house for-the-sake of a person's shelter.<sup>11</sup>

The place the hammer has among other ready-to-hand entities is a place inhabited by persons. An entity which is experienced as ready-to-hand gets its identity from our particular concerns and interests. Ready-to-hand entities are used in the way they are because persons assign to them these uses in the light of their projects and goals. Our particular interests and concerns are not projected onto ready-to-hand entities. These entities do not have a ready-made identity independent of our concerns: they are what they are

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<sup>11</sup> Heidegger (1927/1962:116)

only for persons like us who relate to them as something to be put to certain uses.

Thus there is an important sense in which ready-to-hand entities exist in a way which depends on us. Something is ready-to-hand only because of the ways in which it is normally used, but an entity's normal use is defined by us with our particular projects and goals. Ready-to-hand entities fit exactly the model I set out above when I was accounting for Heidegger's definition of being in terms of our understanding of being. The being of ready-to-hand entities is indeed shaped or constituted by our understanding of these entities. It is our knowing the way in which an entity is normally put to use which determines what counts as an appropriate response to something ready-to-hand. A ready-to-hand entity has its particular identity – it occupies a particular place among other ready-to-hand entities – because of the ways in which it is normally used. Thus the being of a ready-to-hand entity, what it is and that it is, is defined by our operative understanding, our understanding of how this entity along with other entities, is normally put to use.

I have said that it is not only the entities we experience, but also ourselves that have a different way of existing when undergoing an operative experience and when undergoing a cognitive experience. This is to say that we understand ourselves differently when we experience an object operatively and when we experience an object cognitively. One important difference is that in the former case we represent the world from our own particular point of view. The subject doesn't think of his point of view as distinct from its objects because he doesn't think about his point of view at all.<sup>12</sup> When we are acting non-deliberatively, immersed in what we are doing

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<sup>12</sup> This is not to say that when experiencing the world operatively, a subject is not self-aware as Dreyfus (1991: 67) once claimed. Dreyfus says that our operative experiences are accompanied by "awareness but no self-awareness". I will argue in chapter 5 that this is a

and all is going to plan we are consciously aware of ourselves only in the course of directing our actions. We do not distinguish our particular point of view from the object on which we have taken up a point of view. Instead we are wholly absorbed in our dealings with the object. We understand the object wholly in terms of our dealings with it.

The existential phenomenologist makes a further claim about the understanding we have of ourselves when engaged in a skillful activity. Just as we understand an entity as ready-to-hand by understanding it in accordance with the norms that govern its usage, so we also understand ourselves and our actions according to certain norms. The norms which govern the use of a piece of equipment like a hammer only make sense in relation to us, and the tasks in which we are engaged. A task like hammering in a nail in order to put up a shelf in turn gets its point or purpose from us and our goals. We make sense of an activity like hammering in terms of our goals. Heidegger calls these goals in terms of which we make sense of our activities, “for-the-sake-of-which’s”. There is some point or purpose standing behind every one of our activities by reference to which we make sense of whatever we are doing.

The operative understanding we draw on in acting skillfully includes a sense of the point or purpose behind our actions. It is important to realise that this purpose will often *not* be one we have decided on for ourselves. Just as there are social norms which determine how to use a piece of equipment

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mistake. The subject is aware of himself but he is aware of himself as Sartre says “pre-reflectively”. He is aware of himself as immersed in whatever it is he is doing. When Dreyfus denies that the subject is self-aware I think what he is meaning to highlight is that when experiencing the world operatively the subject make no distinction between himself and world. Dreyfus may have been assuming that to be self-aware a subject must think of his own point of view as one among others. I shall argue that Sartre shows this is not to be the case. He identifies a kind of self-awareness which accompanies our operative experiences and which is such that a subject doesn’t conceive of himself as distinct from the object of his experience.

so too will the for-the-sake-of-which's that stand behind our actions often be socially determined. There is a normal way of using equipment, a norm one expresses by saying what one does with the equipment. Equally there are normal ways of making sense of an activity, a norm expressed by saying what one is doing and by expressing the point behind one's actions. Our skillful behaviours draw on a body of knowledge of how things are normally done, and in exercising such behaviours we act in ways which conform to these public norms. More often than not then the for-the-sake-of-which's in terms of which a person makes sense of her actions are the result of a person falling in with public norms. A person's understanding of herself when she is acting operatively is for the most part a public understanding.

We have seen something of how operative understanding can shape the being of ourselves and the entities we experience. Let us now turn our attention to cognitive understanding. The existential phenomenologist claims that we spend most of our lives engaged in skillful activities. Under what circumstances do we come to experience the world cognitively, independently of our particular point of view?

When I introduced the idea of cognitive intentionality in section 2, I said that when we represent the world cognitively we do not necessarily represent the world in terms of our dealings with it. Heidegger describes a number of different ways in which we can represent the world cognitively.<sup>13</sup> Of particular interest to us is the account Heidegger gives of scientific theorising.<sup>14</sup>

Scientific theorising, like other forms of deliberately attentive activity, requires us to break from our ordinary concerns. Scientific theorising is

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<sup>13</sup> Heidegger (1927/1962: §16)

<sup>14</sup> Heidegger (1927/1962: 408)

however importantly different from other forms of deliberation in that it involves a radical kind of decontextualisation. When we ask what it is for the hammer to be heavy, we cease to relate to the hammer as something to be used. We are interested instead in a property that the hammer shares in common with other particulars that are heavy: the property of having a weight.<sup>15</sup> The scientist might ask, in virtue of what do entities in general have weight? It is only by decontextualising – by considering this thing and its properties apart from the context in which we use it – that we become concerned with entities in general and their properties.

The scientist doesn't just decontextualise; he also recontextualises. In our capacity as scientists we do not relate to things according to our ordinary practical concerns, but instead we relate to them in the light of our scientific theories. We might for instance be interested in the causal properties of items that have a weight, and note that anything which has a weight can exert a pressure on things that come into contact with it.<sup>16</sup> The scientist might then ask in virtue of what a thing has a causal power of this kind, and develop a theory to answer this question. Henceforth, the understanding we have of "weight" will derive from this theory. Any modifications this understanding might undergo in the course of scientific practice will take the form of modifications to this theory.

By first decontextualising – that is to say by setting aside our ordinary concerns – a subject comes to experience an entity as present-at-hand. When one relates to an object apart from the context in which it is ordinarily

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<sup>15</sup> In a passage quoted by Dreyfus (1991: 80) Heidegger tells us that the proposition 'the hammer is heavy' "can mean that the entity that is before us, which we already know circumspectively as a hammer, has a weight – that is to say, it has the property of "heaviness": it exerts a pressure on what lies beneath it, and it falls if this is removed." (1927/1962: 412) The account of Heidegger on scientific reasoning which I am here presenting follows closely Dreyfus. See Dreyfus (1991, pp.'s 79-83).

<sup>16</sup> See the previous footnote.

encountered one comes to experience it as having context-free properties. That is one can think about the object in ways that do not depend on one's particular point of view. The particular point of view one takes on an entity when relating to it as ready-to-hand depends, as we have seen, on situating the entity in a context. It depends on our knowing the place that the entity has in a network of other ready-to-hand entities. As soon as one ceases to experience an entity as ready-to-hand and relates to it as something present-at-hand one discloses or reveals that the entity has context-free properties and features. One comes to experience the entity as having properties and features independently of the particular point of view one takes on it.

To experience an entity as present-at-hand, as existing independently of a particular point of view or context, requires one to bring to bear a certain understanding. One comes to experience an entity *as* having context-free properties and features. To experience an entity in this way requires that the subject understand the entity in a certain way. Thus we see once again how an entity's being – what it is and that it is – can be constituted by our understanding of its being.

There is a sense in which this is equally true of the entities our scientific theories disclose to us. The properties the scientist identifies are ones that show up for us only once we have taken up the standpoint of the scientist. These are properties that come into view for us only once we have taken a ready-to-hand entity out of its ordinary context and resituated it in the context of our scientific practice. Having done so, we come to understand this entity according to the scientific theories of the day. This understanding brings to light properties that would otherwise have not shown up for us.

We have seen how Heidegger thinks that an entity's being is shaped or constituted by our understanding of being. Moreover it has been claimed that



one and the same entity can exist in different ways, it can be ready-to-hand at one time and present-at-hand at another. This is because one and the same entity can be understood in different ways. Our understanding of being defines both what an entity is and that it is. Where does this leave Heidegger on the question of realism?

### 5. Heidegger's Realism

I shall take realism to be the view that there is a fixed totality of entities which exist independently of our practices, and our modes of understanding them. Heidegger's position on realism can be summed up as follows: while *being* depends on our understanding of being, entities or *beings* do not. As he puts it:

“Entities are, quite independently of the experience by which they are disclosed, the acquaintance in which they are discovered, and the grasping in which their nature is ascertained.” (1927/1962: 228)

This seems an unequivocal statement of realism. However Heidegger goes on to add the following significant qualification:

“But being ‘is’ only in the understanding of those entities to whose being something like an understanding of being belongs.” (*ibid*, 228)

A little later in the text Heidegger considers the question of an entity's independent existence and has this to say:

‘If Dasein does not exist, then, ‘independence’ ‘is’ not either, nor ‘is’ the ‘in-itself’. Such a thing is then neither understandable nor not

understandable...it can be said neither that entities are, nor that they are not." (*ibid*: 255)<sup>17</sup>

In this passage Heidegger is asking us to consider the following counterfactual scenario:

(IND) If there were no longer any persons (or what Heidegger calls "Dasein") in existence, entities like hills and mountains, rivers and trees, would still exist.

Heidegger seems to want to say in response to this counterfactual that we are not in a position to assess its truth or falsity. This is not for the trivial reason that in the scenario described persons wouldn't exist so there would be no one to discover that entities exist independently of us. Nothing would be understood in such a scenario. No one is going to disagree that if nothing is understood, entities will not be understood either as independent existents or as existing in a way that depends on us.

I have said that to understand an entity as existing independently of us is to understand it as existing apart from any particular point of view we can take on it. In Heidegger's words, it is to relate to the entity as something present-at-hand. Now Heidegger's thought seems to be that if we are not around to understand an entity in this way then there are no present-at-hand entities. Thus construed isn't Heidegger saying that an entity's independent existence ultimately depends on our way of understanding it? An entity is present-at-hand only if it is understood as such. Can an entity truly be said to exist independently of us if its independence from us is characterised in terms of our ways of understanding entities?

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<sup>17</sup> I shall follow Carman (2003: 35-43) in reading Heidegger's technical term "Dasein" to refer to persons.

In interpreting these passages we need to be careful to distinguish an epistemological from a metaphysical reading. I take Heidegger to be making the surely uncontroversial claim that we have no access to an entity apart from our ways of understanding that entity. Our access to entities comes in different forms. There is epistemic or cognitive access which can be understood in terms of our capacity to arrive at knowledge of the world or form accurate beliefs about the world. There is what we might call semantic access, which can be understood as our capacity to make meaningful utterances, and to refer to things by means of our utterances. Finally there is a practical access to things which we have when we can causally affect things in such a way as to satisfy our needs and desires.<sup>18</sup>

I take Heidegger to deny that there is, to borrow Nagel's useful phrase "a view from nowhere", which we can take up and thereby know entities as they are apart from our ways of understanding them. It is by means of our understanding that we gain access to entities in the three senses I have just set out. We can form true beliefs and arrive at knowledge of entities only by drawing on our understanding. We can make meaningful utterances and succeed in referring to entities only by means of our mastery or understanding of a language. As we have seen in the previous section, we can use entities so as to achieve our ends only by understanding them as having a normal use and thus fitting into a network of other things that we use to accomplish our ends. It is tempting then to read Heidegger as claiming with Kant that our access to things is limited to that which our understanding discloses to us. As soon as we try to step outside of the

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<sup>18</sup> Heidegger distinguishes between these different modes of access using his distinction between presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand. Malpas (1999) offers a useful reconstruction of Heidegger's distinction in terms of this division between the epistemic/cognitive, the semantic and the practical.

bounds of our understanding we make claims that are neither true nor false but unintelligible.<sup>19</sup>

It doesn't follow from such a claim that an entity is brought into existence through our ways of understanding it, so that if we didn't exist nor would mountains, trees, rivers and the rest of nature. What our understanding discloses to us is a world that is there anyway, a world that doesn't depend on our concerns and interests. We discover such a world when we stand back from our particular point of view and relate to entities as something present-at-hand. Then we discover the entities and their properties that underlie our everyday dealings with the world. Nature is revealed as having been there all along.

(IND) claims that the natural world would continue to exist were persons not to exist. (IND) was introduced as a way of making sense of Heidegger's claim that while an entity's *being* depends on us, the entity itself does not. What does it mean to say that the natural world and the entities of which it is composed exist "independently" of us?

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<sup>19</sup> I have been reading Heidegger as claiming that there is a restriction on our understanding of the counterfactual situation which (IND) describes. Blattner (1994) takes Heidegger to be defending a kind of transcendental idealism. He takes Heidegger to be saying that when we consider the situation (IND) describes from a transcendental standpoint it makes no sense to say either that entities are or that they are not. I do not mean to ally myself with Blattner. Near the end of his paper Blattner raises an objection (posed to him by Dreyfus) that Heidegger couldn't have been a transcendental idealist since "Heidegger insists that all understanding takes place in the context of an involvement with the world, and hence the detached, uninvolved perspective of the transcendental standpoint is impossible." (Blattner, 1994:196) I am not sure I understand Blattner's response but Dreyfus objection seems to me a powerful one.

Cerbone (1995) seems to me to have been more successful in pinpointing the restriction on our understanding Heidegger has in mind. He argues that we cannot make assertions about the situation (IND) describes, since our assertions get their significance from our being-in-the-world. A situation in which there are no persons is a situation in which there is nothing to confer significance on our assertions. Cerbone concludes that it is not entities that depend on us for their existence, but only "what we say about them". (*ibid*, 416) Assertions depend on us for their significance, but it is not us that make our assertions true or false.

Unsurprisingly, this is not a question to which I am currently able to return a definitive answer. I shall settle instead for sketching two possible answers.<sup>20</sup> The first answer claims that our access (in the epistemic, semantic and practical senses) to an entity *necessarily* depends on our ways of understanding an entity but the entity itself only *contingently* depends on our ways of understanding it.<sup>21</sup> On this understanding to say an entity exists independently of us is to say it has a “nature” or “essence” that is in no way dependent on us and our ways of understanding it. Moreover this essence or nature is something that we can achieve knowledge of through scientific investigation. Our ordinary, pre-theoretical ways of understanding an entity, secure access or reference to an entity by picking out certain of its contingent properties. Through scientific investigation, so the argument goes, we can discover properties that belong to the entity essentially, properties that it has at every possible world where it exists.<sup>22</sup>

This second conception of realism departs from the first by denying that we have epistemic access to the world independent of our practices. It denies that we can know a thing’s essence or nature if we understand a thing’s essence to be something that is independent of us, and our ways of understanding an entity. The second view insists on a distinction between on the one hand the independence of the thing which we take a point of view on when we understand an entity in a certain way, and the independence of the point of view from our concerns and interests. It denies that there is any point of view we can take up which doesn’t in some way reflect our concerns

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<sup>20</sup> I am basing the first position on Dreyfus (1991: ch.15, pp’s 251-265) & Dreyfus & Spinoza (1999) and the second on Cerbone (1995) and Malpas (1999). For a defence of Heidegger’s realism that diverges in subtle ways from both these positions see Carman (2003: ch.4).

<sup>21</sup> See Dreyfus and Spinoza (1999: 57)

<sup>22</sup> Dreyfus and Spinoza cite Kripke, Putnam and Donnellan’s pioneering work on rigid designation in explaining how we come to identify a thing’s essence or nature. See Dreyfus and Spinoza, (*ibid*, FN 47: 76).

and interests. It doesn't follow that the existence of the thing which we take a point of view on is dependent on our mode of understanding. Malpas (1999) offers the following useful analogy:

'(A) map of some portion of space depends on a particular set of interests on the part of the mapmaker, and the likely user of the map, as well as on certain conventional forms of presentation, but this is no way impugns the capacity of the map to accurately "describe" and thereby to give access to some portion of objective space'. (*ibid*, 99)

I am not going to attempt to decide between these two ways of construing the claim that entities exist independent of us. It suffices for my purposes that there are at least two credible ways in which existential phenomenology can be read as compatible with realism. I have been looking to the existential phenomenologist for an argument against naturalism that doesn't beg the question by presupposing the truth of idealism. I have shown that the existential phenomenologist isn't committed to idealism and can indeed be used to defend some version of realism.

Before we can turn to the existential phenomenologist's argument against naturalism we need to introduce something the existential phenomenologists call "being-in-the-world". This idea does serious work for the existential phenomenologist explaining how both operative and cognitive intentionality are possible. We shall see that it is being-in-the-world which the existential phenomenologist argues the naturalist must presuppose and so cannot explain.

## 6. Being-in-the-World

I have said that just like Husserlian phenomenology, existential phenomenology seeks to describe how it is possible for our thoughts and



experiences to exhibit intentional directedness. Existential phenomenologists depart from Husserl in locating the conditions of the possibility for intentionality (both cognitive and operative) in something they call “being-in-the-world”.

We can get some idea of what existential phenomenologists mean by “being-in-the-world” by considering how we grasp, or make sense of, the content of a particular intentional state.<sup>23</sup> We have an understanding of our intentional states as being about particular situations in virtue of their contents, but how do we come to understand an intentional state’s content as representing one situation rather than another? Any account of intentionality must answer this question; the answer the existential phenomenologist returns appeals to our being-in-the-world.

Take my desire for a good cup of coffee. This desire only makes sense to me given a large number of other beliefs and desires I have, such as beliefs about what counts as good cup of coffee, where such a thing might be purchased, what it is to buy coffee, and so on. However, it looks implausible to say that the grasp I have of my desire’s content derives from these various beliefs. Not only is there an indefinite number of other beliefs that I would have to mention in order to spell out my understanding of this simple desire. My understanding of each of these beliefs is likewise dependent on a whole host of other intentional states. To explain how we grasp an intentional state’s content by appeal to other intentional states seems to land us with a regress. The same question arises again for each intentional state to which we appeal in accounting for our understanding – we want to know how we

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<sup>23</sup> My treatment of this question is indebted to Dreyfus (1991, ch.’s 3-5). For some tweaking of Dreyfus’ account see Wrathall’s (2000). Olafson (1994) attacks Dreyfus’ interpretation of Heidegger, but I cannot engage with his arguments here.

make sense of each of these intentional states as representing one situation rather than another.

The existential phenomenologists claim that it is by means of our being-in-the-world that we interpret an intentional state as having one content rather than another.<sup>24</sup> To return to my desire for a good cup of coffee, it is my familiarity with coffee and cafes that gives me a sense of what it is to desire good coffee, and what I need to do to satisfy this desire. This familiarity isn't something I can make fully explicit by writing down everything I know about coffee and cafes. I know how to find my way about in the world of coffee, this is just one facet of my being-in-the-world. Much of this knowledge consists in a sense of what to do, of what is appropriate and what is not given this desire. I am ready to respond appropriately to whatever my coffee-related circumstances might present me with. I have a sense of how to respond

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<sup>24</sup> Searle (1983: ch.5 and 1992: ch.8) appeals to something he calls "the background" to answer the question I have posed about our understanding of an intentional state's content. Searle's notion of the background is similar to what I am here calling "being-in-the-world". He describes the background as a set of "capacities, abilities and general know-how that enable our mental states to function." (Searle, 1992: 176) The background determines what Searle calls an intentional state's "conditions of satisfaction", the conditions which we would state in specifying an intentional state's representational content.

There are however, some significant deficiencies in Searle's account, for an account of which see Carman (2003: 115-121) and Wrathall (2000, pp.103-114). Carman attacks Searle for failing to account for the normative status of the skills that constitute the background. What Searle's account leaves out is "the phenomenon of embodied social skill as such, which is arguably neither full blown conscious obedience to explicit rules nor mere blind neurophysiological capacities and dispositions." (Carman, 2003: 121) Carman's complaint against Searle is that he tries to treat our being-in-the-world as a set of mere causal capacities when being-in-the-world consists in a variety of knowledge, knowledge of what one *should* do in everyday situations.

Wrathall objects to Searle's characterisation of the background as a neuronal capacity. He argues that such a characterisation ignores the background's temporal structure. The background doesn't just fix an intentional state's content, it also refers forward to certain future possibilities for action. The background gives us an orientation to the world not just now but also in the future, it opens up or discloses a world to us. According to Wrathall, Searle cannot recognise "the temporally embedded character of human existence" (Wrathall, 2000: 113). He claims this is something which "cannot be explained in terms of neurophysiological structures" (ibid, 113). Whether he is right about this is something that I think can be questioned (see Varela (1999) and Van Gelder (1999)). Leaving Wrathall's objection to one side, it seems to me Carman has raised a significant problem for Searle.

appropriately because of my familiarity with coffee-drinking situations, because I know how to find my way about in such situations.

What I have just described with respect to the world of coffee is true of other worlds too. Consider the art world, for instance. In order to understand a work of art, a conceptual piece by Joseph Beuys say, one must know how to find one's way about in this world. One must know quite a lot about the history of art, so as to decipher whatever references might be being made to other artists. One must also understand what it is the conceptual artists do, in order to decipher the signs they use in their work. This knowledge is knowledge one must acquire before one can understand a work of art as a work of art. In other words one must know one's way about in the art world in order to understand an entity which is a work of art as a work of art. What is a pile of bricks to one person is a work of art to someone who knows how to find their way about in this world.

I have given a couple of examples of how before we can represent an entity as an entity we must have what I shall call "a background understanding". This background understanding is what enables one to understand an entity as the entity it is. The background is a feature of each and every world we inhabit as persons. Each of these worlds has its own background which we draw on in understanding the entities that populate those worlds as the entities they are. Heidegger will say that the background forms a part of the structure of being-in-the-world. Recall that being-in-the-world is our way of existing as persons. It follows then that the background forms a part of our way of existing as persons. Now it is only in virtue of the background that we can understand, that is to say represent, an entity as an entity. Thus it follows that intentionality has as its condition of possibility,

being-in-the-world. Let us consider how this is the case for the two modes of intentionality described above, cognitive and operative intentionality.

When we experience the world operatively, we experience things in terms of our dealings with them. Being-in-the-world confers on a person, knowledge of how to deal with a thing competently. To know how to deal with a thing competently is to have a sense of what counts as an appropriate response, and what does not. The existential phenomenologist claims that this sense of appropriateness derives from a person's being-in-the-world, from her knowing her way about in the world.

When does a response count as appropriate and when does it count as inappropriate? This all depends on the point of the response; it depends on the purpose or goal which the agent is acting to bring about. Any piece of equipment is defined by its normal way of being used, its function.<sup>25</sup> A thing's function will depend on the activity the agent is engaged in when he puts the thing to use. This activity in turn derives its point from the agent and her self-understanding. The agent understands herself as engaged in a certain task, and it is by reference to this understanding that she makes sense of her actions.

We saw in section 3 that an agent's knowledge of the point of some activity often derives from her knowing what others do and knowing how to conform with her community's normal ways of doing things. An agent can be said to know the point of some activity when she knows what it is to participate in a communal or social practice. Her knowledge of how to find

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<sup>25</sup> We saw in section 3 that a piece of equipment doesn't have a function in isolation from other pieces of equipment: we make sense of something as a hammer, for instance, only in the context of other pieces of equipment like nails and pieces of wood. It is only if a person knows the place a piece of equipment occupies in a network of equipment as a whole that she can be said to know how a piece of equipment is normally used. This knowledge of how a piece of equipment is used in conjunction with other items of equipment in pursuit of some activity forms a part of what a subject must know if she is to know how to respond appropriately to a situation.

her way about in the world, her being-in-the-world, is a matter of knowing how to act in ways that fall in with what others normally do. She makes sense of things and finds intelligibility where others find it. Someone can experience something as a piece of equipment only when she knows how to respond to it as others respond to it, when she knows how this thing would normally be used. This knowledge is knowledge of how to make her responses conform to the responses of others.

It is also our being-in-the-world that makes it possible for things to show up to a person as present-at-hand. To represent an entity as present-at-hand is to represent this entity cognitively. Even our propositional attitudes have a kind of intentionality that is dependent on our being-in-the-world. For the entities and properties we represent cognitively are also understood as entities. We have seen above that to understand an entity as an entity is always to draw upon a background understanding relating to the world of which that entity is a part. Consider as an example the world as it is described by physics. One can understand an entity as belonging to this world only because one has acquired a background understanding required for participating in physics. However we have seen that to be in possession of a background understanding is a feature of our way of existing as persons; it forms a part of the structure characteristic of being-in-the-world. Thus our understanding of entities as present-at-hand no less than our understanding of entities as ready-to-hand is dependent upon our being-in-the-world.

The latter point that we can experience entities as present-at-hand only because each of us is a being-in-the-world forms the basis for the existential phenomenologist's argument against naturalism. The existential phenomenologist doesn't think of intentionality as the means by which the

subject escapes the confines of her own mind. He claims instead that intentionality just is transcendence:

“In directing itself toward something and grasping it, Dasein does not somehow first get out of an inner sphere in which it has been encapsulated, rather its primary kind of being is such that it is always “outside” with entities that it encounters and that belong to an already discovered world...And furthermore perceiving what is known is not a matter of returning with one’s booty to the “cabinet” of consciousness after one has gone out and grasped it; even in perceiving, retaining and preserving, the knowing Dasein, as *Dasein*, remains outside.” (Heidegger, 1962: 62)

It is our being-in-the-world which makes it possible for us to encounter entities “that belong to an already discovered world.” It makes possible both our cognitive and our operative modes of understanding. We shall see in the next section how being-in-the-world is something that the existential phenomenologist will argue must resist naturalistic explanation. Let us finally turn to the existential phenomenologist’s argument against naturalism.

## 7. The Argument against Naturalism

The naturalist, you will recall from chapter 1, takes science to be the measure of what is and what is not. The entities the scientist identifies are present-at-hand entities. They are entities that have been stripped of their ordinary significance so as to reveal their context free properties and features. It is these properties and features the scientist then proceeds to describe in the light of the theories of the day.

The existential phenomenologist argues that we cannot account for our being-in-the-world by appeal to the kind of context-free properties the theories of the natural sciences identify. To see why not it will be helpful to



remind ourselves of Heidegger's claim that being and our understanding of being stand in a relation of reciprocal dependence. In section 3 I said we should understand Heidegger's as claiming that:

- (1) An entity's being is constituted by our cognitive and non-cognitive responses to it, and
- (2) The relevant responses are shaped by our understanding.

From (1) and (2) it follows that an entity's being is shaped by our understanding of it. Now according to the existential phenomenologist the mistake the naturalist makes is to try to understand everything in terms of the existence an entity has when it is experienced as present-at-hand. Recall that an entity becomes present-at-hand when we cease relating to it as something ready-to-hand, when we cease to relate to the entity in terms of our everyday, pre-theoretical interests and concerns. The naturalist is accused of giving a false priority to this present-at-hand mode of understanding. Suppose we grant that an entity's being is shaped by our modes of understanding in the way that was described in section 3 & 4. If the naturalist is to give priority to the present-at-hand, she will have to explain our ready-to-hand mode of understanding in terms of context-free properties and entities we uncover when we take up a reflective standpoint. This is just what the existential phenomenologist claims the naturalist cannot do.

The conception of reality that results from prioritising the present-at-hand will be one in which the meaning we ordinarily and unreflectively find in a thing has been bleached-out. Once we have abstracted away from our ordinary concerns with things, it becomes impossible to recover these ordinary concerns within the context of the scientist's theorising. We cannot account for the meaning we give to things, making use only of the properties

and entities we learn of from the theories of the natural sciences. For these properties and entities have been discovered only by stripping objects of the meaning we ordinarily give them.<sup>26</sup>

By prioritising our present-at-hand mode of understanding, the naturalist ends up treating our ordinary ways of understanding entities as mere projections of our mind, superimposed onto a world fundamentally lacking the meaning and value we invest in it. The existential phenomenologist argues that this gets matters back to front. We discover a thing's context-free properties they claim only once we have set aside our ordinary, operative mode of understanding. Things can be encountered as present-at-hand only because they have first been experienced as ready-to-hand and only once this ordinary way of understanding things has been set-aside.

It is a mistake to treat the significance we ordinarily find in things as projections of our minds onto the world. Scientific theorising, the existential phenomenologist points out, is just one of the modes of our being-in-the-world. To take the theories of the natural sciences as a guide to what there is, is to ignore all of the ways in which a thing's existence is shaped by our non-scientific modes of understanding. It is to treat entities as if their sole mode of being is that of the present-at-hand. This is what the naturalist is accused of doing when she gives priority to the present-at-hand and treats

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<sup>26</sup> Dreyfus (1991) makes this point in discussing Heidegger's critique of naturalism. Once "we have stripped away all meaningful context", he says "to get the elements of theory, theory cannot give back meaning. Science cannot reconstruct what has been left out in arriving at theory; it cannot explain significance." (Dreyfus, 1991: 121)

The existential phenomenologist allows that science might discover laws that further our understanding of, for instance, an entity's causal powers. However, he also thinks the explanations of the natural sciences have their limits. They can never explain how we come to inhabit a world in which things are encountered as significant. For the entities and properties the scientist makes reference to have been discovered only by abstracting away from the meaning we ordinarily give to things. The elements of which the naturalist's ontology is composed are devoid of the meaning we ordinarily find in the world.

everything else as a merely subjective contribution of our own minds. The result of understanding all entities in present-at-hand terms is a leveling-off of the different ways of being that entities have. For there is a variety of other ways we have of understanding entities in addition to our scientific mode of understanding. The existential phenomenologist claims that corresponding to each of these modes of understanding there is a way that entities are.

Nagel (1986) can be construed as echoing the existential phenomenologist's argument when he worries that an objective conception of reality must leave something out from its description of what there is. Nagel tells us:

“(A) succession of objective advances may take us to a new conception of reality that leaves the personal or merely human perspective further and further behind. But if what we want is to understand the whole world, we can't forget about those subjective starting points indefinitely; we and our personal perspectives belong to the world.” (Nagel, 1986: 6)

For Nagel, an objective conception of reality can never find room for what he calls our “subjective starting points”. It has always already left these starting points behind. The existential phenomenologist makes the very same point about our non-cognitive modes of understanding. As soon as the natural scientist proffers her explanations she has abandoned the context in which her experiences ordinarily take place. The scientist cannot explain what takes place within this context once she has abandoned it.

It might be reasonably objected that so far no reason has been given for the priority existential phenomenology gives to our ordinary operative mode of understanding over the cognitive mode of understanding achieved by the scientist. The existential phenomenologist's argument as I have presented it derived some of its force from the claim that we come to experience things as

present-at-hand only by abstracting away from the significance we ordinarily give to things when dealing with them operatively. Why not say that things are fundamentally without the significance we ordinarily invest in them? To pose this question in the existential phenomenologist's terms, why not prioritise the present-at-hand over the ready-to-hand in the way that it is claimed the naturalist does?

The question I am currently raising is why we should grant that we must first experience something as ready-to-hand before we can experience something as present-at-hand. Why not say instead that something must be present-at-hand, it must have the context-free properties identified by the natural sciences, before it can be experienced as ready-to-hand? Such a response derives additional force when we consider the fact that a thing can only function as an item of equipment, as a hammer say, if it has certain properties that enable it to play this role, properties like mass, solidity, *etc.* These are properties the true nature of which is identified and described by science. Surely then something can be ready-to-hand, it can be used for our ends, only because it is first present-at-hand.

The existential phenomenologist can concede that the "handiness" of ready-to-hand things is dependent on the properties that science identifies, in the way I have just sketched. However he will deny that an entity's being is exhausted by what science tells us about an entity's nature. Recall that according to Heidegger an entity's being – what an entity is and whether it is – is defined by our understanding of being. Our scientific theories reveal to us a world that is there anyway independent of us. However, this is not the only way in which entities exist. Entities also have ways of existing that depend on us and our peculiar concerns and interests. The existential phenomenologist claims that we can learn about the nature of entities as they

exist independently of us from the theories of the sciences. What we cannot learn about from those theories is the various ways in which entities exist when they are made the object of our non-scientific concerns and interests.

Still the naturalist might ask why some psychological or biological story couldn't be told about how we come to invest entities with significance? We have seen the existential phenomenologist claim that the properties which are the scientist's stock and trade, have been shorn of the significance we ordinarily give to things. Perhaps this is right. Still the question remains why we shouldn't treat the significance we give to things as merely subjective responses to be explained by our psychology and biology?

We are yet to find a reason for agreeing with Heidegger and the existential phenomenologists that an entity's being is dependent on our modes of understanding. Until we give some reason for thinking this is true we will only have established that there is a conflict between the metaphysics of the existential phenomenologist and that of the naturalist. We will not however have given any reason to prefer the existential phenomenologist's metaphysics to the naturalist's. Worse still for me, we will have established once and for all the incompatibility of naturalism and existential phenomenology by locating a difference in their respective metaphysics. Moreover we will have done so in a way that is completely independent of idealism, since we have seen in section 5 that the existential phenomenologist isn't committed to idealism. This will leave me unable to dismiss the conflict between phenomenology and naturalism as the outcome of a mistaken commitment on the part of the phenomenology to idealism.

Fortunately we need not leave matters there; we haven't yet got to the bottom of the existential phenomenologist's argument against naturalism. So far I have argued as though the problem arose from the impossibility of

describing what it is for something to be ready-to-hand by reference to the context-free properties the theories of the natural science deal in. In fact the problem lies with our being-in-the-world. Before anything can show up for us as ready-to-hand we must know our way about in the world. This is equally true of our present-at-hand modes of understanding – before we can understand an entity as present-at-hand we must know how to find our way about in the world in which this entity exists. This is knowledge we have in virtue of our being-in-the-world. It is not only an entity's readiness-to-hand that causes problems for the naturalist then. It is also our being-in-the-world. It is this which the existential phenomenologist denies the naturalist can explain.

Why might it be thought that being-in-the-world isn't susceptible to explanation by the natural sciences? The existential phenomenologist claims that being-in-the-world accounts for our access to entities, whether they be understood as ready-to-hand or as present-at-hand. For being-in-the-world is the condition of the possibility of intentionality conceived of as transcendence. In particular being-in-the-world explains how we can have access to the entities and properties the natural sciences describe.

To see how being-in-the-world makes possible our access to the natural world it will be useful to distinguish scientific *understanding* from scientific *practice*. Scientific understanding aims to identify and describe the nature of entities independent of us and our peculiar concerns and interests. However we achieve such an understanding only through certain practices which constitute scientific method.

The theories and models of the natural sciences can be understood as tools which must be mastered before one can participate in scientific activity. When one learns a theory one learns how to apply the theory to various



situations, and one learns how to perform operations within the models defined by the theory. The way one learns the theory and its application is through the use of theory to solve problems.<sup>27</sup>

Thus while the objective of science is to achieve a disinterested, disengaged understanding of reality, this can only be achieved through scientific practices. Like any other activity the scientist must have mastered certain skills and techniques before he can fully participate in a science. Before one can participate in a science one must have mastered its practices. One must have become familiarized with the scientist's way of doing things. We saw above how being-in-the-world makes possible our mastery of practical skills by giving us a sense of what is appropriate and what is not. Scientific understanding is made possible by a person's being-in-the-world just as much as any other kind of understanding. Being-in-the-world is just as much a necessary requirement for scientific understanding as it is a necessary requirement for any other kind of understanding.

The existential phenomenologist's descriptions of being-in-the-world explain how we can make sense of anything whatsoever including the entities and properties our scientific theories uncover. Being-in-the-world isn't something science can explain because being-in-the-world supplies the conditions for the possibility of doing science.

The substance of the existential phenomenologist's argument against naturalism is that being-in-the-world makes possible both our operative and cognitive modes of understanding. I shall argue in the final part of my thesis that the phenomenon of being-in-the-world is something that cognitive scientists and neurobiologists are beginning to recognise.<sup>28</sup> Thus being-in-

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<sup>27</sup> I am indebted here to Rouse (2000), also see Rouse (1996).

<sup>28</sup> See for instance the account of the enactive, embodied approach to the study of cognition described in Clark (1997) and Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1991).

the-world may well be a phenomenon that can be incorporated within a naturalistic theory of the mind.

Once we think of being-in-the-world as a naturally occurring phenomenon however, the existential phenomenologist's argument against naturalism will have lost its force. We won't need to think of being-in-the-world transcendentally as Heidegger did.

Carman (2003: 23-30) compares the role that being-in-the-world plays in existential phenomenology to the role of space, time and the categories in Kant's epistemology. Space, time and the categories constitute the conditions for the possibility of knowing in the account Kant gives of knowledge. Carman presents Heidegger as arguing that being-in-the-world plays the same role with respect to what I have called our "operative" and "cognitive" modes of understanding. Being-in-the-world, like Kant's conditions for knowing, is a universal and necessary condition for understanding, and that it constitutes such a condition is something which can be known a priori.

The real ground for the conflict between phenomenology and naturalism lies in the transcendental nature of the phenomenologist's philosophical project. I shall argue that there is nothing in the notion of being-in-the-world which requires us to conceive of it transcendentally. Thus the naturalist can appeal to being-in-the-world as what accounts for our experiencing an entity as ready-to-hand.

There is an objection that needs to be overcome first before I can make such an argument. We saw the existential phenomenologist complain earlier in this section that the naturalist levels-off the different ways in which entities exist. The naturalist it was argued can only ever give us an account of a reality that is there anyway independent of our particular human ways of

responding to reality. Standing behind this worry is a conception of the naturalist as forming what Williams (1978) calls an “absolute conception” of reality. The worry the phenomenologist raises is that there are certain facts that must be left out from any absolute conception of reality. These are facts that involve our human perspective on the world, and our particular ways of responding to the world that are a reflection of this perspective.

In the next chapter I will connect this worry with the problem of the explanatory gap, the worry that our naturalistic explanations of mind leave out what is essentially subjective about our experiences. I will argue that the explanatory gap is genuine, and the reason it exists is that naturalistic explanations of mind do not seem to make room for the existence of facts that essentially involve us as conscious subjects.

Now the very same difficulty which the next chapter will argue is responsible for the existence of an explanatory gap has also been presented above as an argument against naturalism by the phenomenologist. A naturalised phenomenology of the kind I wish to develop recognises the existence of facts that involve an essentially human perspective on the world. Such an account of the mind can not only help the naturalist to overcome its difficulties with the explanatory gap. It can also reveal one of the grounds for the phenomenologist’s anti-naturalism to be unfounded.

### Chapter 3

#### Introduction

In the last two chapters I have been attempting to establish the reasons for the phenomenologist's avowed opposition to naturalism. My aim in this chapter will be to connect a difficulty I raised for the naturalist in the previous chapter with a problem naturalists have identified for themselves. Naturalist theories of mind have run into what Levine (1993) calls "an explanatory gap". So far no naturalistic theory of mind has succeeded in securing agreement as to why we have the kinds of conscious experiences we do, or indeed any at all. Yet any satisfactory naturalistic theory of consciousness should give us answers to these two questions. There is then a gap in the naturalist's account of mind, a gap which must be closed if the naturalist is to lay claim to having succeeded in locating the mind in the natural world.

I will argue that the appearance of the explanatory gap is due an apparent failure on the part of naturalistic theories of mind to recognise the existence of facts of a certain kind. I shall argue drawing on Jackson's knowledge argument that there is a class of facts that can only be represented from a subject's point of view. I shall call these facts "subjective facts". It is subjective facts which appear to be missing from a naturalistic conception of reality. The arguments of the previous two chapters establish that phenomenologists are likewise committed to the existence of subjective facts. One of the arguments that the phenomenologist makes against naturalism claims that a naturalistic conception of reality must fail to include subjective facts. Thus it will turn out that the explanatory gap is located at one of the places where phenomenology attacks naturalism.

Section 1 offers some reasons for believing in the existence of an explanatory gap. I argue following Levine (2001) that functional and physical

explanations of consciousness are significantly different from other successful cases of reductive explanation insofar as these explanations seem to provide at best what Levine calls “gappy identities”. Many philosophers who are persuaded of the gap’s existence have concluded that functional and physical explanations of mind cannot account for the nature of consciousness. They have tried to argue that the properties in virtue of which an experience seems or feels a certain way to a subject and functional/physical properties must be two distinct kinds of property. In section 2 I show how the arguments given in support of an explanatory gap do not support a metaphysical conclusion of this kind. They establish at most that functional and physical explanations fail to make intelligible to us the nature of consciousness.

I argue that this failure is an example of a wider failure of naturalistic explanations to make room for facts that can only be represented from a subject’s point of view. It is facts of this kind that I will call “subjective facts”. The fact that some entity is ready-to-hand (it is experienced as something to be used) is a subjective fact in this sense. It is a fact that can only be represented from the point of view of a subject with a particular understanding and know-how.

Section 3 returns to the arguments of the existential phenomenologists to fend off an objection to the account of the explanatory gap I have proposed. The objection claims that my account of the explanatory gap slides from a claim about different ways of representing facts to the conclusion that there are different facts represented. This is an objection we will have cause to return to a number of times in later chapters. I offer an initial response by appealing to Heidegger’s account of being introduced in the previous chapter. According to Heidegger, our understanding of being literally shapes

and constitutes the mode of being of the objects of our thoughts and experiences. If Heidegger is right, it will follow that a difference in understanding (or what I have been calling “representation”) can bring with it a difference in the facts that are represented.<sup>1</sup>

By the end of this section I will have presented an account of the explanatory gap which locates the gap just where existential phenomenology attacks naturalism. Given this result it will follow that one way to close the gap I have described would be to show that phenomenology can be naturalised. It is this project of naturalising phenomenology which I will take up in the remainder of the thesis. A naturalised phenomenology would not only show that the existential phenomenologist is mistaken about the limits of scientific understanding. It will also provide the materials for addressing the problem of the explanatory gap. For if I am right the explanatory gap is located just where the phenomenologist attacks naturalism.

I finish up this chapter by considering two further arguments which attempt to show that the explanatory gap is illusory. I shall argue that both arguments presuppose the existence of subjective facts. So far from revealing the gap to be an illusion, these arguments only confirm the existence of a gap of the kind I describe in this chapter.

### 1. The Explanatory Gap Introduced

A naturalistic theory of mind must find a place for consciousness in the natural world. This it will do by explaining how the conscious mind is constituted by the kinds of entities and properties identified by the theories of the natural sciences. Yet it remains deeply puzzling to us how these

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 4 will explore in more detail how this move works.



elements could coalesce so as to bring about anything like consciousness. As Colin McGinn has put it:

'We know that brains are the *de facto* causal basis of consciousness, but we have, it seems, no understanding whatever of how this can be so. It strikes us as miraculous, eerie, even faintly comic. Somehow, we feel, the water of the physical brain is turned into the wine of consciousness, but we draw a total blank on the nature of this conversion.' (1991, p1)

When a subject undergoes a sensory experience, and when she suffers a pain or enjoys a pleasure, there is something it is like for the subject to undergo this experience. Think of the difference between experiencing a wine that tastes sweet and experiencing a wine that tastes sour. The two wines differ in what they are like to experience: one tastes sour, the other sweet. Many of our experiences also have a qualitative feel to them. What it is like to undergo such an experience will be determined by what we feel at the time of the experience's occurrence. When we talk of a sensation being pleasant, painful or irritating, for instance, we are describing the way the sensations feels – it feels pleasurable, disturbing, annoying we say.

A naturalistic account of consciousness must account for these characteristics of conscious experience. It must explain how our experiences can present the world as seeming a certain way when we undergo a conscious perceptual experience. It must account for the fact that the different sensations we undergo each have their own distinctive qualitative feel. Following convention I will call those properties in virtue of which our experiences have a qualitative or phenomenal character "phenomenal properties"<sup>2</sup>. I will call the type of consciousness in virtue of

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<sup>2</sup> This chapter will not examine the metaphysics of phenomenal properties. In particular I will not consider whether phenomenal properties belong to experiences or to the objects of experience. I will discuss this question at the beginning of chapter 4.

which there is something it is like to be a subject of an experience “phenomenal consciousness”.

The nature of phenomenal consciousness is an extant problem for naturalistic philosophy of mind. There is every reason to believe that the collaborative efforts of cognitive science, psychology and neurobiology will succeed in making intelligible the nature of the various cognitive capacities characteristic of conscious mental life. Yet we are long way from understanding the nature of phenomenal consciousness. Why does a particular sensory experience of mine manifest one set of phenomenal properties rather than another entirely different set of phenomenal properties? Why is there something rather than nothing that it is like for a subject to enjoy conscious experiences? Any naturalistic explanation ought to give us an answer to these questions, yet there is no widespread agreement as to how an answer to these questions might go.

Take the first question I have just posed: why do my sensory experiences seem and feel to me the way they do rather than seeming or feeling entirely different? We can see that naturalistic accounts of the mind do not seem to return a satisfying answer to this question by reflecting on the classic inverted spectrum thought experiments. In these thought experiments we are asked to conceive of two physically and functionally identical subjects one of whom sees yellow things like daffodils and autumnal leaves that seem to her to be coloured yellow, while the other sees yellow things that seem to him to be coloured blue. The situation these thought experiments describe is one in which two subjects are physically and functionally identical, but the two subjects experience yellow things in different ways. Yellow things systematically seem to be blue to one subject, and yellow to the other. So it would seem our functional and physical explanations fail to explain a

difference in the experiences our two subjects enjoy: they fail to explain, for instance, why yellow things should appear yellow rather than blue. This is a significant shortcoming in the kind of understanding a functional and physical explanation of phenomenal consciousness supplies.

More dramatically, many philosophers have claimed to be able to conceive of a world where “subjects” are functionally and physically identical to us, but enjoy nothing in the way of phenomenal consciousness. Chalmers (1996) calls worlds of this kind “zombie-worlds”. There is nothing at all that is like for the “subjects” inhabiting such a world to undergo sensory experiences. Nor does it feel anyway to them when they hurt themselves. Let us suppose we find the possibility of a zombie-world conceivable; then we must say that functional and physical explanations of mind leave it an open question whether phenomenal consciousness is present in a creature. Again this is something a satisfactory explanation of phenomenal consciousness ought to render inconceivable. To the extent that we find zombies conceivable, we will have to say that functional and physical explanations do not provide a satisfactory explanation of phenomenal consciousness.

Consider a case of a successful reductive explanation, such as the much discussed identification of water with  $H_2O$ . Given a rich enough theory of  $H_2O$  molecules and their interaction we can understand everything we desire to understand about water and its behaviour. Moreover it is inconceivable to us that  $H_2O$  molecules could behave as our theory describes and not exhibit the kind of behaviours which we take to be definitive of water. The same does not seem to be true of phenomenal consciousness. Reductive explanations of phenomenal properties yield identities of phenomenal properties with functional or physical properties which leave plenty of room

for us to wonder why our experiences should present the world as seeming a certain way, or even why our experiences should present the world as seeming anyway at all. These are questions that a satisfactory reductive explanation of consciousness ought to be able to answer. As Levine has pointed out, a reductive explanation of phenomenal consciousness should put us in a position to reason as follows:

‘Suppose creature X satisfies physical description *P*. I understand—from my physical theory of consciousness—what it is about instantiating *P* that is responsible for its being a conscious experience. So how could X occupy a state with those very features and yet *not* be having a conscious experience?’ (Levine, 2001: p80)

Functional and physical explanations of phenomenal properties supply what Levine calls “gappy identity statements”. Gappy identities differ from the kind of identities successful reductive explanations supply because they require further explanation. In the case of identities like “water = H<sub>2</sub>O”, it is unintelligible for us to ask for explanations of these identities. Our theory of H<sub>2</sub>O molecules and the way in which they interact suffices as an explanation of water and its properties. There are no further facts about water and its identity with H<sub>2</sub>O that we do not learn from such a theory. Phenomenal properties are different. If we were to identify a phenomenal property *P* with some physical-functional state *Q*, it would be perfectly intelligible for us to ask for some explanation of why *P*=*Q*. It is perfectly intelligible for us to ask, for instance, why a visual experience of a red rose should also instantiate phenomenal properties of redness rather than some other type of phenomenal property or none whatsoever. A reductive explanation of

phenomenal properties to physical-functional properties shouldn't leave room for such questions.

Why is it that functional and physical explanations of phenomenal properties differ from successful cases of reductive explanation like the reduction of water to H<sub>2</sub>O? In the case of water and H<sub>2</sub>O a reductive explanation identifies for us the true nature of the stuff we call "water". It is tempting to say that we do not learn about the true nature of phenomenal properties from functional and physical explanations of mind because phenomenal properties and functional/physical properties are distinct kinds of properties.<sup>3</sup> It makes sense for us to ask for some further explanation of why P=Q should be true because P and Q are properties with distinct natures.

The arguments I have given so far do not seem to me to license a *metaphysical* conclusion along these lines. So far the reasons I have given in support of the claim that there is an explanatory gap has been based on our being able to conceive of certain kinds of situations in which two individuals share the same physical and functional properties but differ in the kind of consciousness they enjoy. Cases of this kind license at *most* the conclusion that our functional-physical explanations of phenomenal consciousness do not deliver the kind of knowledge of the nature of phenomenal properties we are seeking. Functional-physical explanations of phenomenal consciousness leave open possibilities that a satisfying reductive explanation ought to rule out. It is one thing to agree that our existing explanatory strategies fail to do what they set out do, and quite another to conclude from this failure that phenomenal properties are *sui*

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<sup>3</sup> This is the conclusion reached by Levine (2001, ch.3, see in particular pp.86-92). It is also the conclusion that Chalmers (1996, ch.4) and Jackson (1982 & 1986) defend. I will discuss the arguments of these philosophers later in sections 4 & 5.

*generis*. Conceivability arguments of the kind outlined above do not support the latter conclusion.

Chalmers (1996) has tried to persuade us otherwise. He uses a version of two-dimensional semantics to argue from the conceivability of zombie worlds to the metaphysical conclusion that phenomenal properties are distinct from functional/physical properties.<sup>4</sup> I will briefly explain why I take Chalmers' argument to fail before presenting my own account of the explanatory gap.

## 2. Chalmers on Conceivability and Possibility

Two-dimensional semantics as it is understood by Chalmers tells us that every term has two kinds of meaning. The first kind of meaning Chalmers calls a term's "primary intension". It can be understood as a function which determines a term's extension or fixes a term's reference at a world considered as the actual world. The second kind of meaning Chalmers calls a term's "secondary intension". It picks out a term's reference at worlds considered as counterfactual.

Chalmers goes on to argue that when we say a statement *s* is possible, the truth of what we have said is a function of *s*'s primary and secondary intension. Given a description of a world *w*, knowledge of a statement *s*'s primary intension will tell us whether *s* is true at *w*, when *w* is considered as the actual world. In a similar fashion, knowledge of a statement's secondary intension will tell us whether *s* is true at a world when *w* is taken to be a counterfactual world. Chalmers wants to deny that there are any conceivable worlds which are impossible. Where we find a description of a

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<sup>4</sup> The idea behind two-dimensional semantics is implicit in Kripke (1980), and is developed by Stalnaker (1978); Davies & Humberstone (1980) and Chalmers (1996) among others.



world which we think is conceivable but which is in fact impossible, we are merely mistaken about the conceivability of the world, perhaps because we have misdescribed the world or perhaps because we haven't conceived of any world whatsoever. For Chalmers then, whenever we can truly conceive of a world at which a statement is true, the statement in question describes a situation that is a genuine metaphysical possibility, a situation that could have obtained.

If Chalmers could establish something to the effect that every situation of which we can truly conceive is a metaphysically possible situation, he will have shown that zombie worlds are metaphysically possible. We have seen above that we seem to be able to conceive of a world where the functional and physical facts are just like our own world but where subjects enjoy nothing in the way of conscious experiences. If when we conceive of zombie worlds we are *truly* conceiving of such worlds, we can conclude that zombie worlds are possible. We can conclude that fixing the functional and physical facts at a world doesn't suffice to fix the phenomenal facts at this world.

The obvious response to Chalmers is to ask how we *know* that when we entertain the possibility of zombie worlds we are not mistaken in thinking that we have truly conceived of a world. Chalmers is likely to reply that knowing a statement's primary intension enables us to know *a priori* whether a statement is true at a world. What we do is take a set of descriptions of a world and consider whether the statement in question would be true if these descriptions were descriptions of the actual world. In the case of zombie-worlds, we suppose that we have a complete functional and physical description of a world. Then we consider whether such a world could be a world where it is true that subjects do not enjoy anything in the way of conscious experiences. Each of us knows what it means to say a subject

enjoys conscious experiences. So we can use our knowledge of what statements of this kind mean to determine whether there could be a world physically and functionally just like our own where subjects are not phenomenally conscious.

The move Chalmers makes from conceivability to possibility depends on whether one is willing to concede that knowing a statement *s*'s meaning and knowing a set of descriptions of a world *w* will enable one to know *a priori* whether *s* is true at *w*. One might agree that a statement's primary intension determines for any given world considered as actual, whether the statement is true at the world. One might nevertheless deny that a sentence's primary intension is something to which one has epistemic access. To continue with the example of the term "water" it might be denied that when one uses the term "water" to successfully refer to water one must know that "water" refers to the watery stuff. One might have no such knowledge but still use the term competently. A speaker might exhibit competence with the term just by using it to successfully refer to water. On this view of primary intensions a speaker needn't have epistemic access to a term's primary intension in order to know a term's meaning. In particular s/he needn't be able to say what a term *T* would be used to refer to in hypothetical situations considered as actual.<sup>5</sup>

Let us apply this worry to the case of zombie-worlds. We have just seen how one can be a competent user of a term without knowing the primary intension for a term. Suppose this is right. Then it will follow that one cannot know that one has truly conceived of a zombie world just by understanding the descriptions of such a world and understanding the meaning of a

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<sup>5</sup> Levine (2001, ch.2) describes a theory of primary intensions along these lines. He refers us to Dretske (1981) and Fodor (1990) for an account of the external reference determining relation.

sentence attributing phenomenally conscious experiences to a subject. One can understand sentences attributing phenomenally conscious experiences by knowing what we are referring to when we talk about phenomenally conscious mental states. Having this kind of understanding will not tell one whether one is entertaining a genuinely conceivable situation when one conceives of a zombie world. Yet it is only if one knows that one has truly conceived of a zombie world that one can say that zombie-worlds are possible. Since one cannot know that one has truly conceived of a zombie-world when one entertains statements which describe zombie-worlds, one cannot know that zombie-worlds are genuinely possible.

Chalmers' move from conceivability to possibility has been shown to be dependent on a particular take on the question of what it is know the meaning of a statement. Reject this account of meaning and Chalmers is deprived of his conclusion that zombie-worlds are genuinely possible. I shall take conceivability arguments of the kind Chalmers employs to license the epistemic conclusion that functional and physical explanations do not give us the right kind of understanding of the nature of consciousness. If they did, we would not be able to conceive of the kinds of possibilities which we in fact do seem to be able to conceive of. This account of what we are doing when we entertain the possibility of zombie-worlds leaves it open that we might only *seem* to be conceiving of such worlds, in which case we will have to say that zombie-worlds are not possible after all. The question of whether or not we mistakenly think we are conceiving of a world when we entertain a possibility is one that we cannot answer a priori. The answer to this question will only emerge through a posteriori investigation.

In the next section I will offer a different explanation for the gap's existence which doesn't attempt to derive a metaphysical conclusion from

considerations of what we find conceivable. My diagnosis of the gap will draw on the phenomenologist's critique of naturalism as it was presented in the previous chapters. Phenomenologists claim that the mode of understanding the scientist operates with will fail to incorporate our ordinary, pre-theoretical modes of engaging with the world. I will begin by connecting this claim with Jackson's much discussed knowledge argument which purports to show there are some facts which we cannot learn from science. I will argue that Jackson's argument fails to establish any metaphysical conclusion to this effect. Where Jackson's argument fails, the argument of the phenomenologists succeeds. Phenomenologists argue for the same conclusion as Jackson, but their argument has a potential metaphysical bite which is missing from the Jackson knowledge argument, or at least so I shall argue across the next two sections.

### 3. The Knowledge Argument and Subjective Facts

Jackson's knowledge argument invites us to imagine Mary, a colour scientist confined to a black and white room for the duration of her life.<sup>6</sup> The only coloured objects Mary has ever seen are things coloured black and white. Mary has made use of her time to learn all the facts there are to know concerning the visual apparatus, colour vision and the neurobiology that supports our colour experiences. Jackson also supposes that Mary has acquired complete knowledge of the physical facts. Despite being in possession of all this knowledge still, so the Jackson intuition goes, there is something she doesn't know. She doesn't know what coloured things look like to those who have experienced them. We can see this by reflecting on what would take place in Mary if she were to escape the black-and-white

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<sup>6</sup> See Jackson (1982 & 1986/1997).

room. Surely Mary would learn something new when she encountered colours other than black and white for the first time. She would learn something she didn't know before even though she knew all the microphysical facts there are to know. Before her escape she knew a lot that was not common knowledge: she knew all one could know about colour vision and its neurobiological realisers. However it seems to be equally true that many of us knew facts she didn't. What she didn't know was what coloured things look like to those of us who have experienced them.<sup>7</sup> She couldn't gain this knowledge until she experienced colours for herself.

Jackson used to also hold that the knowledge argument established the falsity of physicalism.<sup>8</sup> Numerous philosophers have since pointed out that no such conclusion is warranted.<sup>9</sup> All the knowledge argument really establishes is that there are some facts that we cannot *know* just by knowing those facts that can be given a microphysical *description*. It doesn't follow that those facts which cannot be given a microphysical description are not microphysical facts. Perhaps there are some microphysical facts that we cannot learn about by reading books. It wouldn't follow that those facts are not microphysical facts.<sup>10</sup>

The conclusion I want to take from the knowledge argument is that some facts are subjective facts.<sup>11</sup> I will call facts which can only be represented from a particular subject's point of view "subjective facts". By a "fact" I mean the object of propositional knowledge.<sup>12</sup> The claim that some facts are

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<sup>7</sup> See Jackson 1986/1997: §1 for this characterisation of Mary's ignorance.

<sup>8</sup> He no longer holds this view, see Jackson (1995).

<sup>9</sup> For a useful overview of the literature the knowledge argument has spawned, see Van Gulick (1993)

<sup>10</sup> This is the conclusion that Lewis (1990) argues for. I shall discuss Lewis' response to the knowledge argument at the end of this chapter.

<sup>11</sup> Mellor (1992-3 and (1988 essays 1 & 2) disagrees as does Moore (1997, ch.3). I shall discuss Mellor and Moore's arguments in some detail later in chapter 6.

<sup>12</sup> An issue remains about how to individuate facts. Should we individuate facts finely and claim that corresponding to every representation that counts as knowledge there is a distinct

subjective facts is the claim that there are some facts which can only be represented from a particular subject's point of view.

Being sighted for example enables one to represent certain facts, permanently closed-off to those without sight. There are certain facts that a sighted person can represent from that a blind person cannot. Almost certainly the converse also holds. The facts in question are ones that no amount of *knowledge* of microphysical facts could impart. They are facts that can only be known from the point of view of creatures that have, or have had, certain experiences.<sup>13</sup> While Mary remains locked up in the black and white room she is in the same position as a person suffering from an extreme variety of colour blindness who can experience only shades of black and white. There are facts her situation prevents her from representing just as a person suffering from this extreme form of colour-blindness would be prevented by his condition from representing certain facts – facts about what a range of colours look like. Moreover knowledge of these facts cannot be imparted through a complete physical description of reality, but only by having experiences of the relevant kind for oneself.

Thus construed the knowledge argument is in agreement with a point we saw the existential phenomenologist insist upon in the last chapter. According to the existential phenomenologist the theoretical understanding of the scientist is just one of many modes of understanding available to human beings. The existential phenomenologist claims that there are all

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fact? Should we individuate facts coarsely at the level of reference and claim that we can refer to one and the same fact in different ways? Some philosophers have tried to argue against subjective facts by taking the latter option (e.g Loar (1997); Perry (2001)). These philosophers argue that there are indeed some facts that can only be represented from a point of view but these facts are not distinct facts from those that we learn about from science. I shall return to their arguments later in the chapter.

<sup>13</sup> Note, this is a claim only about the epistemic access we have to certain facts. It doesn't follow that the facts in question are not microphysical facts. At most it follows that they are not the kinds of facts that can be given a microphysical description.



kinds of facts in addition to those that science describes. More specifically there are facts which can only be represented from the point of view of a subject who understands the world operatively through his dealings with it.

The phenomenologist goes on to argue that naturalists give a false priority to our scientific mode of understanding. The scientist purports to give us access to a reality as it is independent of our non-scientific concerns and interests. The result is that she ignores all the ways in which the reality we experience depends on us and our subjective and personal concerns and interests. To the extent that naturalists take their conception of reality from science, the phenomenologist thinks a naturalistic conception of reality will also leave out a significant class of facts. The naturalist will fail to account for the relation we take up to entities when we understand them in terms of our non-scientific interests and concerns.

The knowledge argument and the argument I have just sketched from phenomenology both claim that there is something important missing from scientific explanations of consciousness. What is missing from these explanations is any account of subjective facts. Arguments for an explanatory gap normally proceed by attempting to demonstrate that functional and physical explanations of mind fail to explain why things seem and the feel the way they do to us. When a subject knows what it is like to undergo an experience he knows something that can only be represented from his own point of view. According to the phenomenologist the difficulty naturalism encounters in explaining phenomenal properties is an instance of a wider problem endemic to naturalism. We might say that facts about what it is like to undergo an experience are a species of fact belonging to the genus of subjective facts. According to the phenomenologist, it is *qua* subjective fact that the facts about what it is like to undergo a conscious

experience cause a problem for naturalism. It is facts that can only be represented from a subject's point of view which it is claimed a naturalist must leave out from their conception of reality.

Now it might reasonably be objected that an argument for an explanatory gap along these lines illegitimately slides from a claim about there being different ways of representing facts, different modes of understanding, to claiming that there are different facts which are represented or accessed. The knowledge argument may give us grounds for believing that there is knowledge that can be achieved only by undergoing experiences for oneself. What it doesn't establish is the existence of some properties or entities over and above those we learn of from science.<sup>14</sup> It doesn't establish that the facts which can only be known by undergoing certain experiences have as their constituents, elements we do not learn about from science. This conclusion would only follow if we assume that corresponding to every distinct way we have of gaining knowledge of the facts there are distinct properties and entities that are known. But making a distinction between ways of accessing the facts and the properties and entities we thereby gain access to, precludes us from having to grant such an assumption.<sup>15</sup>

The phenomenologist does indeed infer the existence of distinct facts from a difference in ways of accessing facts, a difference in what I have been calling "modes of understanding". For according to the existential phenomenologist being and our understanding of being stand in a relation of reciprocal dependence: different ways of understanding one and the same entity entail correspondingly different ways of being for an entity, and

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<sup>14</sup> Crane (2001) agrees; he tells us that the fact there is knowledge "only available from certain perspectives does not entail that there are some further non-physical/non-objective objects and properties involved in these situations" (*ibid*, 80).

<sup>15</sup> Here I am rehearsing a point insisted on variously by Peacocke (1989); Moore (1997: ch.3); Mellor (1992) and Perry (2001, ch.5). Perry calls the assumption I have just described "the subject-matter assumption".

differences in an entity's being entail differences in our understanding of that entity.

According to the existential phenomenologist, it is the naturalist who is making a mistake when she fails to recognise that the objects of our experience have distinct ways of being. What we don't gain access to through our scientific understanding, he claims, is all of the ways in which an entity's being is dependent on our non-scientific modes of understanding. Our scientific modes of understanding give us access to a reality understood according to our scientific theories but what we cannot learn about from science is a reality as it is ordinarily experienced by us before we undertake any scientific explanation. In the next section I will use the latter point to offer an account of the explanatory gap.

#### 4. Locating the Explanatory Gap

The existential phenomenologist claims that subjective facts are extra facts over and above those that science gives us knowledge of. They claim that there are facts which our scientific theories must leave out. The existential phenomenologist's reasoning can be reconstructed along the following lines:

- (1) Science gives us an objective understanding of the world, an understanding of the world that is independent of any particular subject's point of view.
  - (2) There are facts the representation of which essentially involves us and our peculiarly human and subjective concerns and interests. I have called this class of facts "subjective facts".
  - (3) The class of scientific facts – the facts we can learn from science – doesn't include the class of subjective facts.
- (CON) Science doesn't give us knowledge of subjective facts

Since naturalism takes science to be the measure of what there is, it will follow from this argument that naturalism can make no room for subjective facts. Phenomenology tells us that there are subjective facts. It follows that there is a gap in the naturalist's account of the mind; what is missing from a naturalistic account of mind is any account of how there can be facts that essentially involve subjects of experience.

In the remainder of this section I will return to existential phenomenology in order to explain how they are committed to premises (2) and (3). My objective will be to argue that it is subjective facts as the existential phenomenologists describe them which are responsible for the existence of the explanatory gap. It will follow that one way to close the gap would be to use the descriptions of subjective facts existential phenomenology supplies as the basis for constructing a scientific account of consciousness. To show that this is possible would be tantamount to falsifying premises (1) and (3). Premise (1) would be shown to be false since room would have been made within science for facts the obtaining of which depend on subjects of experience. Such a conclusion would also falsify premise (3) by showing that the class of scientific facts can after all include the class of subjective facts.

A good deal of work will need to be done before we can achieve either of these results. First I must show how the explanatory gap is located at a place where existential phenomenology attacks naturalism. Otherwise the objection which I sketched at the end of the last section will stand undefeated, and it will not have been shown that there is a *metaphysical* gap in the naturalist's theory of mind. This objection agreed that there are facts that can only be known by taking up a particular point of view, but denied that

these are additional facts over and above those that we learn about from science.

The existential phenomenologist's commitment to subjective facts follows from the claim that when we are acting skillfully we simply experience what needs to be done without giving the matter any deliberation. We experience things we are dealing with as having a significance which points, or directs us towards certain ways of acting, in much the same way as we experience a prescriptive utterance as bearing a meaning that calls for a certain course of action from us. We don't experience the significance that attaches to the objects of our dealings as something we have projected or superimposed onto these objects. Rather things are experienced by us as already having meaning or significance.

The existential phenomenologist will claim that the possibilities for action that a thing affords us make a contribution towards defining that thing's identity, making it the entity that it is. In describing what a hammer is, for instance, we cannot simply mention the materials from which it is made. We also need to mention how hammers are normally used. To say how hammers are normally used will require us to make mention of the purposes for which hammers are employed and the roles of the persons that use hammers such as carpenters and craftpersons.

Suppose we grant that the possibilities for action that an entity affords partially define an entity's identity, contributing towards making an entity what it is. It will follow that what it is for an entity to exist is for it to find a place in the kind of existence we have as persons. The things we experience which serve a function for us will on this account have an identity bound up with us, and the kinds of lives we lead. If we wanted to explain to a visitor from Alpha Centauri what an entity was, we would have to impart to this visitor

knowledge of the place the entity has in our lives. We would have to explain the function the entity serves for us, and this would ultimately require us to make mention of some of the ways in which we human beings live. This is something the alien could come to grasp only by coming to understand how we live and the practices in which we engage.

So the existential phenomenologist is committed to the existence of subjective facts by taking the entities we experience to have an identity defined by the possibilities for action they afford us. To make sense of these possibilities for action we must make reference to persons and their projects, desires and aspirations. We must understand the purposes for which a person acts; something that cannot be understood except by making mention of our particular concerns and interests. There are subjective facts then because the objects of our experience have as part of their very identity a meaning or significance which derives from our concerns and interests. One can know what it is we experience only by coming to share an understanding of our purposes, desires and aspirations. It is only by coming to understand our practices and how we live our lives that one will understand what it is we experience.

I have characterised the claim that there is an explanatory gap as the claim that a scientific account of the mind will not supply us with knowledge of subjective facts. I said that there is something we will not learn about from a complete scientific account of mind. An objection was raised that an explanatory gap will only exist if there is some entity or property that our scientific account of the mind is failing to explain. We are in a position now to see that according to the existential phenomenologist there are indeed objects and properties that will be missing from a conception of reality formed from science. These are the objects we ordinarily experience whose



identity is bound up with our existence as persons. Such objects must be missing from a naturalistic account of reality because science gives us an account of reality as it is independent of us and our particular concerns and interests. What our scientific theories seem not explain is a reality as it is ordinarily experienced by us. Reality as it is ordinarily experienced is, as we have just seen, dependent on us and the purposes for which we act.

The explanatory gap has traditionally been presented as arising because naturalism fails to explain why our experiences feel and seem to us the way they do. It might seem that the problem I have just raised has little or nothing to do with the problem of the explanatory gap. Such a conclusion would be a mistake. Phenomenal properties are introduced as properties which make an experience seem or feel a certain way to its subject. As such they are properties the instantiation of which are dependent on subjects of experience. It is their dependence on us and our peculiar ways of responding to the world which makes it so difficult to see how room could be found for such properties in a scientific account of reality. It is difficult to see how these properties could be integrated into a scientific account of reality because we think of such an account of reality as describing a world that is there anyway independent of us and our ways of experiencing it. Yet phenomenal properties were introduced to characterise the ways in which we experience reality. Descriptions of how reality is independent of our experiences look destined to leave out that which we want explained.

There is however something right about this objection that the existential phenomenologist is no longer talking about the same problem. For the existential phenomenologist doesn't introduce anything akin to phenomenal properties to explain why our experiences feel and seem the way they do. According to the existential phenomenologist our experiences seem and feel

the way they do because of our self-understanding. The objects of our experiences have an identity, they claim, that can only be understood by making reference to the projects, desires and aspirations in terms of which we make sense of our actions. Our affective responses to the world are likewise dependent on our self-understanding in the sense that a difference in the sense a person makes of his feelings can suffice to bring about a different feeling in a person.<sup>16</sup>

There is an explanatory gap then, not so much because a naturalistic theory of the mind fails to find room for phenomenal properties but instead because naturalistic accounts of the mind have so far failed to admit subjective facts. The existential phenomenologist describes facts that essentially involve subjects of experience. Phenomenal properties also essentially involve subjects of experience. These properties are introduced to explain what it is like for a *subject* to be in a sensory or affective state. It is the subject-involving nature of these properties which I take to account for the gap's existence.

I shall argue that the existential phenomenologist is right to characterise the objects we ordinarily experience as dependent on us and our modes of understanding. Chapters 4 & 5 will develop further the thesis that there are subjective facts, and that it is these that the naturalist must make room for if she is to close the explanatory gap. I will finish up the chapter by

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<sup>16</sup> For further discussion of this point see chapter 2, pp. 11-13 and Taylor (1985, essays 2 & 4). Perhaps it will be objected that pains, itches and tickles and the like aren't dependent in this way on our understanding. Yet there is of course something it is like for a subject to experience a pain, an itch or tickle. Phenomenal properties are introduced to capture the properties in virtue of which an experience is like something for a subject. It is these properties which we don't seem to learn the nature of from functional-physical explanations. In chapter 4 I will argue that we don't need to introduce phenomenal properties to explain what it is like to undergo experiences of this kind. We can explain the sensory qualities of these experiences in terms of representational properties. Still I think there is an explanatory gap. There is an explanatory gap, I am arguing, because naturalists have traditionally not acknowledged the existence of subjective facts.

considering two deflationary responses to arguments which purport to establish the existence of an explanatory gap. I have been supposing that the knowledge argument establishes the existence of subjective facts but this is just what these two responses deny. I shall argue that far from showing that subjective facts do not exist, both responses presuppose the existence of such facts.

### 5. Deflating the Knowledge Argument

The previous section argued that there is an explanatory gap because functional-physical explanations of consciousness do not admit the existence of subjective facts. Most philosophers of mind deny the existence of subjective facts. Consider for instance the ability hypothesis. In response to the knowledge argument proponents of the ability hypothesis claim that there are no new facts that Mary learns when she leaves the black and white room. What she learns are certain abilities. She can, for instance, now recognise, remember and imagine experiences of colour. However, these abilities do not bring with them knowledge of any new facts. To think otherwise, so it is argued, is to confuse propositional and practical knowledge or knowledge-how and knowledge-that.<sup>17</sup> If there are no new facts that Mary learns we cannot say that there are some facts that can only be represented through having certain experiences or by coming to share a certain self-understanding. We cannot say that there are facts that essentially involve subjects of experience.

There is no doubt that Mary does acquire these abilities, but I shall argue these abilities largely consist in knowledge of subjective facts.<sup>18</sup> Mary does

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<sup>17</sup> This response to the knowledge argument has been defended by Lewis (1990), Nemirow (1990) and Mellor (1992-3).

<sup>18</sup> Loar (1997); Papineau (2003, ch.2) and Crane (2001) all agree, though the arguments they each offer for this conclusion differ from my own.

acquire the ability to recognise things of a certain colour, an ability she previously lacked while in the black and white room. But this is an ability she can acquire only because she now knows what red things look like. In order to know what red things look like, Mary must represent red things from her own point of view. The ability to recognise things that look red is an ability Mary can acquire only if she represents a fact which can only be represented from her point of view, as happens when she has an experience of a red thing herself. It follows that Mary can recognise red things only by having knowledge of a subjective fact.

I will run an argument along the same lines for the other abilities attributed to Mary. I accept that when Mary sees a thing that is coloured red for the first time she acquires the ability to remember seeing red things. Once again I insist she can acquire this ability only because she knows what red things look like. What she can remember (more or less indistinctly) is what it was like for her when she saw a red thing. She comes to know what it is like to experience a red thing only by seeing a red thing for herself. Thus once again we find that the ability to remember seeing coloured things rests on her having represented a fact from her own point of view. We have described an ability which depends on her knowledge of a subjective fact.

I will also willingly concede that once Mary has had a reddish experience she might be in a position to imagine red things in their absence. Again I will insist this is an ability she has because she has represented a fact that can only be represented from a point of view she shares with subjects like her in certain relevant respects. Each of the cognitive capacities to which the ability hypothesis appeals, requires Mary to have acquired knowledge of a subjective fact. Far from establishing that we do not need to believe in the existence of subjective facts, the ability hypothesis provides us with a further

reason to insist on the existence of these kinds of facts. It shows us that what we need to explain is the existence of facts that can only be represented from a point of view. For each of the abilities to which it appeals rests on our subject representing a fact that can only be represented from his or her point of view.

The ability hypothesis might deprive the knowledge argument of the conclusion that phenomenal properties are metaphysically basic. It might show that we can explain those properties that make an experience like something for a subject in terms of cognitive capacities.<sup>19</sup> However it achieves this success at the cost of buying the existence of subjective facts. If the phenomenologist is right, it is subjective facts that are metaphysically and explanatorily basic. Thus, the ability hypothesis succeeds in closing one ontological gap only to open up another.

The second response to the knowledge argument I want to briefly consider again tries to argue that Mary doesn't learn any new non-physical facts. It says that she simply learns to think about the same microphysical facts in a new way. Proponents of this response argue that there are two kinds of concepts which we might call "material concepts" and "phenomenal concepts".<sup>20</sup> Material concepts are concepts we employ in thinking and making statements about entities and properties in the natural world. Phenomenal concepts are concepts we employ in thinking about our experiences and their qualities. The latter are not concepts we employ in thinking about entities and properties in the natural world but concepts we employ when we think about what it is like to have an experience.

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<sup>19</sup> See Loar (1997: 607-8) and Tye (2000: ch.1) for an argument that the ability hypothesis fails to achieve even this moderate success.

<sup>20</sup> This is Papineau's distinction, see his (2003, ch.2).

When Mary is locked up in the room she can think about colour by employing her material concepts, the concepts she has acquired through her extensive learning. When she leaves the room and has an experience of redness for the first time she acquires a new concept, a concept she can use to think about what it is like to see something red. She can employ this concept in introspection when she is having an experience of something red. She can think to herself “Ah, so this is what it is like to see something red”. She can also employ this concept in imagination, as when she brings to mind the image of something red in its absence. In both cases we are describing a change that takes place in Mary’s understanding. She acquires what Papineau describes as a ‘grasp of the redness of red experiences’ (Papineau, 2003: 53)

Mary, it is claimed, doesn’t learn any new facts. All she acquires is the concepts needed to think about the facts she already knew<sup>21</sup> but in a new way. When we employ a phenomenal concept to think about some experience, this concept picks out its referent directly. Thus the facts our phenomenal concepts pick out are the very same facts as our material concepts pick out. There is no need to introduce any new facts.

Let us concede the last point, and agree that the facts our phenomenal concepts pick out might be the very same facts as those our material concepts pick out. Does it follow that the knowledge argument gives us no reason for believing in the existence of subjective facts? I don’t think so.

In chapter 2 it was argued that whenever we represent an entity we are drawing on a background or operative understanding which enables us to understand this entity as the entity it is. This claim formed a central part of

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<sup>21</sup> See Loar (1997: §1) for a defence of this claim, and Levine (2001: 84-6) for an argument that the mode of presentation for phenomenal concepts may be thicker than Loar had reckoned.



the case that was made for what I am calling subjective facts. If every representation derives its intelligibility from our background understanding, this will be equally true of the representations we produce of our own minds. We don't avoid an appeal to subjective facts by arguing that what Mary acquires is a different way of conceiving of facts she already knew. For we still need to account for the new way of conceiving of facts she acquires. Admittedly it is not clear how our phenomenal concepts could derive their intelligibility from our being-in-the-world. I leave this as a problem to be resolved another. The point for now is simply that we do not avoid an appeal to subjective facts by appealing to differences in representational abilities. It has been argued that any representational ability derives its intentionality from our ways of existing. Hence whenever we posit a representational ability we are also admitting into our ontology a realm of irreducibly subjective facts.

There is another difficulty for theories which try to dissolve the explanatory gap by appeal to phenomenal concepts. Proponents of these theories argue that phenomenal concepts are recognitional concepts.<sup>22</sup> The recognitional concepts in question are not triggered by any amount of knowledge of microphysical facts. They are triggered only by an occurrence of an experience with the phenomenal quality one is recognising. Phenomenal concepts have as their extension subjective facts. Maybe the very same facts are picked out by our material concepts. The problem the explanatory gap raises is just how this can be true.

Our material concepts do not make intelligible to us how the facts our material concepts describe can also be subjective facts. Any explanation of what Mary learns which tries to explain away her knowledge by appeal to

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<sup>22</sup> See for instance Loar (1997, §2) and Papineau (2003, ch.4).

phenomenal concepts will leave us just as much in the dark about subjective facts as when we started. An account of phenomenal concepts will tell us about how we think about our experiences in introspection and in imagination. It won't explain what it is to have experiences or what it is about an experience that makes it like something to have for a subject. It is the latter questions which we want an account of subjective facts to explain.

I conclude that two of the most influential responses to the knowledge argument fail to establish that subjective facts do not exist. An explanatory gap exists because physical-functional explanations of the conscious mind do not explain subjective facts. Phenomenologists say that naturalists cannot explain subjective facts. If the gap is to be closed it will only be by showing that phenomenologists are mistaken. The gap will be closed by showing that naturalists do have the ontological resources to account for subjective facts. The next two chapters will examine in more detail what phenomenologists have to say about the nature of subjective facts.

## Chapter 4

### Introduction

The last chapter argued that naturalistic theories of mind face an explanatory gap with respect to our conscious experiences. Typically it has been supposed that phenomenal properties are responsible for the gap's existence. I have argued that phenomenal properties pose a problem for naturalism only because these properties have a nature that essentially involves subjects and their points of view. I called facts that can only be represented from a subject's point of view "subjective facts". It is subjective facts that I have argued seem to get left out from a naturalistic theory of mind.

Phenomenologists argue that subjective facts have an explanatory and metaphysical priority over the facts science describes. They would say that it is subjective facts naturalists must account for if they are to close the gap. Yet phenomenologists also argue that naturalism lacks the explanatory resources to discharge this obligation. It would seem to follow that the explanatory gap is an insuperable problem for naturalism.

Naturalists could respond to this attack in one of two ways. They could reject the claim that to close the explanatory gap they must account for subjective facts or they could rise to the challenge by showing that they can account for subjective facts. I will be pursuing the latter option. First I must offer further support for the claim that to close the gap naturalists must make room for subjective facts.

Section 1 takes up the task of further clarifying the nature of phenomenal properties. There are two questions an account of phenomenal properties must answer. The first asks whether phenomenal properties are essentially subjective, while the second asks whether phenomenal properties are

representational properties. The phenomenologist returns positive answers to both these questions. If they are right, it will follow that some representational properties are essentially subjective.

I will contrast the phenomenologist's position with two other possible accounts of phenomenal properties. The first takes phenomenal properties to be essentially subjective and non-representational. I will label this position, *qualia-realism*. The second position takes phenomenal properties to be representational but denies that they are essentially subjective. I will call this position *intentionalism*.

The phenomenologist claims that there is a kind of perceptual intentionality constitutively determined by an experience's phenomenology. In section 2 I contrast this phenomenological species of intentionality with a number of naturalistic conceptions of intentionality.

If a case can be made for the claim that there is a species of phenomenological intentionality it will follow that the contents of experience are essentially subjective. Sections 3-5 draw on Husserl and the existential phenomenologists respectively to develop such an account of intentionality in more detail. I take the kind of perceptual intentionality set out in these two sections to be just what the naturalist must make room for if s/he is to close the explanatory gap. Section 6 finishes up by returning to intentionalism.

### 1. Phenomenal Properties and Representational Properties

Our perceptual experiences have two faces, one which is directed outwards towards the world and the other which they present to their subjects.<sup>1</sup>

Perceptual experiences represent things in the world but at the same time as

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<sup>1</sup> Here I am echoing McGinn when he tells us that: "perceptual experiences are Janus-faced: they point outward to the external world but they also present a subjective face to their subject: they are of something other than the subject and they are like something for the subject. (McGinn, 1991/1997: 298)

doing so there is something that the occurrence of a perceptual experience is like for its subjects. I will call the properties of perceptual experiences in virtue of which they represent things in a subject's environment "representational properties". Those properties in virtue of which an experience is like something for its subject I will follow tradition in calling "phenomenal properties". The remainder of this section will sketch three different positions one can take on the relation between phenomenal and representational properties.

In line with the previous chapter I shall take phenomenal properties to be those properties in virtue of which perceptual experiences seem a certain way to a subject, and experiences of pleasure, pain and other affective states feel a certain way to a subject. Representational properties are those properties in virtue of which an experience is assessable for truth or falsity. Our experiences represent the world to be a certain way. My experience as of a shiny green apple represents the world to be a certain way – it represents some part of my local environment as containing a shiny green apple. It is in virtue of its representational properties that my experience represents the world to be this way.<sup>2</sup>

Many philosophers have claimed that the way an experience seems or feels to a subject cannot be exhausted by its representational properties.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Often the ways in which an experience represents the world to be will far outstrip the concepts a subject has mastered. When this happens the subject will be representing the world to be a certain way even though she cannot describe what it is her experience is representing. In order to accommodate this kind of possibility philosophers often make a distinction between two kinds of representational property which I will label conceptual and nonconceptual. The terminology of conceptual and nonconceptual properties derives from Cussins (1990/2000). He characterises a property *p* as conceptual when *p* is described by a theory by means of some concepts and this theory tells us to attribute *p* to a creature only if the creature possesses mastery of these concepts. A property *p* is nonconceptual if it characterised by a theory by means of some concepts which the creature need not possess mastery of in order for us to attribute *p* to this creature.

<sup>3</sup> This question has been raised with some force by Block in various places, most recently in his (2003). Kim (1996: 13); McGinn (1982: 8); Searle (1983: 1) have also voiced concerns

One way to argue for this conclusion is by constructing cases in which two experiences share the same representational properties but differ in their respective phenomenal properties. Another would be to look for cases in which two experiences share the same phenomenal properties but differ in their representational properties.

Block's (1990/1997) Inverted Earth is an ingenious version of the latter scenario. A subject is described as undergoing two experiences, one in earth and the other on inverted earth. The two experiences the subject undergoes share the same phenomenal properties but differ in their representational properties depending on whether the experience is happening on earth or on inverted earth. Block does not deny that there is something representational about phenomenal properties, but he does deny that this exhausts their nature. He thinks that in addition to their representational properties, experiences have intrinsic, introspectively accessible properties. Phenomenal properties he tells us are "experiential properties" distinct from any "cognitive, intentional or functional property".<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere he calls phenomenal properties "mental paint".<sup>5</sup>

When looking at a painting we can attend to what the painting depicts or we can attend to the paint on the canvas in virtue of which the painting depicts what it does. Block claims we can do something similar with respect to our experiences. We can attend to what our experiences represent but we can also turn our attention to what he calls an experience's mental paint. Our experiences have intrinsic properties just as the surface of the painting does. It is these intrinsic properties of experience that Block calls "mental

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about the limits of a representational account of phenomenal properties. Boghossian and Velleman (1989) describe a number of difficult cases for representational theories. Peacocke (1983, ch.1) provides what is perhaps the classic discussion of counterexamples to a pure representational account of phenomenal properties.

<sup>4</sup> Block (1995/1997:380-1).

<sup>5</sup> See Block (1996) & (2003).



paint". Henceforth I shall refer to any philosopher that takes phenomenal properties to be either wholly or partially non-representational as a "qualia-realist". By "qualia" I shall mean the intrinsic, introspectively accessible, non intentional properties of experience.

Intentionalists deny that our experiences have qualia by denying that our experiences have any non-intentional properties. Intentionalism comes in varying degrees of strength. Strong intentionalists claim that the phenomenal character of our experience is exhausted by the way in which the world seems to us. Weak intentionalism denies this without reintroducing qualia. Strong intentionalists argue that phenomenal properties are wholly determined by an experience's representational properties.<sup>6</sup> An experience's phenomenal character is on this view entirely fixed by the ways in which an experience represents the subject's external environment. Weak intentionalists hold that the way the world appears to us is partially dependent on our sensory constitution. We don't get a full account of phenomenal properties by making reference to the features of a subject's external environment that an experience represents. Weak intentionalists argue that we must also make reference to how those features affect our senses.<sup>7</sup>

I am not going to attempt to decide between these two versions of intentionalism, though it does seem to me that the weaker version of intentionalism is the more plausible of the two. Nor am I going to allow myself to get embroiled in the debate between the qualia-realist and the intentionalist. I will however say this much on the question of the existence of qualia.

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<sup>6</sup> Byrne (2001); Dretske (1995) and Tye (1995 & 2000) amongst others have defended strong intentionalism.

<sup>7</sup> Shoemaker has defended a version of weak intentionalism. See for instance his (1994 and 1996, essay 5).

It seems to be possible for an experience to differ in phenomenal character without this difference being explicable in terms of an experience's representational content. Consider the following example from Peacocke: suppose I am looking at a wall which is uniformly painted white and this is all that my experience represents. My experience has a content which represents the white wall I am looking at. Still some parts of the wall can appear to be darker than others, because of the way in which the wall is illuminated. So on the one hand my experience represents a wall that is uniformly white. On the other hand some parts of this wall look to be darker to me than others. This difference doesn't have anything to do with the object my experience represents. As I move my eye from the well-illuminated part of the wall to the less well-illuminated parts, it is the same wall that I am representing. Moreover the experiences I undergo of these different parts of the wall all represent the wall to be the same colour, uniformly white. I don't represent the less-illuminated parts to be off-white and the well illuminated parts to be pure white. This difference in my experience seems to instead be a matter of the way in which this object is being represented by me. The shadowy appearance which belongs to my experience of some parts of the wall but not of others modifies my experience of the wall.

Does a case like this one call for us to introduce qualia? I don't think so; the difference in my experience as I move my eyes to different parts of the wall is a representational difference. It is a difference in the way in which the wall's whiteness is represented by me. However it is not a difference which can be explained in terms of the objects and properties I am representing. We don't after all want to say I am representing the wall to have a different colour when I look at the part of the wall which is less well illuminated.

I suggest then that we need to introduce two kinds of representational properties if we are to adequately capture an experience's phenomenal character in representational terms. The first kind of representational properties we may take to determine an experience's representational content. These properties may well be fully determined by whatever objects and properties a subject is representing in her external environment. However in addition to this first class of representational properties we need to introduce a second kind of representational property. This second class of representational properties determines the way in which an experience represents an object.

The way in which an experience represents an object will often be determined by the context in which a perceptual experience occurs.<sup>8</sup> In the example I have just been discussing it is because of the way in which the wall is illuminated that it looks to me to be darker in some regions than others. This difference in illumination conditions can make a difference to the way in which the wall is represented by me. What this case highlights is that the way an experience seems to a subject isn't fully exhausted by whatever the subject is representing. We need also to consider the context in which a thing is being represented if we are to fully capture an experience's phenomenal character.

Philosophers have raised a number of other problem cases for views which attempt to identify phenomenal properties with representational properties. I am going to assume henceforth that intentionalists can satisfactorily finesse these problems.<sup>9</sup> I want to consider a related but

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<sup>8</sup> For a further discussion of this point see Kelly (1999 & 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Boghossian and Velleman (1989) and Block (1996 & 2003) raise a number of problem cases for the intentionalist such as blurry vision, afterimages, and variations on the classic inverted spectra scenarios. Tye (1992 & 2000: ch.4) and Crane (1998 & 2000: 140-50) have each developed convincing intentionalist responses to these kinds of cases. Since I intend to focus on the issue of the subject-dependence of perceptual content I am going to ignore this

different issue.

Qualia are normally taken to be essentially subjective properties which can be known only from an introspective or first-person point of view. Part of the attraction of the position I have labeled strong intentionalism is that it seems to allow us to avoid characterising phenomenal properties as essentially subjective. We can simply point to the objects and properties in the public world in characterising what it is for an experience to seem or feel a particular way to a subject. We don't need to invoke any properties which belong to a subject's experience and can only be known from a first-person point of view.

Phenomenologists have something in common with intentionalists in this regard. They agree that an experience seems a certain way to a subject in virtue of the objects and properties it purports to represent. Phenomenologists are nevertheless committed to there being something essentially subjective about our experience. Even though they would follow intentionalists in taking an experience's phenomenal character to be fully explained by an experience's representational properties, they still think of experiences as essentially subjective. The debate I wish to focus on for what remains of this chapter takes place between strong intentionalists and phenomenologists. Strong intentionalists deny that there is anything essentially subjective about experience, arguing that we can fully account for phenomenal properties in terms of the objects and properties an experience represents in the subject's external environment. Phenomenologists agree with this characterisation of phenomenal properties but they hold that there is still something essentially subjective about conscious experience.

In what follows I will call a property that is essentially subjective, a

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debate.

“subject-dependent property”. A property that is not essentially subjective I will call “subject-independent”. A property is essentially subjective I shall say when its instantiation essentially involves a subject of experience. Secondary qualities will qualify as essentially subjective on this characterisation. What it is for an object to be coloured on views which take colour to be a secondary quality, will be partly determined by a subject’s responses to coloured things. We cannot say what it is for a thing to be coloured without making reference to our responses to coloured things. This makes colour a subject-dependent property.

We can now distinguish two questions that arise when we begin to think about the nature of phenomenal properties. The first question asks whether phenomenal properties are representational properties, and the second asks whether phenomenal properties are subject-dependent properties. It follows that there is a four-way partition between the different positions one can take on the nature of phenomenal properties detailed in the following table:

The Nature of Phenomenal Properties	Intentional	Non-Intentional
Subject-Dependent	Phenomenologists and Weak Intentionalists <sup>10</sup>	Qualia Realists

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<sup>10</sup> I have characterised weak intentionalists as sharing with phenomenologists the claim that phenomenal properties are subject dependent. This is because weak intentionalists like Shoemaker say that phenomenal properties are relational properties. On this view two subjects could respond differently to redness, one seeing a flower that seems to be red and the other seeing a flower that seems to be green. The flower in this case has both the property of seeming to be red and the property of seeming to be green. This view allows us to say that there can be no difference in an experience’s phenomenal properties without some difference in this experience’s representational properties. However it also allow that which representational properties an experience has can depend on how the subject responds to the properties she is representing. This makes phenomenal properties essentially subjective.

Subject-Independent	Strong Intentionalists	Eliminativists <sup>11</sup>
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The debate I will focus on for the remainder of the chapter is carried out between intentionalists who hold that phenomenal properties are subject-independent and phenomenologists who disagree. Thus I will be assuming that the issue of whether phenomenal properties can be characterised in representational terms has been settled in the intentionalist's favour. Once we set aside the question of the existence of qualia, the issue of the nature of phenomenal properties shifts to become an issue about how best to account for an experience's representational properties. The debate becomes one about how experiences get their intentional contents. Strong intentionalists hold that our experiences get their representational properties in ways that do not essentially involve subjects of experience. Phenomenologists disagree.

Part of my aim in what follows will be to introduce the account of intentionality one finds in phenomenology. I shall argue that this account of intentionality is to be preferred to that endorsed by the strong intentionalist. However the account of intentionality we find in phenomenology has the implication that phenomenal properties must be understood as subject-dependent. Hence if we are to close the explanatory gap, it will only be by making room for properties and entities that are subject-dependent.

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<sup>11</sup> While plenty of philosophers have been eliminativists about qualia, I suspect that it is only the Churchlands who would propose the wholesale elimination of phenomenal properties. Perhaps Dennett's eliminativism about qualia can also be taken to apply to phenomenal properties more generally. Dennett seeks to explain away phenomenal properties in terms of a subject's evaluative responses to his/her experiences. Dennett's heterophenomenological approach seems to have as a consequence that it is our evaluative responses that science must seek to account for, since we don't really have any independent handle on our experience's phenomenology apart from the evaluative judgements we make about them. For a discussion of Dennett's heterophenomenology and its difference from phenomenology proper, see my introduction.



## 2. Intentionality and Phenomenology

Phenomenologists hold that perceptual intentionality is constitutively determined by phenomenology. This is to say that an experience has the representational properties it does in virtue of the way the experience presents the world as appearing to its subject. This claim gives us a straightforward argument for the conclusion that phenomenal properties are subject-dependent. The argument runs as follows:

- (P1) Phenomenal properties are identical with representational properties.
- (P2) An experience has its representational properties in virtue of the way it presents the world as appearing to a subject.
- (P3) An experience's representational properties are essentially subjective. We must characterise them in terms of the ways in which they present the world as appearing to a subject.
- (CON) An experience's phenomenal properties are essentially subjective.

The crucial premise in this argument is (P2). Phenomenologists take (P2) to be motivated by an uncontroversial feature of intentional states that they can purport to refer to an object whether or not that object exists. It is, I take it, uncontroversial that there is a conceptual connection between intentional directedness and the property of purporting to refer. It is part of what we *mean* by "intentionality" that a state can exhibit intentional directedness but fail to refer to anything.<sup>12</sup> Phenomenologists claim that not only is there a *conceptual* connection between intentionality and the property of purporting to refer; there is in addition a constitutive or metaphysical connection. They

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<sup>12</sup> The possibility of reference failure together with the failure of substitution of coreferential terms are commonly cited as the defining features of intentionality. These are among the criteria Chisholm (1957) offers as the distinguishing mark of "intentional" sentences.

Searle (1983: 22-5) argues that the criteria Chisholm identifies are really just features of the sentences we use to ascribe intentional states but are not features of the intentional states themselves. Crane (1998) agrees. But neither Searle nor Crane will deny that whenever there is representation there is the possibility of misrepresentation or worse still empty representation, and this is all my current argument needs.

take intentional directedness to be *identical* with the property of purporting to refer.

The phenomenologist claims that an experience purports to refer to something in virtue of its phenomenology. An experience can purport to refer to something just by presenting the world as *seeming a certain way*. I can undergo an experience the content of which purports to refer to a lemon say, just by undergoing an experience that presents to me something that seems to be a lemon. If we suppose that to exhibit intentionality is to purport to refer, it is natural to think that an experience could exhibit intentionality just by presenting the world as seeming a certain way.

We can get an initial hold on what the phenomenologist has in mind by comparing the account of intentionality as I have sketched it thus far with the more familiar accounts proposed by contemporary naturalist philosophers of mind. The phenomenologists, I have said, take intentional directedness to be identical with the property of purporting to refer. On this conception of intentionality, an experience doesn't get its content from the relation, causal or otherwise, in which a subject stands to the world. The experience already has an intentional content in virtue of its phenomenology – the ways in which it presents the world as appearing. An experience's intentional content can either be confirmed or disconfirmed by the world the subject is representing. The question of whether an experience accomplishes its goal of referring is quite independent of an experience's possession of a particular content.

The naturalist will of course admit that a subject can represent an object whether or not this object exists. All parties are agreed that this is definitive of intentionality. However the naturalist will argue that there is always some other relation that the subject stands in to the world which explains why an experience has a particular content. This, I shall claim, is the central

difference between their respective accounts of intentionality. Phenomenologists hold that intentional directedness is a nonrelational property of representational states, a property an experience has whether or not a subject enters into any relation with the world. Naturalists have however supposed that there must be *some* relation between the bearer of an intentional state and the world which accounts for intentional directedness.

On the causal covariation theory for instance the relation in question is one of tracking objects and properties under ideal or optimal conditions. If we want to know why an experience has particular correctness conditions, we can appeal to the relation of causal covariation under optimal conditions.<sup>13</sup> How will the causal covariation theory handle cases of reference-failure? The causal covariation theory will say that our senses can represent an object that doesn't exist because sometimes the conditions for reliable tracking are not satisfied. When the conditions for reliable tracking are not satisfied a creature can represent what does not exist. What is it that an experience represents in such cases? The causal covariation theory claims that non-veridical experiences represent whatever they *would* causally covary with under ideal conditions.

For the causal covariation theory, successful reference has an explanatory priority over the property I have described as "purporting to refer". Intentional directedness is defined in terms of reference, where "reference" is understood as causal covariation under ideal conditions. We are to understand the property an experience has when it purports to refer always in terms of the conditions that would hold if the experience succeeded in

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<sup>13</sup> See Stampe (1977) for the classic defence of this position. Tye (1995: ch.4, pp.'s 100-5) defends an account of perceptual content along these lines.

referring.

Phenomenologists would argue that the causal covariation theory can succeed only by changing the subject. By giving priority to cases of successful reference they find they cannot make room for anything like a non-relational property of purporting to refer. Instead they must try to explain away the property of purporting to refer in terms of some other relation the bearer of an intentional state stands in to the world. Phenomenologists will insist that the property of purporting to refer is metaphysically more basic than the property of referring. Any attempt to explain the property of purporting to refer in terms of the relation that would hold when an intentional state succeeds in referring will fail to explain the true phenomenon. It will fail to explain how mental states can have a representational content prior to a subject taking up any relation to the world.

Do teleological theories of content fare any better? By the phenomenologist's standards we will have to conclude they do not. Teleological theories add to the causal covariation account, an explanation of which conditions are optimal. Consider first Dretske's spin on the causal covariation story. Dretske advances a theory of perceptual intentionality according to which "a system S, represents a property F, if and only if S has the function of indicating (providing information about) the F of a certain domain of objects." (Dretske, 1995: 2) What Dretske calls "indication" is another way of describing the relation of causal covariation: to indicate or carry information about F is to track F. However Dretske points out that indication on its own won't suffice to account for representation. Indication is a relation of lawful dependence which doesn't allow room for misrepresentation.<sup>14</sup> So Dretske is led to invoke a representational system's

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<sup>14</sup> For an argument to this effect see Dretske (1986/1994: 158-159)

function. A representational system S has the function of representing F if the detection of F by S enables the organism to meet its needs. Of course this doesn't quite work either because there is always more than one way to specify a representation producing system's function. Thus Dretske's final move is to invoke the learning history of an organism. A representational system S has the function of representing F if representations which indicate the presence of F have been recruited by the organism as the cause of some behaviour M which enables the organism to cope in its environment.

What will the teleological theory say about cases of reference-failure? Dretske's teleological theory will attempt to explain the contents of my experience in these cases by reference to a creature's learning history. According to the story he tells, a creature that can misrepresent has learned that the various stimuli which cause it to be in a representational state R indicate the presence of some feature F which is in some way relevant to its needs. However occasionally something may go wrong and the creature may find itself in representational state R in the absence of any F's. Why when this happens does the state the creature is in nevertheless represent the presence of F? R represents F because this is its function.

Thus Dretske will explain the phenomenologist's property of purporting to refer by reference to the conditions that obtain when a sensory system isn't functioning properly. A sensory system S fails to function properly when the stimulus which causes S to go into state R is a stimulus which normally indicates the presence of F but on this occasion fails to do so. Thus the sensory system is led to malfunction. Notice that like the causal covariation theory, Dretske accounts for the property of purporting to refer in terms of a relation between the sensory system and the world. What he adds to the story is an appeal to learning. It is a creature's having learning to associate

its being in a state R with the presence of some feature F relevant to its meeting its needs which explains why R represents the presence of F. Thus Dretske's teleological theory attempts to redescribe the property of purporting to refer in relational terms. From where the phenomenologist stands, this move amounts to denying the phenomenon.

Millikan (1984) has proposed a teleological account that is very different from Dretske's. According to her account, content is not individuated by any causal or informational relation, and thus at first glance it looks to be a good deal more promising than the other theories we have considered. Can her theory make room for the phenomenologist's conception of intentional directedness?

Millikan assigns proper functions to the systems that use or consume representations and not to the systems that produce them. The beaver's splash means danger because when it corresponds to danger, the response on the part of other beavers serves a purpose. The bee dance serves a purpose when other bees can make use of it to collect nectar, and this they can do only when the location of the nectar corresponds correctly to the dance.

For Millikan we determine a representation's content by asking what the consumers of representations need in order to do their jobs. Millikan goes on to argue that the consumers of a representation need a certain relation to hold between a representation and what is represented. Just like Dretske a representation's content turns out to be individuated by a relation between a bearer of a representation and the world, the relation that must hold if a consumer of representations is to function properly.<sup>15</sup> Once again we have

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<sup>15</sup> Matters are not quite as straightforward as I make them seem here. Millikan makes an important distinction between direct and derived proper functions (see for instance Millikan (1986)). She introduces the distinction to get around the problem of how to account for the function of novel, one-off intentional states or intentional states whose job is to bring about



a theory of intentionality which attempts to analyse the non-relational property of purporting to refer in terms of some relational property.

Phenomenologists think that thoughts and experience can exhibit intentional directedness just by purporting to refer. An experience or thought doesn't get its intentionality from the relation a subject stands in to the world. The accounts of intentionality I have just sketched challenge this conclusion. One and all they argue that a representation's content is individuated by a relation, either causal or historical, that a subject stands in to the world. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to assess which party in this debate gets the last word. My aim in what remains of the chapter will be instead to outline in more detail what a rival non-relational account of intentional directedness might look like. According to this rival account the kind of intentional directedness that attaches to perceptual experiences is wholly determined by an experience's phenomenology. The idea is that an experience can by virtue of its phenomenology alone purport to refer to something. This is to say that an experience can, just by presenting the world as seeming a certain way, purport to refer to something.

An example might make this proposal clearer. Suppose that my experience presents me with what seems to be an apple. The phenomenologist claims that it is by presenting to me something that seems to be an apple that my experience purports to refer to an apple. The phenomenology of my experience – its presenting me with something that seems to be an apple – is constitutive of my experience purporting to refer to an apple. From this theory the conclusion that phenomenal properties are

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states of affairs disadvantageous to the well-being of an organism. A derived proper function is a function which derives from the function of some device which produces some effect. A novel bee dance for instance, a particular waggle that has never been performed in the past, has a derived proper function. The novel dance derives its function from the function of bee dances more generally.

both representational and subject-dependent will immediately follow. My experience purports to refer to something in virtue of its representational properties. The fact that my experience presents me with something that seems to be an apple is a subject-dependent property of my experience. It is to *me* that my experience presents something that seems to be an apple. An experience could not present something as seeming to be a certain way without there being some subject to whom things are so-presented. If we say that my experiences do purport to refer solely in virtue of their phenomenology, it will follow that phenomenal properties are both representational and subject-dependent. It is this conclusion that is important for my current project. If correct it will show that an intentionalist response to the explanatory gap must make room for subjective facts.

### 3. Phenomenal Intentionality

I have attributed to the phenomenologist the view that an experience has its representational content in virtue of its phenomenology. It is this view which I shall be developing in its Husserlian and existential guises across the next two sections. I am using “phenomenology” here to refer to the way an experience presents something as seeming to its subject. I will continue to think of representational content as specifiable by a set of correctness conditions, the conditions which must hold if the bearer of representational content is to represent something true. The claim I will be developing says that it is an experience’s phenomenology – the ways in which an experience presents the world as seeming to its subject – which makes it the case that an experience has the correctness conditions it does.

Let us call the thesis that phenomenology fixes intentional content, “the Phenomenal Intentionality Thesis” (or PIT for short). There is a strong and

weak reading of PIT. We can formalise the two readings as follows where 'x' stands for an intentional state, 'R' for a relation to the world, 'y' for an object, and 'P' for the property of representing y.

(1) Strong Reading:  $\sim \forall x \exists R \exists y (Px \supset Rxy)$ <sup>16</sup>

(2) Weak Reading:  $\sim \exists R \exists y \forall x (Px \supset Rxy)$ <sup>17</sup>

The strong reading holds that a psychological state's phenomenology doesn't depend on the existence of any individual other than the subject to whom the psychological state belongs.<sup>18</sup> According to PIT phenomenology determines intentional content. Thus a proponent of the strong reading must show that there is a type of intentional content whose individuation conditions do not refer to any individual other than the subject to whom the psychological state belongs.<sup>19</sup>

The strong reading is committed to the following possibility. Imagine a phenomenological duplicate of me such that whenever I undergo an experience with a particular phenomenology so does my duplicate. Now further imagine that this individual is a brain-in-a-vat, his external reality is

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<sup>16</sup> More informally the strong reading says: no intentional state x is such that there is a relation R and an object y such that necessarily if x represents y then x bears R to y.

<sup>17</sup> The weak reading claims: it is not the case that there exists a relation R and an object y such that for all experiences x if x represents y then x bears relation R to y.

<sup>18</sup> Putnam (1975) borrows Carnap's label "methodological solipsism" to describe this position.

<sup>19</sup> A proponent of the strong reading needn't deny that there is a type of intentional content the individuation of which does require us to make reference to entities in the subject's external environment. Consider two individuals that are looking at phenomenologically indistinguishable paintings one of which is a forgery. The strong reading will say that there is a sense in which both individuals enjoy experiences with the same truth conditions. The truth conditions are that each must be presented with a painting with a certain arrangement of form and colour. There is however also a sense in which their respective experiences differ in content. If one of the individuals was to point to the painting in front of him and say 'this is the original painting' his utterance would be made true by the painting he had pointed to. If the other individual was to point to the painting in front of him and say 'this is the genuine painting' his utterance would be made true by the painting he had pointed to. What makes each of their utterances true or false is a different painting. Hence there is also a sense in which each of them enjoys an experience with different truth conditions.

fundamentally different from the one he experiences, containing only a supercomputer feeding his brain information about a virtual reality. The strong reading must say that my phenomenological duplicate and I enjoy experiences with the very same representational contents because an experience's correctness conditions are determined by phenomenology alone. Since my duplicate and I have phenomenologically identical experiences, my duplicate and I must share experiences with the very same correctness conditions.<sup>20</sup>

The weaker reading of PIT agrees with the strong that an experience's phenomenology, the way it seems or feels to its subject, determines intentional content. Unlike the strong reading it allows that an experience's phenomenology requires a subject to stand in some relation to the world. At first glance it would seem the weak reading is committed to the view that an experience's intentional content must be individuated by a relation a subject stands into the world. If phenomenology requires a subject to stand in some relation to the world, and phenomenology determines intentional content, doesn't it follow that it is a subject's standing in a particular relation to the world that explains an experience's having a particular intentional content?

A proponent of the weak reading denies this consequence. He claims that a thought or experience has its intentional content before a subject takes up any relation to the world. It may be true that an experience's phenomenology requires a subject to stand in some relation to the world. It doesn't follow that intentional content is individuated by the relation a subject stands in to the world. An experience's phenomenology – the determinant of

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<sup>20</sup> Loar (2003) and Horgan and Tienson (2002) have both defended this consequence of the strong reading. Horgan and Tienson defend the claim that you and your phenomenological duplicate share experiences with the same correctness conditions by arguing that what you and your twin would have to do to establish the correctness of your experience is just the same.

its intentional content – might not be individuated by a particular relation a subject stands in to the world, but in some other manner. Indeed I shall argue for precisely that claim in the final sections of this chapter.

The weak reading has one noteworthy implication which I will register before considering how these respective readings of PIT find an articulation in Husserlian and existential phenomenology. I have said that the weak reading of PIT allows that an experience's phenomenology might in some sense "involve" extra-mental items. Suppose a case can be made for what we might call "wide phenomenology". It will follow that it is not possible for there to exist a phenomenological duplicate of me which is a brain-in-a-vat. If phenomenology is wide, a phenomenological duplicate of you or I must enjoy experiences that involve just the same extra-mental items as our experiences involve. A brain-in-a-vat exists in an environment that contains none of the same extra-mental items that our environment contains. If he experiences anything that can be considered an extra-mental item, it is at best an item that has a virtual existence, and I am presuming this is not true of all, or even many, of the items we experience. It follows that a phenomenological duplicate of me cannot be a brain-in-a-vat. Sceptical arguments are usually mounted by imagining a phenomenological duplicate embedded in a radically different environment from our own. A weak-reading of PIT would provide significant machinery for mounting a response to this variety of sceptical argument.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> I will not however pursue this possibility here.

#### 4. Husserl's Theory of Intentionality

Some commentators take Husserl to hold the stronger reading of PIT.<sup>22</sup> Recall that Husserlian phenomenology begins by setting aside all propositions whose truth can be doubted. This leaves the Husserlian phenomenologist only with propositions about his own consciousness considered in complete abstraction from the natural world. All propositions about the natural world are subject to doubt in a way that some propositions describing a subject's occurrent mental states are not. Thus construed it certainly seems like the Husserlian phenomenologist is committed to the claim that a psychological state's content doesn't depend on the existence of any individual apart from its bearer.

I shall argue that if Husserl did hold the strong thesis he faces a problem which is the mirror image of the problem I described for the naturalist in the previous section. The naturalist seeks to explain the property a state has when it purports to refer by appeal to the relation of reference. S/he has the difficulty of explaining how intentional states can seem to exhibit directedness independent of any particular relation to the world once s/he has taken reference to be metaphysically basic. Husserl gives priority to the property of purporting to refer over that of reference in his account of intentional directedness. This leaves him facing the difficulty of explaining how our perceptual experience can succeed in making contact with objects if the contents of our experiences do not require the existence of anything other than the subject to whom they belong.

Husserl took it to be a phenomenological datum that our perceptual experiences seem to present us with extra-mental items in their full "bodily

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<sup>22</sup> See for instance Dreyfus (1982) and McIntyre (1982). For an argument that Husserl held the weaker thesis see Zahavi (2004).



presence”.<sup>23</sup> He denies that the objects of our experience have an existence in consciousness, claiming instead that the objects given to us in experience seem to have a transcendent existence.<sup>24</sup> *The* central problem of his phenomenology is to explain how it is possible for our experiences to give us access to a world whose existence transcends consciousness.<sup>25</sup> Husserl must explain how a state whose content is in no way dependent on a relation to the world can nevertheless sometimes succeed in making contact with extra-mental items.

Existential phenomenologists we shall see can avoid both the naturalist’s problem and Husserl’s problem. They endorse a weak reading of PIT and this is what enables them to steer a middle course between (the methodological solipsist reading of) Husserl’s phenomenology and naturalism. Before we can grasp the existential phenomenologist’s proposal we need to understand the problems Husserl encounters which their account of intentionality was designed to address. This will be my aim in the remainder of this section.

Husserl made a three-way distinction along the lines of Frege’s distinction between idea, sense and reference. What Frege referred to as “ideas” Husserl calls “act of consciousness”. He shares with Frege an

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<sup>23</sup> “The object stands before us in perception as bodily present, as, to put it more precisely yet, actually present, as given in *propria persona* in the actual present.” (Husserl 1907/1997: §4, 14) Also see Husserl (1913/1970: §136).

<sup>24</sup> This is a departure from his teacher Brentano who assigns to objects a peculiar kind of mental inexistence. Brentano claimed that every mental phenomenon includes an object within itself, though not in the same way: “in presentation something is presented, in judgement something is affirmed or denied, in love something is loved, in hate something is hated, in desire desired etc.” This landed him with the difficulty of explaining the difference between intentional states directed towards objects that exist and intentional states that take as their objects fictional or imaginary entities. Husserl avoids this problem by distinguishing an intentional state’s content from its object. Every intentional state has content but not every intentional state has an object. For further discussion of the difference between Brentano and Husserl’s conception of intentionality see Husserl (1913/1970: V, §10-11) & Føllesdal (1969).

<sup>25</sup> There are countless places where Husserl poses this question but see for instance the fifth investigation in his (1913/1970) and the second of his *Meditations* in his (1931/1973).

understanding of acts of consciousness as subjective. They are subjective in the sense that they are temporal events confined to a particular person's stream of consciousness.<sup>26</sup>

While an act of consciousness is something subjective, its sense is not. Two subjects cannot share one and the same token act, each will have his own act of consciousness. Different subjects can however share one and the same thought or experience. This they can do by each tokening an act with the same intentional content or sense. According to one influential interpretation Husserl thinks of sense in much the same way as Frege did as something ideal or abstract that different acts can share in common.<sup>27</sup> Distinct acts of consciousness can exemplify or instantiate one and the same sense just as different objects can share one and the same property.

Husserl claims that every act of consciousness has as its correlate a sense. This enables him to explain how every act of consciousness can seem to place a subject in relation to an object whether or not that object exists. Husserl denies that an act's sense and its object are one and the same. It is for this reason that an act can have a sense but no referent. While Husserl's theory is designed to make room for the possibility that an

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<sup>26</sup> See for instance Husserl (1913/1982: §88 & §97)

<sup>27</sup> This is the interpretation advanced by Føllesdal (1969) and developed at length by Woodruff-Smith & McIntyre (1982). In recent years there has emerged a significant rival interpretation according to which the sense that belongs to an act of perception isn't something that mediates reference. A Husserlian "sense" on this interpretation is the object of experience or thought just as it is experienced or thought of by a subject. This interpretation stresses the continuity between Husserl and his existential successors. Drummond (1990) and Sokolowski (1987) both defend versions of this interpretation. For a more recent discussion which takes the side of the latter interpretation against Føllesdal see Zahavi (2004).

The Drummond/Sokolowski interpretation presents Husserl as an exponent of direct realism. While I find the position they describe attractive it fails to come to terms with the many places in which Husserl makes declarations which sound very much like those of an idealist. A.D. Smith (2003, ch.4) quotes the following passages from Husserl's unpublished manuscripts: "If there were no consciousness with appearances, there would also be no physical things." (ibid, 180) Unequivocal statements of idealism like this one do not accord well with the reading of Husserl as an exponent of direct-realism. I will return to this issue at the end of this section.

act can have a sense but no object, he denies the converse is possible. It is not possible, he claims, for an act to have an object but no sense. Every act purports to refer to an object by means of its sense. It is by virtue of an act's sense that a subject comes to stand in a relation to an object.

We see then that Husserl conceives of directedness as a property an intentional state exhibits because every act has as its correlate a sense or intentional content. How does he think an act can by means of its sense succeed in referring to an object?

Husserl describes a perceptual act's sense as being composed of two parts. The first I will call a "signifying intention".<sup>28</sup> The signifying intention presents an object as having certain features. Some of these features will be sensibly presented. Others will be features that are not currently sensibly presented but which the subject nevertheless takes to be features that could potentially be experienced by taking up a different point of view on the object. Husserl describes the features which are sensibly presented as "filled intentions" and the features which are not sensibly presented as "emptily intended".<sup>29</sup> An experience's signifying intention is at any given moment a conjunction of filled and empty intentions.

A signifying intention determines how an object is represented, but not which object is represented. It is only if Husserl can explain how at least sometimes an experience succeeds in singling out a particular object that he will have given us an answer to the problem we raised for him at the

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<sup>28</sup> I have borrowed this piece of terminology from Dreyfus (1982).

<sup>29</sup> The distinction between empty and filled intentions is discussed in Husserl (1913/1982: §135) and (1907/1997: §18). A word about Husserl's use of "intending": Husserl talks of an experience as "intending" an object in order to capture the sense in which an experience aims at or has its target some object whether or not it succeeds in referring to anything. We think of an agent as forming an intention to  $\phi$  when s/he resolves to do what is necessary for  $\phi$ -ing. If we understand the resolution an agent forms as the agent's goal we can see what Husserl might have meant by "intending". An experience intends an object by having as its goal reference to a particular object.

beginning of this section. There I attributed to Husserl the opposite problem to that of the naturalist. Husserl must explain how an experience can succeed in referring to an object when an experience has its representational properties independently of any relation to the world.

Husserl's answer to this problem is to claim that every perceptual act has as part of its sense what he calls a "determinable X", which he tells us, presents an object in abstraction from all predicates.<sup>30</sup> I shall call it the "X-component". The X-component is that part of an experience's content that purports to refer to a particular individual. What is intended in any given perceptual act isn't simply a bundle of unrelated properties. Rather these properties are represented as properties that belong to one and the same object. One of the roles the X-component plays is that of combining and unifying these properties so that an experience can represent them as properties of one and the same object. Another role the X-component plays is that of tracking a particular object across a series of experiences.

As we move around a sculpture, for instance, experiencing it from different sides we take up a series of distinct points of view on one and the same object. It is by means of the X-component that these distinct points of view are combined so that what we experience is an identical thing, the sculpture. The X-component plays the role of binding together these distinct points of view so that the series of experiences the subject undergoes are all directed towards one and the same object.

The X-component is being asked to do a lot of work by Husserl, but just how does he think it achieves these tasks? Woodruff-Smith and McIntyre (1982: 200-4) propose that we construe the X-component as functioning like a demonstrative expression. On their proposal a perceptual act is related to

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<sup>30</sup> Husserl introduces the determinable X-component in his (1913/1982: §131).

a particular object in much the same way as a demonstrative expression is related to its referent. Interpreting the X-component as a demonstrative helps to make sense of Husserl's claim that the X-component presents an object in abstraction from its predicates. It is a feature of demonstratives that they refer directly, which is to say, without the mediation of any descriptions. The X-component represents an object without making reference to any of its properties in just the same way as a demonstrative expression purports to refer to a particular without the help of any identifying descriptions.

There is little doubt that Husserl needs the X-component to function in something like the manner of a demonstrative. What is not so clear is that the strong reading of PIT allows Husserl to introduce anything like a demonstrative into the contents of experience.<sup>31</sup> What a demonstrative expression such as 'this' takes as its referent will vary from occasion to occasion depending on the context in which it is employed. An interlocutor will determine which object a particular utterance of 'this' has as its referent by making use of the context in which the utterance was made.

Husserl cannot make use of the context in which a perceptual experience takes place to determine which object, if any, the X-component takes as its referent. His account of the phenomenological reduction seems to require him to say that there is no relation to the world that a perceptual experience depends upon for its representational properties. The X-component is described by him as a kind of representational property that all experiences have in common. Thus he must hold that there is no relation to the world that the X-component depends upon in order to single out a particular object.

Husserl is well aware of the context-dependent nature of demonstratives; he tells us in his (1913/1970) that: "'This' is an essentially occasional

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<sup>31</sup> Dreyfus (1982) and McIntyre (1982) both raise this problem for Husserl.



expression which only becomes fully meaningful when we have regard to the circumstances of utterance..." (VI, §5, 682) Instead of appealing to the context in which the perceptual experience takes place to single out an object, he has the subject enter into the relation of direct and immediate perception to an object that he calls "intuition" (*Anschauung*). I take it his proposal is that the X-component singles out the object that the subject is intuiting, where "intuition" is understood as a kind of direct and immediate presentation of the object in its bodily presence.

Does the appeal to intuition really help him avoid introducing a relation to the world that runs contrary to the strong reading of PIT? It looks like any appeal to intuition will require Husserl to appeal to the existence of an object which the subject is directly and immediately presented with. Yet his methodological strictures call for him to refrain from making any existence claims. Thus the introduction of the X-component into his account of perceptual sense would seem to be in serious conflict with his views on phenomenological method.

There is an obvious way out of this difficulty for the Husserlian phenomenologist. It could be objected that the whole thrust of the above argument rests upon a false understanding of phenomenological method.<sup>32</sup> So far I have been assuming that the phenomenological epoché commits Husserl to a kind of methodological solipsism. It's possible to understand the "epoché" in such a way that the world *isn't* excluded from the phenomenologist's inquiry. On this reading the epoché doesn't require the subject to study his subjective psychological states in abstraction from the world. Rather the epoché simply affects a change of attitude. Instead of relating to objects as we ordinarily do pre-reflectively we are to study the

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<sup>32</sup> Zahavi (2004, pp.60-1) makes an argument to this effect.



objects of our thoughts and experiences as they are intended or represented by us. The phenomenologist is to study the perceived object as it is perceived, the recollected episode as it is recollected, the imaginary object as it is imagined *etc.*

Here is not the place to assess the plausibility of this proposal as an interpretation of Husserl. Suffice it to say that if it can be defended it would establish that Husserl was not a methodological solipsist. This reading attributes to Husserl the view that at least sometimes our perceptual experiences can contain their objects as constituents: the perceptual act contains the perceived object as it is perceived; a memory contains the recollected episode as it is recalled. If this is right then a perceptual experience's content *does* depend on the existence of some individual other than its subject. Husserl can allow that context plays the role it is ordinarily thought to play in fixing the content of a demonstrative, and his theory of intentionality will be rescued.

Let us set aside the strong reading of PIT then. We have seen that Husserl's account of perceptual content incorporates a demonstrative component, and that this aspect of his theory is in serious tension with any reading which takes him to endorse the strong reading of PIT. Perhaps Husserl's theory can be rescued, but only by allowing that perceptual content requires a subject to stand in some relation to the world. Since this is something the strong reading of PIT denies a Husserlian phenomenologist has little choice but to abandon such a thesis.

### 5. The Existential Phenomenologist's Theory of Intentionality

We have seen that a strong reading of PIT encounters insuperable difficulties when it comes to explaining how our thoughts and experiences can secure reference to their objects. Existential phenomenology rejects a conception of intentionality as a relation between a subject's states of mind and their object because they reject a conception of the subject as standing apart from the world. Thus they can avoid the problems Husserl faces in explaining successful cases of reference. McCulloch (2003) finds in Descartes a distinction he tags "the ontological real distinction". According to McCulloch, Descartes didn't just distinguish a person's mind from his body, arguing that mind and body are distinct substances. Descartes went further endorsing a dualism that extended to mind and world.<sup>33</sup> It is this dualism of mind and world that the existential phenomenologist repudiates. It is only if we conceive of subjects as capable of a distinct existence from the world that a view of intentionality as a relation between mind and world makes sense. If we think of a subject as existing apart from the world, it is natural to think of intentionality as the means by which the distance between mind and world is bridged. Once a dualism of mind and world is rejected it no longer makes sense to think of intentionality as a relation between a subject's states of mind and the world.

We are, for the most part, involved with the world dealing with things in exercising some skillful activity. We can of course take up a detached

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<sup>33</sup> Descartes can conceive of the possible non-existence of a reality external to the mind precisely because he accepts that mind and world have a different kind of being. In the first of his *Meditations* Descartes invites us to imagine that we might be the victims of a massive deception so that pretty much everything we believe is false. This is a possibility we can grant Descartes only if we suppose that the contents of our minds, our thoughts and experiences, are self-contained with respect to the world. Only if our minds are wholly self-contained, only if our thoughts and experiences can have the contents they do completely independently of the existence of an extra-mental item, can we be radically deceived in the way Descartes imagines.

standpoint whereby we stand back from our ordinary engagement with the world, and conceive of the world from no particular point of view. This is not how we live our lives for the most part. Most of our life is spent dealing with situations without needing to give the situation any thought. We know how to find our way about in the world. This know-how is made possible by our being-in-the-world.

Existential phenomenology is committed to a weak reading of PIT. It holds that the contents of our experience require us to stand in some relation to the world. This follows from their conception of the existence of persons as being-in-the-world. They deny that it is a subject's relation to the world that accounts for an experience or thought having a particular intentional content. For as we have just seen, they reject any conception of a subject existing apart from the world. In the remainder of this section I will explore the sense in which our experiences can be said to have their intentional contents prior to a subject entering into a relation with the world.<sup>34</sup> I will argue that existential phenomenology make sense of this claim in a way that reflects their rejection of Husserl's idealism. First we must make explicit what there is in the phenomenology of our perceptual experiences to motivate such a claim.

In fact we have already encountered the answer to this question in our discussion of Husserl. Recall that Husserl makes a distinction between two aspects of an experience's intentional content which he calls "empty" and "filled intentions". This distinction is introduced to capture the sense in which

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<sup>34</sup> There is an important sense in which this way of putting things is incoherent from the perspective of existential phenomenology. A subject doesn't exist before it takes up a relation to the world. Thus it doesn't make sense to talk of 'a subject's experiences having intentional content before a subject takes up a relation to the world' as I have just done. This way of putting matters reflects an Husserlian understanding of intentionality as we shall see in a moment.

what we sensibly perceive of an object at any given moment is a single perspective or point of view on it. Some features of the object are sensibly presented to us, while others are not. The features of the object we perceive are those that are presented to us from our current point of view. The features of the object that are not currently perceived, we can perceive by taking up a different point of view on the object. An experience's intentional content is thus a conjunction of actual and possible points of view. The point of view an object currently presents to us corresponds to that part of an experience's content which Husserl calls a "filled intention". While the other points of view an object affords which are not currently presented to us Husserl says are "emptily intended".

Husserl claims that the points of view on an object that are not currently presented to us form a part of the content of an experience as much as those parts that are seen. We do not perceive facades of things but three-dimensional entities whose features go beyond those presented to us. How do I come to represent an object as having features beyond those that I currently perceive? Husserl's answer to this question is to claim that I form an interpretation or hypothesis about what I would see if I were to take up a different point of view on an object. This interpretation or hypothesis takes as its evidence the properties of the thing that are sensibly presented to me.<sup>35</sup> Every perceptual act is composed of parts that are sensory and interpretative.<sup>36</sup> Husserl calls the interpretative part of the perceptual act, the "noesis", the Greek word for intelligence or understanding. The sensory part of an act he refers to variously as "hyletic data", "sense data" and sometimes

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<sup>35</sup> Here I am following an interpretation of Husserl defended by Kelly (2003). Kelly cites passages from Husserl's (1907) lectures in support of his interpretation.

<sup>36</sup> Husserl *doesn't* think of perception as the outcome of two distinct acts, a purely sensory act and an act of interpretation or judgement, as do sense-datum theorists. (See for instance, Broad (1923) and Maund (2003)) Instead he will describe various acts of interpretation or sense-bestowal that take place *within* the perceptual act itself.

simply as “hyle”. The fundamental role assigned to the noesis is that of giving meaning (*Sinngebung*) to those properties of the object that are sensibly presented to a subject.<sup>37</sup>

Sensations supply the subject with evidence about the structural and qualitative aspects of the thing s/he perceives. This evidence constrains the subsequent perceptual acts of interpretation. Consider in this light what I see when I see an object moving away from me. The change that takes place in my visual field acts as evidence for the interpretation I give my experience. To perceive that the object is moving away from me is, for instance, to anticipate that it will continue to shrink in size as it gets further away. This expectation I have about how the size of the object will appear to me to continue to change forms a part of the representational content of my experience. Husserl claims that I come to experience the movement of this object in the way I do because there is this change in my sensory field which I interpret as the movement of an object. Moreover a part of the interpretation I bestow on my experience involves an expectation about how the appearance of the object's size will continue to change with its movements.<sup>38</sup>

We should by now be getting a sense of how Husserl makes sense of the claim that our experiences have their intentional content before we take up any relation to the world. I take the object of my experience to have certain features that are not currently perceived by me. These are features I take the object to have in advance of taking up a relation to them and as it were

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<sup>37</sup> See Husserl (1913/1982: §85). It should be noted that a significant change took place in Husserl's work towards the end of his career. He became increasingly concerned with the genesis of the various items we find in consciousness. (See for instance Husserl (1932/1973)) An important aspect of this shift in Husserl's thinking was a rejection of the distinction between sensation and intentional content I have just introduced, so we shouldn't place too much importance on the latter distinction.

<sup>38</sup> See Husserl (1913/1982: §85)

perceiving them for myself. They are represented in the form of hypotheses about what further exploration of the object would reveal of the object.

The initial interpretation a subject gives the sensory part of its experience together with the anticipations a subject forms about the possible experiences it could have of the same object fix an experience's correctness conditions. In both cases the correctness conditions that are assigned to an experience is something which is decided by the way an experience seems to its subject. On the basis of the sensory part of an experience the subject takes an object to have certain sensory properties like a colour, shape, size, and texture. The hypotheses the subject forms, fill out further conditions that must obtain if the experience is to correctly represent the world.

While Husserl characterises our perceptual experiences as representing features that are hypothesised in their *absence*, Merleau-Ponty (who I shall have speak on behalf of the existential phenomenologists) describes those features as *present* in our perceptual experience but indeterminately.<sup>39</sup> It is here that the difference between Husserl's idealism and Merleau-Ponty's realism is at its most pronounced. While for Husserl the object is the sum of the possible points of view we can take on it<sup>40</sup>, this is not the case for Merleau-Ponty. This is why he can speak of the features of the objects that are not sensibly presented to us as nevertheless being there in some positive sense.<sup>41</sup> They are "there" not just as possible points of view we could represent. Rather these are features the object is perceived to have *positively*, albeit in an indeterminate manner. Unlike Husserl, Merleau-Ponty

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<sup>39</sup> Kelly (forthcoming) discusses this difference at length.

<sup>40</sup> Husserl says for instance: "Something objective is nothing other than the synthetic unity of actual and potential intentionality..." (Husserl, 1969: 242)

<sup>41</sup> See Merleau-Ponty (1962: 6) where he says that phenomenology must recognise "the indeterminate as a positive phenomenon". By the "indeterminate" I take him to mean features of the object that are experienced but not as determinate features of the object. For further discussion of Merleau-Ponty on perceptual indeterminacy see Kelly (2004) and my discussion in chapter 7 section 4 and 5.



thinks of the parts of an object that are hidden from us as in a real sense perceived. They are not just hypothesised. Merleau-Ponty must explain in what sense a thing's hidden aspects are perceived when they are not sensibly presented to a subject.

Merleau-Ponty claims that anything we perceive is perceived as having a place within a perceptual field. According to Merleau-Ponty the simplest units of experience are not sensations of, for instance, colour or smell, size or shape. Rather what we perceive is a fully formed figure appearing against a background. I can at the moment perceive my laptop surrounded by books, papers, pens and other assorted paraphernalia that furnish my desk. The screen of my laptop constitutes the figure in my current experience, while the other items on my desk form the background to this experience. The items that make up the background form a part of what I perceive but I perceive them in a different way to the screen of my laptop. The things that surround my laptop are present in my perceptual experience but not determinately. Merleau-Ponty will say the same about an object's hidden aspects – those features of an object which are not currently sensibly presented to me. An object's hidden aspects form a part of the background – they are present in my experience but not determinately so.

To grasp the difference between a determinate and indeterminate presentation think of the difference between being told the measurement of a room and seeing the size of a room for oneself.<sup>42</sup> Measurements are of course determinate representations. They are context independent representations in the sense that one does not need to know anything about context in order to know what size a room is when one is given its

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<sup>42</sup> I borrow this example from Kelly (2003). Peacocke (1989b) uses a similar example in explaining the difference between analog and digital representation. Kelly wants to make sense of Peacocke's distinction using Merleau-Ponty's idea of determinate and indeterminate perceptual content.

dimensions. Merleau-Ponty will claim that the same is not true of seeing a room's size. The experience one has in this case is context dependent. One perceives the size of the room in this case not in terms of determinate dimensions but in terms of what one can do within the space. One might perceive for instance the arrangement of the furniture in the space and get a sense of how one could arrange one's own furniture.

The difference between a determinate and indeterminate representation can be characterised in terms of context-dependence. A determinate representation is context-independent, in that one doesn't need to know anything about context to know what is represented. An indeterminate representation is however context-dependent, in the sense that one does need to know the context to know what is represented.

We have seen something of how Merleau-Ponty draws a distinction between what is presented determinately and what is presented indeterminately. What does he mean when he says that items in the background are presented in perception including an object's hidden aspects even if they are not sensibly presented? I take him to mean that an object's hidden aspects are represented in perception because the object itself forms a part of a perceptual experience's content. An object forms a part of an experience's content by for instance, shaping the ways in which we direct our behaviour towards it. Think of reaching for a cup at the side of one's bed. One directs one's movements towards the place where the cup is standing and shapes one hand according to the shape of the cup. The subject uses the cup that is present in her perceptual experience to guide her reaching and grasping behaviour. But of course she isn't seeing all of the cup but only a side of it that is presented to her. Still the other sides are present in her perceptual experience guiding her movements. We are positively aware of

an object's hidden aspects by being prepared to deal with it. One of the ways in which we manifest this preparedness is by moving our body in ways that may or may not accord with the object's hidden properties. The object reveals itself to me through the behaviours I direct towards it.

For the existential phenomenologist then our intentional states have their contents before we take up a relation to the world through our knowing how to deal with things. Merleau-Ponty has illustrated one way in which this case by describing the way in which when reaching to take hold of an object our body is prepared to deal with a thing of a certain shape, size and so on. These properties are not represented as determinate quantities, but are represented instead in terms of how we *should* direct our movements if we are to succeed in reaching and grasping the thing we are directing our behaviour towards. For the existential phenomenologists then it is a mistake to think of intentionality in terms of a relation between a subject and the world because intentional directedness is made possible by a certain kind of understanding. In the case just described it is an understanding of space which is manifested in our knowing how we should direct our movements if we are to succeed in our goal-directed behaviours. We could just as well have spoken of the understanding which Heidegger describes a subject as having when he knows how to deal with things that are ready-to-hand or available to be used as pieces of equipment.

By now the reader might be wondering what all this has to do with consciousness. We started out discussing phenomenal properties, those properties in virtue of which an experience seems or feels a certain way to its subject. We have finished up discussing the understanding a subject has which enables her to direct her behaviour successfully. It will be objected that the existential phenomenologist is describing such a radically different

concept of the subject and its place in the world as to leave entirely untouched the problems with which we started. I have a short answer to this objection and a longer answer which I will present in the next chapter.

The short answer is to say that the problem of phenomenal consciousness is really a problem about intentionality. Phenomenal properties just are representational properties, but the representational properties in question are peculiar: they are representational properties that are constituted by the way an experience presents the world as *seeming* or *feeling* to a subject. Existential phenomenology claims that the phenomenology of our everyday experiences manifests a certain kind of understanding, an understanding we have when we know how to find our way about in the world. An experience represents what it does in virtue of this understanding.

There is however something right about the objection that we seemed to have simply changed the subject. There is a question philosophers ask about consciousness which has been left untouched by my discussion of intentionality in the latter half of this chapter. The question asks why there is something rather than nothing it is like to have experiences. The account of intentionality I have been outlining tells us why our experiences seem or feel the way they do. It has turned out that our experiences seem or feel the way they do because of the understanding a person has of himself and the world he inhabits along with other persons. This doesn't tell us why our experiences should present the world as seeming, or should themselves feel like anything at all. Phenomenologists do have an answer to this question. Their answer, as we shall see in the next chapter, depends on the controversial claim that every conscious experience is also self-conscious.

Before I explore how this claim can help explain why our experiences should have any phenomenal character whatsoever, I will briefly return to the

intentionalist thesis which claims that phenomenal properties are subject-independent. I have presented the phenomenologist's case for thinking of our experiences as having representational properties that are subject-dependent. I will finish up by assessing the intentionalist claim that our experiences have the phenomenal properties they do by representing entities and properties that are subject-*independent*.

### 6. The Intentionalist Argument for Subject-Independence

Intentionalists argue for the subject-independence of phenomenal properties in two stages. The first stage in their argument aims to establish that while some *concepts* are experience dependent no *properties* are subject-dependent. A property is subject-dependent if its identity depends on a subject and its point of view. A concept is experience-dependent if to possess the concept a subject has to have had certain experiences. The intentionalist allows that phenomenal concepts – the concepts we employ in introspective reflection – are in this sense experience-dependent but he denies that phenomenal properties are subject-dependent.

Tye (2000, ch.2) for instance has argued that to possess a phenomenal concept C one must have had experiences of a certain type E for oneself. A phenomenal concept is a concept one employs when one introspects on an experience and forms a conception of what it is like to undergo this experience. One can form a conception of what it is like to undergo an experience only by having the experience for oneself.<sup>43</sup> Thus there are good

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<sup>43</sup> Tye supports this claim by arguing that no amount of description of pain, theoretical or otherwise, could convey knowledge of pain to our subject. For Tye takes phenomenal concepts to be what he calls "directly recognitional concepts". It is a part of the functional role that phenomenal concepts play that they enable a subject to recognise a phenomenal property directly just by introspecting on his experience. Phenomenal concepts do not pick out their referents via descriptions. Hence no amount of description will confer on one, mastery of a phenomenal concept. One can acquire mastery of a phenomenal concept only by having the kind of experience the phenomenal concept has as its referent.

reasons for thinking that phenomenal concepts must be experience dependent.

The intentionalist goes on to argue that those philosophers who take phenomenal properties to be essentially subjective have been misled by this feature of phenomenal concepts. There is a gap that separates our theoretical from our phenomenal concepts: mastery of theoretical concepts doesn't suffice to confer on a subject mastery of phenomenal concepts. It doesn't follow that the properties that phenomenal concepts pick out are distinct properties from those picked out by our theoretical concepts. Nor does it follow that phenomenal properties are likewise experience-dependent. In fact nothing about the nature of phenomenal properties follows from the nature of phenomenal concepts. Philosophers have been misled by the role that experience plays in possession of phenomenal concepts into thinking that phenomenal properties must also be subject-dependent. There are no subject-dependent properties; at most all that is true is that some of our concepts are experience-dependent.<sup>44</sup>

The second stage in the intentionalist argument purports to show that phenomenal properties are properties belonging to a subject's external environment, which can when all goes well, enter into the contents of our experience. It is this second thesis that carries the weight in the intentionalist argument for subject-independence. The intentionalist claims that experiences get their representational content from the relation a subject stands in to features of his external environment. I can stand in the very same relation as you have stood in and thereby have the same experiences as you. Thus it follows that phenomenal properties are not subject-

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<sup>44</sup> Tye, Papineau and Loar have all run arguments along these lines. Peacocke (1989a) also worries that any argument for subjective facts might rest on a sense-reference conflation.



dependent. There is nothing about phenomenal properties that essentially involves a subject and its point of view.

Such an argument is to be found in Dretske (1995: ch.3). He imagines a scientist called Mary who wants to know what it is like to experience electric fields. Mary has complete knowledge of electromagnetic phenomena, but she doesn't have an electromagnetic sense so she cannot experience electromagnetic fields for herself. Does this mean there is something about electric fields Mary doesn't know, namely what it is like to experience them?

Dretske thinks not. Dogfish sense their environments by means of an electromagnetic sense. Dretske claims that Mary can know what the experiences of the dogfish are like. Thus she can know what it is like to experience electric fields:

"If the dogfish's electromagnetic sense is functioning normally, then it is representing patterns in the electric field...Mary, who knows all about electric fields and how fish, rocks and plants deform them, could draw an exact picture of the field. What she draws (describes, represents or knows) about the electric field is what the fish senses about the electric field in which it finds itself. What she draws...is what the fish senses...Mary draws, describes, represents and knows what it is like to be a dogfish (veridically) sensing that kind of field." (Dretske, 1995: 84-5)

Dretske's reasoning seems to be that once Mary knows what the dogfish is sensing when it is sensing veridically, she can represent the very same thing. This will give her knowledge of what the experiences of the dogfish are like. If Dretske is right, one need not have the distinctively dogfish-like way of experiencing the world in order to know what dogfish-experiences are like. There is nothing essentially dogfish-like about dogfish experiences. The radically different sensory constitution of dogfish doesn't even hinder our

knowledge of what dogfish experiences are like. All we need to know to acquire the latter kind of knowledge is what dogfish represent when their electromagnetic sense is functioning normally. Knowing what dogfish normally represent when they are using their electromagnetic sense will tell us what dogfish-experiences are like.

The crucial premise in this argument claims that phenomenal properties are “the properties the object being perceived has when the perception is veridical” (Dretske, 1995: 84). By establishing which properties the dogfish represents when its perceptual experiences are veridical we can know what its experiences are like.

Tye holds a similar position. He proposes a version of the causal covariation theory of representational content. On this view of representational content, an experience represents a phenomenal property by tracking this property under normal or optimal conditions. Tye offers the following analysis of a representational state *S* with the content that *P*:

“If optimal conditions were to obtain, *S* would be tokened in *c* iff *P* were the case; moreover, in these circumstances, *S* would be tokened in *c* because *P* is the case.” (Tye, 2000: 136)

Suppose that *P* is the pleasing to the ear sound a saxophone makes when it is being played well. Tye has it that an experience *S* would represent *P* iff when optimal conditions obtain there is indeed a saxophone being played well. On this account of representational content, phenomenal properties belong to the things which an experience would causally covary with under optimal conditions. Again we can know what a creature’s experience is like just by establishing which properties this experience causally covaries with under optimal conditions.

The intentionalist's argument doesn't establish the subject-independence of phenomenal properties. Phenomenologists could agree that we can know what an experience is like just by knowing what it is an experience represents. They can nevertheless hold that what our experiences represent is, in general, something subject-dependent. Both Husserlian and existential phenomenologists take intentionality to derive in some way from a conscious subject. We have seen how Husserl takes intentionality to originate with the conscious subject conceived of as a self-sufficient, self-contained entity capable of existence independently, apart from the world. For the existential phenomenologist intentionality has its origins in our existence as persons who know how to find their way about in the world. The phenomenologist can agree that an experience has its phenomenal properties in virtue of what this experience represents. However they also hold that what our experiences represent is something subject-dependent.<sup>45</sup>

So the claim that an experience seems or feels a certain way in virtue of what it represents does nothing to establish the subject-independence of phenomenal properties. Certainly the above line of argument would, if successful, undercut the claim of the qualia-realist that phenomenal properties belong to experiences intrinsically. It doesn't however establish the conclusion that phenomenal properties are subject-independent. These

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<sup>45</sup> This last point is somewhat complicated by the existential phenomenologist's realism argued for in chapter 2. There it was argued that entities exist independently of our understanding of them. The claim that "entities exist independently of us" was understood as the claim that space and time do not depend on us for their existence. What existential phenomenology doesn't allow is the possibility of experiencing entities independently of our understanding. It is true that one of the recurrent themes in the writings of Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty is the experience of nature as radically indifferent to us and our projects. When Heidegger notoriously claimed "the nothing noths" in his essay 'What is Metaphysics?' he was attempting to describe this type of experience. Such experiences do not show that we can experience entities independent of our understanding of them. On the contrary to experience something as indifferent to us is precisely to understand it in a certain way. Thus existential phenomenologists are no less committed to the subject-dependence of the objects of experience. The objects we experience depend on us because they depend on our ways of understanding them.

are distinct questions, and the above line of argument does not establish the latter conclusion.

The dispute between the phenomenologist and the intentionalist will only be resolved once we have an adequate account of intentionality. The phenomenologist claims that no naturalistic account of intentionality will succeed that fails to recognise the property of purporting to refer as explanatorily basic. I suspect they are right about this, but this is not something I can argue for here.

This section has shown the intentionalist argument for subject-independence is at best inconclusive. The remainder of the chapter has made a positive argument for the subject-dependence of phenomenal properties while at the same time agreeing with the intentionalist that phenomenal properties are representational properties. I have sought to show how representational properties can be subject-dependent. In the next chapter I will explore how this account can be further developed to explain why it is that there is something our experiences seem or feel like to us.

## Chapter 5

### Introduction

I have been arguing that phenomenology can help us to diagnose why naturalistic accounts of the conscious mind run into an explanatory gap. My aim is to argue for the possibility of a naturalised phenomenology which can help the naturalist to close this gap. At the end of the last chapter a worry was raised that the phenomenological account of why things feel and seem as they do leaves untouched a central question that naturalists have addressed when thinking about the explanatory gap. The ideas I have introduced from phenomenology do not explain why there should be something rather than nothing it is like for a subject to undergo a conscious experience. This chapter will be concerned with introducing the phenomenologist's answer to this question.

I shall describe experiences that seem or feel a certain way to their subjects as experiences that have "phenomenal character". The question this chapter has as its concern asks what it is for an experience to have a phenomenal character. In section 1 I propose an answer to this question. There I will argue that an experience seems or feels a certain way to a subject when a subject can have knowledge of an experience he is undergoing from the inside without having recourse to observation or inference. I shall call knowledge of this kind "first-person knowledge". A subject can have first-person knowledge of his experiences I shall claim because they seem or feel a certain way to him. Thus an answer to the question of what it is for an experience to have a phenomenal character, I will suggest, lies with an explanation of how we can have first-person knowledge of our experiences.

In section 2 I set out two conceptions of phenomenal character both of

which are agreed that phenomenal properties are nothing over and above representational properties. The first claims that phenomenal character is something *of* which a subject is conscious. The second denies that phenomenal character is something of which the subject is conscious, claiming instead that it is something *with* which the subject is conscious. We shall see that the first conception of phenomenal character marries up with higher-order theories of consciousness which claim that an experience is phenomenally conscious only if the subject represents that she is undergoing this experience.<sup>1</sup> The second conception of phenomenal character fits with an intentionalist account of phenomenal consciousness. I shall argue that standard intentionalist accounts of consciousness do not give us a satisfying answer to the question of how we can know our experiences from the inside. I look to an account of Brentano to see if he succeeds in finessing the problem. However I find his account wanting.

In section 3 I introduce an intentionalist account of phenomenal consciousness which originates in Husserl, and was developed in greater depth by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. It claims that every conscious experience has built into it a variety of self-consciousness. Sartre calls the kind of self-consciousness in question “pre-reflective self-consciousness” to distinguish it from self-consciousness that is the outcome of introspective reflection. It is this second proposal which I will argue supplies the intentionalist with an account of phenomenal character. On this view an experience has phenomenal character when it is pre-reflectively self-conscious.

By section 4 we will have two distinct accounts of phenomenal character

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<sup>1</sup> Higher-order theories come in different forms. Lycan (1996) defends a version of higher-order perception theory. Rosenthal (1986; 1990/1997 & 1993) and Carruthers (2000) defend different versions of higher-order thought theory.



before us. The first proposal defended by higher-order theories of consciousness says an experience has phenomenal character when a subject represents herself having this experience. The second says an experience has phenomenal character when this experience has built into it pre-reflective self-consciousness. Section 4 presents an argument from Sartre for the conclusion that conscious experiences are also pre-reflectively self-conscious. If successful this argument will serve to further motivate the phenomenologist's account of phenomenal character over the rival proposal of the higher-order theorist. We will see that Sartre's argument succeeds against higher-order theories of consciousness only by assuming that there are no unconscious mental states. This is of course an assumption that higher-order theories reject.

In section 5 I offer an alternative argument against higher-order theories based on Sartre's argument. Sartre's argument is directed at theories which equate self-consciousness with self-knowledge. I argue that higher-order theories fit this description, and that there are certain features of self-consciousness which theories of this kind cannot accommodate. I conclude by showing how the account of phenomenal character I have proposed helps us to clarify the charge that naturalists cannot admit the existence of subjective facts.

### 1. Pinpointing the Problem

The question that will occupy us in this chapter is why it should be that there is something rather than nothing it is like for a subject to undergo a conscious experience. The difference between experiences there is something it is like to have, and experiences there is nothing it is like to have, turns on the presence or absence of a certain kind of consciousness I have

been calling “phenomenal consciousness”. I shall begin by considering how to draw the contrast between those states that are phenomenally conscious and those that are not.

This problem is particularly urgent for any intentionalist account of phenomenal properties which says that an experience seems or feels a certain way for a subject in virtue of its representational properties. All kinds of systems and devices represent the world as being a certain way that lack phenomenal consciousness. My homeostatic system represents the level of glucose in my blood, but the representations it produces will not be ones which make me conscious of anything. What distinguishes cases of representation like this from the kinds of representational states that do make me conscious of something? By endorsing intentionalism I have denied that there is anything over and above an experience’s representational properties that gives an experience its phenomenal character. This leaves me needing to explain what differentiates those representational properties that give a representational state its phenomenal character from those that do not. The objection raised at the end of the last chapter was that so far, the phenomenologically-inspired version of intentionalism I have proposed hasn’t given us an answer to this question.

I believe an answer to our question lies in the peculiar kind of first-person knowledge a subject can have of his phenomenally conscious mental states. A subject can know what it is like to undergo an experience from the inside, which is to say that a subject can know what an experience is like just by having that experience. If an experience doesn’t have any phenomenal character, a subject cannot know the experience from the inside – he cannot know the experience just by having it. Perhaps we can say that the difference between representational states that make a creature conscious

of something and those that do not lies in the epistemic access we have to the former but not the latter. We can say that there is something it is like for a creature to be in a representational state R when a creature is in a position to know that it is in R “from the inside”, just by tokening R. There is nothing it is like for a creature to be in a representational state R when a creature cannot have this kind of first-person knowledge of R.<sup>2</sup>

I shall say that a creature can have first person knowledge of a representational state R if R meets the following two, closely related, conditions:

- (1) A creature X can have *direct* knowledge that it is in R without first having to form observations either of itself, or of anything else, and
- (2) A creature X can have *immediate* knowledge that it is in R, which is to say that X can know that it is in R without performing any conscious act of inference.

First-person knowledge is introspective knowledge: the kind of knowledge a subject can achieve by deliberately reflecting on or paying attention to a thought or experience he is having at the time.<sup>3</sup> When we focus on an itch, tingle or pain we thereby make the sensation we are undergoing into the

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<sup>2</sup> Some might complain that this proposal ignores Block's (1995/1997) distinction between “access” consciousness and “phenomenal consciousness”. A state is access conscious for Block if ‘it is poised for free use in reasoning and for direct “rational control” of speech and action’. (*ibid*, 382) I have stipulated that something akin to this condition must be met if an experience is to have *phenomenal* character. The only way I can see to defend Block's distinction is to accept the existence of what Block calls “p-conscious properties” which are distinct from any cognitive, intentional or functional property (see Block, 1995/1997: 381). In chapter 4 I proposed a version of intentionalism which denies that p-conscious properties are distinct from intentional properties. Thus I reject Block's distinction because it seems to require a commitment to phenomenal properties conceived of as something over and above an experience's intentional properties.

<sup>3</sup> Whether this act of reflection is best understood as a kind of inner-perception is a question I shall ignore for now. For a defence of an understanding of introspection along these lines see Armstrong (1968) and for some trenchant and to my mind persuasive criticism see Shoemaker (1994/1996, lecture 2). I will postpone discussion of this question till later in section 5.

object of our reflection. Normally, we will in this way arrive at knowledge of what we feel: we will come to know that we are undergoing a particular sensory experience. In a similar fashion we can make a belief the object of an act of reflection: I might consider for instance whether I believe that Tony Blair can be trusted. By considering my attitude to this proposition I come to know something about myself, I come to know whether this is something I believe.

It is only my own experiences which I can know in the first-person: no other subject can know my experiences from the inside, and nor can I know of another subject's experiences in this way.<sup>4</sup> The difference between first-person knowledge and what I shall call "third-person knowledge" can be traced to a difference in the warrant I have for these respective types of knowledge-claims. The warrant I have for my first-person knowledge-claims derives from my experience's phenomenal character, from the way my experiences present the world as seeming to me. What I know directly and immediately is the way an experience presents the world as seeming. The warrant I have for the claims I make about the experiences of another person, come from the observations I form of that person and the inferences I make based on those observations. I can know I am feeling silk just by having an experience of the feel of the silk, but I cannot know that another person is feeling silk except by seeing them pick it up and feel it or by having them tell me this is what they are experiencing. I cannot know the experiences of another person from the inside; only they can know their experiences in this way. Hence the claims we make about another's persons

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<sup>4</sup> This is certainly not to deny that I can have knowledge of another subject's experiences. What I cannot have is first-person knowledge of their experiences. I will call the knowledge I can of another person's mind, "third-person knowledge". We shall see later that third-person knowledge is distinguished from first-person knowledge by the kind of warrant I have for assertions made in the first-person.

experiences do not derive their warrant from an experience's phenomenal character in the way that the claims we make about our own experiences do.

I have proposed that we use the first-person knowledge a subject can have of his experiences as an initial way of distinguishing those representational states that have a phenomenal character from those that do not. We can now see how this might work. The states which I can know directly and immediately are states which I can know from the inside just by having them. I can know of these states just by having them because these states have phenomenal character. It is because there is a way these states seem or feel to me that I can know them from the inside just by having them. If there is no way a state seems or feels to me when it occurs I will not be able to know it in this way, just by having it.

If we combine this suggestion with the intentionalist thesis that the way an object seems to a subject is fully determined by its representational properties what results is the following thesis:

(KREP) A thought or experience R presents the world as seeming a certain way when a subject can have first-person knowledge of R's representational properties.

(KREP) claims we can know what it is like to undergo an experience from the inside, and this is surely right: we do for the most part know what it is like to undergo our own experiences just by having them. It strikes us as far-fetched to raise doubts about my sincere claim that "I am currently in pain".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Wittgenstein (1953: 246) famously goes as far as to claim that it is for this reason a mistake to talk of a subject's *knowing* he is in pain at all. We talk of knowledge only where there is room for doubt, but since there is little or no room for doubt in cases like this one, it makes no sense to talk of a subject's knowing he is in pain. If Wittgenstein is right (KREP) looks misconceived: (KREP) talks of us having knowledge of our experiences but Wittgenstein tells us such talk is at best misplaced.

Utterances of the form "I know I am experiencing x" seem to me to be meaningful and to carry information that isn't carried simply by saying "I am experiencing x". I take our talk of

This, I take it, is because we have a warrant for such assertions that derives from the consciousness that attaches to them. To doubt a sincere utterance of “I am currently in pain” is to question whether a person does indeed have warrant for making such an utterance. This is something it doesn’t occur to us to do because a person that says sincerely that they are in pain is a person that is conscious of being in pain. Just by consciously experiencing pain such a person has warrant for saying they are in pain.

(KREP) doesn’t attribute infallibility to a subject: it allows that a subject may well be mistaken when he says he is feeling something painful. The subject may for instance be hypnotised so that he believes that lemons taste sweet. We wouldn’t say that such a subject knows that the lemon he has just eaten tastes sweet to him, since beliefs formed as a result of hypnotism have not been formed in the right way to count as knowledge. (KREP) doesn’t require us to say that this subject knows that when he tastes a lemon, the experience he has just had is of something that tastes sweet. (KREP) claims only that a subject *could* know this in a direct and immediate way. Saying that a subject could have first-person knowledge of his experiences is quite consistent with allowing that a subject may on occasion fail to achieve such knowledge.

One difficulty for (KREP) is that it seems to conflict with the transparency of experience which the intentionalist is so keen to stress.<sup>6</sup> It suggests that

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first-person knowledge to be significant because it communicates something of the distinctive kind of warrant that attaches to first-person knowledge as contrasted with third-person knowledge – knowledge of another person’s experiences. For a further discussion of Wittgenstein on first-person knowledge with which I am in full agreement see Siewert (1998: pp.27-33).

<sup>6</sup> For the use that intentionalists make of transparency, see Harman (1990/1997) and Tye (1992). Martin (2003) uses transparency type considerations to raise difficulties for an intentionalist account of conscious experience. It should be noted that Tye isn’t as careful as he might have been in his discussion of transparency. In a much quoted passage Tye tells us that when he found himself transfixed by the blue of the Pacific Ocean what he was enjoying was “an aspect of the content of his experience” (*ibid*, 160). If our experiences have the contents they do in virtue of their representational properties, it follows that what Tye was



when a subject gains introspective knowledge of her experiences she comes to know the representational properties of her experience. The intentionalist will object that when one introspects, one doesn't find anything like an experience and its representational properties. Instead one finds items belonging to the public world and their properties. This suggests that the knowledge we gain of our experiences through introspection isn't knowledge of an experience's representational properties, but is rather knowledge of whatever is represented.<sup>7</sup>

I take it that accommodating something like this worry is the motivation for Dretske's (1995: ch.2) accounts of introspection as "displaced perception". He says that we come to know what an experience is like through the awareness we have the objects of our experience in much the same way as we come to know of our weight by means of bathroom scales.<sup>8</sup> We do not come to know what an experience is like by coming to know of its representational properties, but only by coming to know what an experience represents.

If (KREP) is to be made compatible with transparency we must modify its

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enjoying was the representational properties of his experience.

I shall argue that if we are to do full justice to the claim that experiences are transparent we must think of introspection as making us aware of whatever it is our experience represents. Dretske offers an account of introspection which acknowledges this point. I take Dretske to be committed to denying that "what is immediately accessible to consciousness" to borrow Tye's words, is an experience's content, though I have not managed to find anywhere where he says as much. In any case, I shall say that it is not an experience's representational properties that are immediately accessible to me when I introspect. An experience's representational properties are properties of the experience *qua* representational vehicle, and I have no access to those properties. Rather what is made accessible to me when I introspect is whatever it is, if anything, that my experience represents at the time. This will mean revising the formulation of KREP somewhat as we shall see in due course.

<sup>7</sup> This characterisation of introspective knowledge doesn't require us to deny that there is any difference between first-person and third-person knowledge. It can allow that we know our own experiences directly and immediately whereas we know the experiences of others only via observations. For an account of introspection along the line just sketched which nevertheless recognises the distinction between first-person and third-person knowledge, see Evans (1982, ch.7, §7.4) and Dretske (1995, ch.2, pp.51-4).

<sup>8</sup> Dretske (1995: 41)

formulation to allow that what a subject knows in the first-person isn't an experience's representational properties, but is rather whatever the experience represents by means of those properties. I propose then that we revise (KREP) as follows:

(KREP\*): An experience E seems or feels a certain way iff a subject can have first-person knowledge of whatever E represents.

We should now have a better sense of the question this chapter will address and the strategy I will employ for answering it. The question asks: what is the difference between representational states that make a subject conscious of something and those that do not? I have said that a representational state makes a subject conscious of something – it presents the world as seeming or feeling some way – when it can be known from the inside just by being in it. My strategy for answering our question is to establish just how it is that the representational states which make us conscious of something can be known from the inside. How is it that a subject can know he is in a particular representational state just by being in that representational state? Answering this question will tell us what it is for a representational state to have phenomenal character.

In the next section we shall see that there are two possible answers to this question. The first appeals to something extrinsic to a representational state to explain how it gets its phenomenal character. The second answer makes phenomenal character something intrinsic to a representational state. The first task we face then will be to decide between these two possibilities.

## 2. Two Conceptions of Phenomenal Character

(KREP) in both of its formulations is consistent with two distinct ways of thinking about an experience's phenomenal character.<sup>9</sup> We can think of phenomenal character as something *of* which the subject is consciously aware. Alternatively we can think of it as something *with* which a subject is consciously aware of the world. Any answer to our question of why there is something rather than nothing an experience is like must decide between these two conceptions of phenomenal character.

To get a better fix on these two conceptions consider by way of illustration the experience one has when tasting honey. The first conception of phenomenal character has it that the sweet taste is something of which the subject is conscious. The sweetness the subject experiences is itself something *of* which the subject is conscious.<sup>10</sup> On the second conception of phenomenal character, the sweetness is something the subject experiences in virtue of his sensory experience's intentional content. As such it is something *with* which the subject is conscious of the honey. The conscious experience is understood as that by means of which a subject's consciousness is directed towards a particular object, in this case the honey.

The first conception of phenomenal character is naturally combined with

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<sup>9</sup> I am indebted here to Rowlands (2001, ch.6). Rowlands notes that "Consciousness can be both object and act of experience. Metaphorically speaking, consciousness can be both the directing of awareness and that upon which experience is directed. Consciousness can include both experiential features of which we are aware, and experiential features with which we are aware." (*op cit*, 122 ) While Rowlands recognises that there are these two distinct ways of conceiving of consciousness he argues against what he calls an "objectualist" conception of phenomenal character as something of which the subject is aware.

<sup>10</sup> A proponent of the first conception of phenomenology isn't committed to the existence of irreducibly phenomenal properties of the kind discussed in chapter 3. He could say that when a subject is conscious of an experience's phenomenology he brings to bear certain recognitional capacities. He might be recognising for instance the property in virtue of which something is experienced as tasting sweet. On this view an experience seems or feels a certain way by being made available to certain recognitional capacities in virtue of which a creature can discriminate among an experience's representational contents. For an account along these lines see Carruthers (2001).

higher-order theories of consciousness. Higher-order theories claim that a mental state has phenomenal character only if a subject is conscious of being in that mental state. A perceptual experience won't seem or feel any way to a subject unless the subject is conscious of having this experience. A perceptual experience might well represent a creature's local environment as being a certain way; it may for instance represent some object as coloured. The experience the subject is having of a coloured object won't seem a certain way to the creature unless it is conscious of having this experience. On this account of consciousness, phenomenal character makes a subject conscious of things in her environment only if she is first conscious of having an experience of those things. It is only if a subject is conscious of having this experience that she will enjoy an experience that seems or feels a certain way.

The second conception fits with the intentionalist account of consciousness, according to which phenomenal character is something *with* which the subject is conscious of things in its environment, but is not something *of* which the subject is conscious. The intentionalist claims that conscious experiences are nothing but vehicles for making a subject conscious of things in its local environment. The experience isn't itself something of which the subject is conscious until the subject turns his gaze inward, and in the process makes an experience the explicit object of his attention. Otherwise his attention is with whatever he is experiencing.

However the intentionalist still owes us an account of how a representational state can be known from the inside. Tye (1995) gives us what looks like an answer to this question. He tells us that an experience has phenomenal character when its content is Poised Abstract Nonconceptual Intentional Content, which he abbreviates as PANIC.

Representations that differ in their PANICs differ in their phenomenal character. A representation has a content that is poised when it 'stands ready and in position to make an impact on the belief/desire system.' (Tye, 1995: 138)

However to account for knowability from the inside in terms of poise is to presuppose what one sets out to explain. If am right an experience exhibits what Tye calls "poise" only because it has phenomenal character. Appealing to poise cannot explain what it is for a state to possess phenomenal character. Poise has built into it the property it is supposed to explain. At least this will follow if we accept (KREP\*) – the claim that what it is for an experience to present the world as seeming a certain way is for that experience to be knowable from the inside.

Higher-order theories are designed to answer the question of what makes a state knowable from the inside. They say a state is like something for a subject when a creature is either disposed to produce, or actually produces, a higher-order representation of a thought or experience he is having. In this respect, higher-order theories of consciousness look to have an advantage over intentionalism. We shall see however that this advantage is only superficial. Although Tye's account is unsatisfactory, I will suggest that the phenomenologists succeed where he fails. Thus it will turn out that we have two rival accounts of what it is for a state to have phenomenal character.

The story begins with Brentano. Following the famous chapter on intentionality in his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, Brentano set about defining what it is for a thought or experience to be conscious.<sup>11</sup> Our conscious thoughts and experience he argues are directed towards two

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<sup>11</sup> Brentano's own view is introduced in §7 of Chapter 2 entitled 'A Presentation and the Presentation of that Presentation are Given in One and the Same Act.'

objects. First we are conscious of what Brentano calls a “primary object”. We can call this kind of consciousness “outer consciousness” since it is consciousness that is directed outwards to something extra-mental in the world. The primary object is the intentional object which a thought or experience is directed towards. Drawing on Husserl I suggested in the previous chapter that we think of the intentional object as an object the thought or experience purports to represent, where “object” is to be construed in a broad sense as including a thing, event, process, condition or state of affairs.

Brentano claims that in addition to being directed towards a primary object conscious experiences can also be directed upon themselves. Consider the experience of hearing a sound. The sound is the primary object, and the experience of hearing the sound is a secondary object. An experience represents a primary object (the sound) by purporting to refer to a sound originating from something in the subject’s local environment. At the same time it represents a secondary object, its own occurrence, by being directed upon itself. The consciousness a subject has of an experience she is having we can call “inner consciousness”. Brentano’s claim is that a single representational state can instantiate both inner and outer consciousness.

Does this Brentanian account of consciousness supply the intentionalist with an account of phenomenal character? Let us consider first how Brentano might have understood phenomenal character. When an experience represents its own occurrence, a subject thereby has epistemic access to this experience from the inside; she can know that she is the subject of this experience just by having it. I said earlier that a subject has this kind of epistemic access only if her experiences manifest a phenomenal character. Brentano might have concluded then that an experience has a



phenomenal character only when it represents its own occurrence. An experience that doesn't represent its own occurrence won't seem or feel anyway to the subject undergoing this experience.<sup>12</sup>

Consider by way of illustration, my experience of hearing a blast of sound from a trumpet. A Brentanian account of consciousness would claim that at the same time as I hear the trumpet my act of hearing is directed upon itself. By being directed upon itself my experience makes me conscious of its occurrence. Brentano might have said that it is the consciousness I have of an experience's occurrence that makes an experience's occurrence like something for me. When I am not conscious of my experience's occurrence, I can hear a trumpet without it seeming or feeling any particular way to me.

Does an account of phenomenal character along these lines provide the intentionalist with an answer to the question of when a representational state instantiates a phenomenal character? Recall that the intentionalist conceives of phenomenology as something with which, but not of which the subject is conscious. Is the Brentanian view of phenomenal character just sketched consistent with intentionalism?

Suppose we think of phenomenal character as something of which a subject is conscious. Then it will be natural to think that it is only by means of an additional representational state that an experience could possibly have phenomenal character. For it is only by means of an additional representational state that a subject could be conscious of an experience's phenomenal character. Brentano denies that a subject's experience needs to be accompanied by a higher-order representation in order to have a phenomenal character. He claims that a single representational state can be directed at something in a creature's environment, and at the same time also

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<sup>12</sup> For a recent defence of such a view see Kriegel (forthcoming)

be directed upon itself. It might be thought that because Brentano rejects a higher-order account of phenomenal character he must instead hold an intentionalist view of phenomenal character.

A moment's reflection will suffice to show that such a conclusion is mistaken. The Brentanian account of phenomenal character sketched above is in important respects different from that proposed by higher-order theories,<sup>13</sup> but Brentano shares with these theories a view of phenomenal character as something *of* which a subject is conscious. Brentano's theory of consciousness and higher-order theories both agree that a representational state has phenomenal character only if a subject is conscious of being in that representational state. Brentano claims that when an experience represents its own occurrence the result is that the subject becomes conscious *of* having this experience: a subject becomes conscious of the experience as a secondary object. The experience becomes an object (a secondary object) for the subject in addition to whatever extra-mental object the experience is representing at the time. Thus Brentano would appear to be committed to the claim that (*pace* intentionalism) a subject is conscious of his experience's phenomenal character.

The intentionalist claims that conscious experiences are something of which a subject is conscious only when the subject engages in an act of

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<sup>13</sup> Higher-order theories conceive of consciousness as a relational property which is instantiated when an appropriate relation holds between a first-order representational state and a higher-order representation. Consciousness is conceived of as a higher-order monitoring of lower level states and processes. Brentano is committed to a one-level account of consciousness which makes consciousness into an intrinsic property of at least some mental states. According to his account a mental state is conscious when it is directed upon itself at the same time as it is directed at something in the world: a representational state needn't actually or potentially stand in a relation to any other mental state in order to instantiate consciousness and phenomenal character. It should be noted that Brentano argued that consciousness was a property of *all* mental states. In other words he denied that there are any unconscious mental states. Kriegel (2003, pp114-116) argues that Brentano might have said all *occurrent* mental states are conscious, making the claim less susceptible to obvious counterexamples.

introspection. Otherwise the subject is conscious of whatever his experience represents. Thus the intentionalist wants to combine the following seemingly incompatible theses:

- (1) Mental states that present the world as seeming a certain way can be known in the first person.
- (2) It is possible for a mental state M to be conscious, although a creature is not conscious *of* itself being in M.

Theses (1) and (2) seem to conflict; a mental state that can be known in the first-person must be one to which the subject has epistemic access; it must somehow present itself to a subject from the inside. How can a subject have epistemic access to a mental state without the subject also being conscious of itself in this mental state?

I will suggest in the next section that phenomenologists may have found a solution to this problem, thereby supplying the intentionalist with an account of when a representational state can be said to have phenomenal character. This will still leave us needing to choose between the two accounts of phenomenal character introduced in this section. In section 4 I will offer further arguments against the first conception of phenomenal character by arguing against higher-order and Brentanian theories of consciousness both of which subscribe to this view of phenomenal character.

### 3. Consciousness and Self-Consciousness

Phenomenologists claim that every conscious experience has built into it a variety of self-consciousness. We saw in chapter 4 that the phenomenologist claims our experiences are intentional before a subject takes up any relation to the world. The phenomenologist says something

analogous about being self-conscious.<sup>14</sup> He denies that a subject's experiences are made self-conscious by a subject reflecting on his experiences, but equally he will reject a theory along Brentanian lines which says that our experiences are made self-conscious when a mental state is directed upon itself. More generally this theory denies that self-consciousness can be understood as any kind of relation between a subject and her mental states. If it is a mistake to conceive of self-consciousness as a relation between a subject and her mental states, it is equally a mistake to view self-consciousness as a relation between a representational state and itself. Our experiences are already self-conscious before the subject takes up any relation to them.<sup>15</sup> Sartre has explained the idea as follows: "This self-consciousness we ought to consider not as a new consciousness, but as the only mode of existence which is possible for a consciousness of something." (Sartre, 1943/2000: xxx)

The phenomenologist makes an important distinction between pre-reflective and reflective *self-consciousness*. It is reflective self-consciousness that philosophers commonly discuss when they are concerned with self-consciousness.<sup>16</sup> Reflective self-consciousness is the consciousness a subject has of herself through introspective reflection. When a subject introspects she forms a belief that she is herself in a mental state M. I will have more to say about what this involves in a moment. Suffice it to say that the phenomenologist is *not* claiming that conscious

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<sup>14</sup> I will support my claims primarily by reference to Sartre, but it should be noted that there are similar ideas to be found in Husserl as Zahavi (1999) has persuasively argued. I will discuss the views of the other phenomenologists in chapter 7 where I develop a naturalistic account of phenomenal character.

<sup>15</sup> This doesn't mean that the phenomenologist thinks of self-consciousness as primitive and unanalysable: we shall see in section 5 that the phenomenologists have plenty to say about what it is for a mental state to be intrinsically self-conscious.

<sup>16</sup> Recently pre-reflective self-consciousness has received some attention under the heading of non-conceptual self-consciousness, see for instance Bermúdez (1998: ch.5-8) and Hurley (1998: ch.4).

experiences have built into them reflective self-consciousness. He claims that a subject can be conscious *of* herself as being in a mental state M only because M is already accompanied by a kind of self-consciousness. I shall call the kind of self-consciousness in question “pre-reflective self-consciousness”. It is pre-reflective self-consciousness which it is claimed forms a part of every conscious experience. Before I consider the phenomenologist’s argument for this claim we need to get a firmer grip on the difference between reflective and pre-reflective self-consciousness. This will be my aim in the remainder of this section.

Reflective self-consciousness attaches to the judgement a subject makes when she self-ascribes some thought or experience she is having. When a subject self-ascribes a conscious state or activity M she judges that she herself is in a mental state M. I have spoken of the subject judging that “she herself” is in M to capture the fact that the judgement the subject makes is one she would express in the first-person. It is a judgement which if I were making I would express by saying “I am in M”. I will follow Castañeda by putting an asterisk beside a pronoun to signal cases of first-person reference. Thus I will henceforth abbreviate “she herself” as “she\*” and “he himself” as “he\*”. When a subject self-ascribes a mental state M she judges that she\* is in M.

To see that a subject must be reflectively self-conscious when a subject judges that she\* is in M, notice that the content of S’s judgement is not <I am S and S is in M>. When S self-ascribes a mental state M she doesn’t need to first identify an individual S and then establish that it is S that is in M.<sup>17</sup> S

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<sup>17</sup> To borrow terminology from Evans (1982), S’s judgement that she\* is in M is “identification free”. Evans applies the term to knowledge that is arrived at in a certain way but I do not think I am distorting the concept by taking it to apply to judgements. According to Evans knowledge is identification free if “(1) it is not identification dependent and (2) it is based on a way of gaining information from objects” (Evans, 1982: 181). While knowledge of a proposition that ‘x is M’ is *identification dependent* if it is inferred from the propositions that ‘y

doesn't need to take this complicated route because when she thinks about herself in the first-person (as she does when she judges that she\* is in M) she cannot fail to realise that she is thinking about herself.<sup>18</sup> It doesn't make sense for her to think that 'she\* is in M' and to also think 'someone is in M but is it myself that is in M?'<sup>19</sup> This is because when a subject thinks of herself by means of "I" she is self-conscious. The kind of self-consciousness that accompanies first-person thoughts of this kind (thoughts the subject has in the course of self-ascribing a mental or bodily state) is what I am calling "reflective self-consciousness".

Let us henceforth conceive of "reflective self-consciousness" as the self-consciousness that accompanies a person's thought that she\* is in a mental state M, in virtue of which a person cannot fail to realise that she is thinking about herself. I shall henceforth call thoughts that are reflectively self-conscious "I-thoughts". Modifying Rosenthal's (1990/1997) terminology somewhat we can characterise reflective self-consciousness as a transitive form of *self*-consciousness. When a subject makes a judgement that she\* is having an experience M she predicates a property of herself, the property of having M. Reflective self-consciousness is consciousness that one is oneself the subject to whom this predicate pertains.

I have said above that the phenomenologists deny that pre-reflective self-consciousness is a relation between a subject and some mental state she is

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is M' and 'x = y'. Knowledge is identification free then, if the subject can know that x is M without first establishing that 'y is M' and 'x = y'.

<sup>18</sup> To use an example from Castañeda (1966), there is a difference between thinking that the Editor of Soul is a millionaire and thinking I am a millionaire even when one is the Editor of Soul. One can fail to know that when one thinks of the Editor of Soul one is thinking about oneself, but this is not true when one thinks of oneself by means of "I". One cannot fail to realise that it is oneself that one is thinking of when one entertains a thought in the first-person. I will suggest that this is because such thoughts are had self-consciously.

<sup>19</sup> Shoemaker (1968) describes this semantic phenomenon as "immunity to error through misidentification relative to the first person pronoun" ("IEM"). I shall follow Shoemaker in taking IEM to be a feature peculiar to self-consciousness. I shall return to IEM in more detail in section 4.



in at the time. They deny then that pre-reflective self-consciousness is a transitive form of self-consciousness. If pre-reflective self-consciousness isn't a transitive form of self-consciousness might we instead characterise it as an *intransitive* form of self-consciousness?

Kriegel (2004) argues for the existence of something he calls "intransitive state *self-consciousness*". Rosenthal (1990/1997) introduced the notion of "intransitive *state consciousness*" to characterise our use of the term "conscious" when we say that a token thought or experience has the property of being a *conscious* thought or experience.<sup>20</sup> Kriegel argues that a subject can instantiate this property only if she is in a mental state that is intransitive state *self-conscious*. Substitute "intransitive state *self-consciousness*" for "pre-reflective self-consciousness", and we get the thesis I have attributed to the phenomenologists that a mental state can be conscious only if it is pre-reflectively self-conscious. Let us consider then whether Kriegel's notion of "intransitive state *self-consciousness*" might give us an initial handle on pre-reflective self-consciousness.

Kriegel introduces the notion of intransitive state *self-consciousness* by asking us to consider the difference between the following two sentences attributing self-consciousness to a subject:

- (1) Smith is self-conscious of thinking that her car is new.
- (2) Smith is self-consciously thinking that her car is new.

The first sentence attributes to Smith what I have called "reflective self-consciousness". I have argued that a subject can be reflective self-conscious only by being in a distinct mental state  $M_2$  which makes her

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<sup>20</sup> Rosenthal goes on to argue that it is a relational property which is instantiated when a mental state is simultaneously accompanied by a higher-order thought. I will have more to say about this later in section 4.

conscious of herself being in a mental state  $M_1$ . Thus (1) describes a case of transitive creature self-consciousness. The second sentence attributes to a subject intransitive state self-consciousness. The self-consciousness which (2) reports, isn't brought about through a distinct act of reflection. The state in virtue of which Smith is self-conscious is one and the same as the state which is her thinking about her new car. We can say that the thought about her new car is a first-order property of Smith, and the self-consciousness is a second-order property of Smith which "modifies", to borrow Kriegel's term, Smith's thinking.

What is it to think or experience self-consciously? It is to be conscious of oneself having a thought or experience. This is not to say that one is conscious of oneself having a thought or experience in the same way as one is conscious of the object of one's thought or experience. The self-consciousness that (2) attributes isn't the result of a distinct act of reflection whereby a subject makes a mental state she is undergoing into the object of her thought. Rather the state in virtue of which Smith is self-conscious is the same state that makes her conscious of her new car. Smith's being self-conscious is a matter of the way in which *she* has this thought. Her self-consciousness modifies the way in which this thought occurs to her, distinguishing it from a thought that is not had self-consciously.

Kriegel has suggested that the kind of self-consciousness (2) describes is best thought of as an "implicit" or "peripheral" consciousness one has of oneself having a conscious thought or experience. When one undergoes a conscious experience one is aware of oneself having this experience. To be aware of oneself having an experience is to be aware of oneself *qua* subject of experience. It is subjects that have or own experiences. The awareness one has of oneself *qua* subject isn't explicit. It would only become explicit if

one could somehow token a thought which targeted the awareness one has of oneself having an experience.<sup>21</sup> We have already seen that intransitive state self-consciousness involves no such act of reflection. Instead the very same experience one is undergoing is such that one is conscious of oneself having it at the same time as one is made conscious of its object. It is this implicit or peripheral consciousness one has of oneself *qua* subject of a thought or experience which Kriegel calls “intransitive state self-consciousness”.

Did the phenomenologists have something similar in mind when they talked of pre-reflective self-consciousness? Sartre will often talk of “consciousness being conscious of itself as consciousness of an object.”<sup>22</sup> Where Sartre talks of “consciousness” I shall instead talk of “subjects of consciousness”. The proposal I am considering takes Sartre to be saying that when a subject is conscious of an object there are two properties instantiated. The first is the property in virtue of which the subject is conscious of an object. I shall call this property “P<sub>1</sub>”. The second is the property in virtue of which the subject is conscious of itself as conscious of an object. Call this second property “P<sub>2</sub>”. The proposal I am considering characterises “P<sub>2</sub>” as a second-order property, a property of P<sub>1</sub>. P<sub>2</sub> characterises the way in which a subject is conscious of an object. It is a property of P<sub>1</sub> which modifies a subject’s consciousness of an object, making the subject conscious of himself having a particular thought or experience.

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<sup>21</sup> It is far from clear that this is something we can do. When Hume worries (to paraphrase) that he can not catch himself without a perception and never can observe anything but perception, it might be thought that what he has noticed is that one can never become aware of himself as the subject of his experiences. As soon as he tries to observe himself having an experience, he becomes the person doing the observing and all he discovers are the mental states that he is undergoing. What Hume cannot observe is himself as the subject that is undergoing those mental states. I will return to this worry at the end of section 5.

<sup>22</sup> This is a formulation that recurs repeatedly in his (1943/2000), see for instance Section 3 of the Introduction titled ‘The Pre-Reflective Cogito and the Being of the Percipere’.

When Sartre says the subject is conscious of himself, he is not saying the subject is himself among the objects he experiences when he has a conscious experience. In fact it is central to Sartre's philosophy to deny that the subject is ever aware of himself as an object. For Sartre consciousness is empty: it is always directed towards something that is not itself. We find here an echo of the intentionalist's claim that phenomenal character is that with which, but not of which the subject is conscious. Sartre generalises this conclusion to claim that there is literally nothing in the mind of which we are conscious. Even when a subject engages in reflection a subject's thinking is directed towards something that is not itself. Introspective reflection issues in knowledge, and knowledge is characterised by a duality of knower and that which is known. When the subject knows itself through introspection "the reflected on must necessarily be the object for the reflected; and this necessarily involves a separation of being" (Sartre, 2000: 151).<sup>23</sup>

In what sense then is a subject conscious of *herself* when she has an experience self-consciously? When one perceives an object one is able to identify that object, singling it out from other objects with which one is simultaneously presented. I take Sartre (and indeed phenomenologists more generally) to be committed to the view that we can single out an object only if we know the object's location in relation to oneself. To know where an object is in relation to oneself one must be conscious of the position of one's body in relation to this object. I also take Sartre to be committed to the view that when I identify an object's position in relation to my body I do not have to identify a body as my own body. The knowledge I have of my own position

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<sup>23</sup> I take Sartre's point to be similar to one that Ryle (1949) makes when he notes that trying to make oneself into the object of one's thought is like trying to jump on one's own shadow. Every time you make the leap your shadow moves away from you, and the same is true of the self. Every time I try to observe myself by engaging in an act of reflection, I myself move out of view as the subject that is doing the observing. Sartre's point seems to be that no person can simultaneously occupy the position of observer and that which is observed.

in space is “identification free” to borrow a term from Evans (1982).<sup>24</sup> I know directly and immediately without having to form any observations of my body its location relative to the object that I perceive. This is because at the same time as I am conscious of an object I am conscious of myself. The consciousness I have of myself is also a consciousness of my body and the way in which the world is presented to it. This consciousness makes it possible for me to know where an object is in relation to me without my first needing to identify my own location.<sup>25</sup>

What I have said so far suffices for us to see that the suggestion from Kriegel that we view pre-reflective self-consciousness as an implicit or peripheral consciousness of self seems to be along the right lines. It is the implicit consciousness a subject has of herself as the subject of an experience which enables her to identify the location of objects relative to her own position in space without first having to identify her own location in space.

I suggest we construe the distinction between reflective and pre-reflective self-consciousness as follows. I have endorsed the intentionalist view that to be conscious is to be in a certain kind of representational state. Expanding on this proposal I suggest we draw the following distinction between types of conscious representational state.

(1) A subject is reflectively self-conscious when she *explicitly* represents that she is the subject of some thought or experience.

(2) A subject is pre-reflectively self-conscious when she *implicitly* represents to herself that she is the subject of some bodily or mental state.

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<sup>24</sup> See footnote 19 for a definition of identification free knowledge.

<sup>25</sup> I discuss this line of reasoning in more detail later in chapter 7.

A subject *explicitly* represents herself when she represents herself as the subject undergoing a conscious state or activity. She explicitly represents herself only by deliberately attending to her conscious states thereby thinking of herself as the subject of some conscious state or activity. What is it for a subject to *implicitly* represent herself? This is a question which will be discussed briefly in chapters 6 & 7, but we are already in a position however to sketch the beginning of an answer to this question. First of all when a subject is implicitly represented she does not figure among the things she represents. I said above that we should understand pre-reflective self-consciousness as *modifying* the consciousness a subject has of an object. I suggested we think of a subject's being conscious of an object as a first-order property of the subject, and pre-reflective self-consciousness as a second-order property of the subject. Thus implicit representation is a property which somehow modifies a representational state which makes a subject conscious of an object.

One possible way to think about a subject's implicitly representing herself is to say that a conscious state isn't just a representation of an object but is a representation of the object as standing in a relation to the subject. I have said that a representational state is somehow modified when it implicitly represents the subject that is in it. The current suggestion is that it is modified in such a way that a subject represents an object as standing in a relation to herself. By representing an object in a relation to herself she is implicitly aware of herself at the same time as she is explicitly aware of the object. Thus we can say that every conscious state has a content of the following form  $R\langle I, f \rangle$ , where 'I' stands for the subject of this conscious state, 'f' for an object the state represents and R for a relation the state represents



as holding between I and f.

How does this distinction between reflective and pre-reflective self-consciousness help us with our question of what it is for an experience to have phenomenal character? I have said that the phenomenologist takes reflective self-consciousness to depend upon pre-reflective self-consciousness. This is to say that one can become reflectively self-conscious only because one is already pre-reflectively self-conscious. On this theory a subject can judge that she\* is in a mental state M only because the mental state M she self-ascribes is already pre-reflectively self-conscious. The judgement the subject makes in self-ascribing a mental state will normally yield first-person knowledge. I have said in section 1 that a subject can have first-person knowledge of a mental state only if that mental state has phenomenal character – if it seems or feels a certain way to its subject. We have just seen that the phenomenologist holds a mental state can be known in the first-person only if it is already pre-reflectively self-conscious. I take this thesis to form the basis for a proposal about what it is for an experience to have phenomenal character. According to this proposal an experience has phenomenal character only if it is pre-reflectively self-conscious. It is only if the subject implicitly represents herself having an experience that the experience she has will seem or feel a certain way.

Such a proposal is consistent with intentionalism: it allows that phenomenal character is something with which we are conscious but not something of which we are conscious. For recall that pre-reflective self-consciousness is not transitive self-consciousness: when an experience is had self-consciously the subject is not explicitly conscious of herself, she is not conscious of herself as the subject having an experience. The subject only becomes explicitly conscious of herself as the subject of an experience

when she makes an experience the object of her attention, through introspection. Recall that this is just what the intentionalist claims about phenomenal character in defending the idea that conscious experiences are not experiences of which the subject is conscious.

The claim that conscious states are pre-reflectively self-conscious explains how a conscious state can seem or feel a certain way without the subject being conscious of this state. The state can seem or feel a certain way because it is had by a subject in such a way that the subject is conscious that she stands in a relation to whatever the state represents. When the subject represents an object as standing in a relation to herself, the state needn't figure among the things of which she is conscious. She can be aware of nothing but the object she represents so long as she is aware of this object as standing in a relation to herself. By representing an object in relation to herself, she becomes aware of being in a particular representational state. She is aware of herself as being conscious of an object, but she is aware of being in this state without actually representing that she is in this state.

We now have two genuinely alternative proposals corresponding to our two conceptions of phenomenal character.

Proposal 1: An experience *E* seems or feels a certain way to me iff *E* is accompanied by a higher-order representation that I am having *E*.

Proposal 2: An experience *E* seems or feels a certain way to me iff *E* is pre-reflectively self-conscious.

In the next section we will see that to defend proposal 2 over proposal 1 it must be shown that reflective self-consciousness depends on pre-reflective self-consciousness. When the phenomenologist claims that reflective self-

consciousness depends on pre-reflective self-consciousness she is saying that a subject couldn't be reflectively self-conscious – she couldn't self-ascribe a mental or bodily state of hers – unless the mental state she was self-ascribing was itself already pre-reflectively self-conscious. I shall call this “the dependence thesis”. The dependence thesis has been asked to do a lot of work in the account of phenomenal character I have just attributed to the phenomenologist. I have said that a state is knowable in the first person when it has phenomenal character. The dependence thesis says that a state is knowable in the first person only if it is pre-reflectively conscious. From these two theses I derived the phenomenologist's account of phenomenal character which says that a state has phenomenal character only if it is had self-consciously (that is to say only if the mental state is pre-reflectively self-conscious).

Proponents of a higher-order theory of consciousness would reject the dependence thesis. They would claim that a subject becomes self-conscious through an act of reflection. Thus a subject doesn't need to already be pre-reflectively self-conscious in order to achieve reflective self-consciousness. If the dependence thesis can be defended this will serve to motivate the phenomenologist's account of phenomenal character over the higher-order theorist (and the Brentanian for that matter). We will have shown that we can account for reflective self-consciousness only by granting that the subject is already pre-reflectively self-conscious. This amounts to conceding that an experience can only be known in the first person if it is pre-reflectively self-conscious. Recall that this is just what the phenomenologist claims when she says that an intentional state has phenomenal character only if it is pre-reflectively self-conscious. Thus by defending the dependence thesis we get an argument for the

phenomenologist's account of phenomenal character. The next section will consider how phenomenologists argue for the dependence thesis.

#### 4. The Dependence Thesis

I shall begin by sketching an outline of an argument for the dependence thesis. The argument proceeds by attempting to show that reflection by a subject on his mental states couldn't possibly make a subject self-conscious.<sup>26</sup> By "reflection" I mean the ability a subject has to introspect, where introspection can be understood either as a form of perception or "internal sense" as it was by Locke or as thought about one's own mental states as it is by Rosenthal (2004).<sup>27</sup> I shall call theories which take self-consciousness to have its origins in reflection "reflection theories". The phenomenologist will argue that self-consciousness cannot originate from a subject observing or thinking about his own mental states. Yet we have seen that when a subject introspects and self-ascribes a mental state he thinks about himself self-consciously. Since this self-consciousness isn't brought about through an act of reflection, the phenomenologist infers that the subject must already be in a mental state that is self-conscious before he introspects. It is this self-consciousness that they call "pre-reflective self-consciousness".

There are a number of points at which this sketch of an argument can be challenged. First the phenomenologist must show that reflection cannot

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<sup>26</sup> I must stress that the following argument doesn't appear anywhere in the phenomenologist's writing, so far as I am aware. I am constructing this argument on the phenomenologist's behalf based on the priority that Sartre and Merleau-Ponty give to the notion of pre-reflective self-consciousness and the treatment these philosophers have been given in secondary literature. See in particular the excellent studies by Wider (1997) and Zahavi (1999).

<sup>27</sup> These are two very different conceptions of introspection but I won't attempt to decide between them at this stage. We shall see that the first conception of introspection is defended by higher-order perception theorists and the second conception of introspection is defended by higher-order thought theories. Both are not without problems as we shall see.

yield self-consciousness. This means showing that self-consciousness cannot come about either by a subject observing her own mental states or by a subject thinking about her own mental states. We shall see that higher-order perception theories challenge the first disjunct: they might claim that a subject can become self-conscious by perceiving her conscious mental states.<sup>28</sup> Higher-order thought theories challenge the second disjunct: they claim that a subject can become self-conscious by thinking about her own conscious mental states.

Let us suppose that the phenomenologist can justify the claim that self-consciousness doesn't have its origins in reflection. Still someone might be unwilling to concede to the phenomenologist, the conclusion that our mental states are intrinsically self-conscious. He might worry that the phenomenologist's argument assumes that the only two options are to claim that self-consciousness comes about through reflection or to accept that some mental states are intrinsically self-conscious, but why suppose that these two options are jointly exhaustive of the possible positions one might take on this question?

This second objection is the easiest to deal with, so I shall start my defence here. First of all we should note that the phenomenologist is treating the question of how a subject comes to be self-conscious as a question that is to be given a personal-level answer. By a "personal level explanation" I mean an explanation that makes ineliminable reference to persons and their mental states.<sup>29</sup> Of course there is another possibility the phenomenologist doesn't consider which is that the question can be

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<sup>28</sup> I confess that I have been unable to find such a theory explicitly asserted by proponents of higher-order perception theories (e.g. Lycan and Armstrong). I have arrived at such a theory based on the account they give of introspective knowledge.

<sup>29</sup> For the distinction between "personal level" explanation and "sub-personal level" explanation see Dennett (1969). The distinction is discussed and put to work by Hornsby in her (1997, ch.7 & 10)

answered by appeal to theories that invokes *sub*-personal mechanisms. We have seen earlier that the phenomenologist rejects the possibility of explaining consciousness in sub-personal terms. I shall return to the argument they give for this conclusion towards the end of this section. In barest outline the worry they have is that such an explanation of self-consciousness will leave something out. It will treat the subject as one material thing among others, but in the process fail to account for the sense we have of ourselves as *subjects* when we are pre-reflectively self-conscious. We have already encountered this objection in chapters 2 and 3, but we will see that it can be made more precise by relating it to the phenomenon of pre-reflective self-consciousness.

Let us set aside for now, the objection that the phenomenologist has ignored the possibility of giving a sub-personal explanation of self-consciousness. Is the phenomenologist nevertheless right to think that the only possible *personal* level explanations treat self-consciousness either as the outcome of reflection or as something intrinsic to our conscious mental states? We can pose this challenge as a question about whether reflective self-consciousness is the only form that self-consciousness can take. To answer this question we must ask what it is for a person to be self-conscious. This is a huge question but one way of answering it would be to determine whether self-consciousness should be understood as a relational property of a person or as an intrinsic property of a person. If the property of being self-conscious is understood as a relational property it might be thought that this property is instantiated when a certain relation holds between her mental states. Perhaps the relation in question holds when her conscious mental states are accompanied by higher-order representations of some kind which target a conscious mental state the person is in at the time. Alternatively



some of her mental states might be directed upon themselves in the way that Brentano describes. We shall see in a moment that the phenomenologist argues against both of these options. In doing so he rejects the conclusion that self-consciousness is a relational property concluding instead that it must belong to certain mental states intrinsically. The soundness of the phenomenologist's reasoning here once again depends on the claim that a subject cannot become self-conscious through reflection. Let us examine then how the phenomenologist argues for this claim.

The argument I shall develop is based on a passage in the Introduction to *Being and Nothingness*, where Sartre considers whether self-consciousness might be identified with self-knowledge.<sup>30</sup> By "self-knowledge" I mean knowledge of propositions of the form "I am F", where "F" picks out some conscious state or activity of a subject and "I" refers to the subject that is thinking she instantiates F. Sartre is considering theories which take self-consciousness to be a variety of propositional knowledge, where the objects of this knowledge are propositions of the form I am in F. Self-knowledge needn't be conceived of as the outcome of a subject self-ascribing a conscious state or activity. If there are conscious states of the kind Brentano describes – states which are simultaneously directed upon themselves and at some state of affairs in the world – these states of mind will also qualify as instances of self-knowledge. These will be states of mind which are such that when they occur the subject will have knowledge of their occurrence.<sup>31</sup> I shall take the target of Sartre's argument to be any account which treats self-consciousness as a relational property. Both Brentanian theories and

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<sup>30</sup> Sartre (2000, xxviii-xxx)

<sup>31</sup> Hossack (2002) defends a Brentanian account of consciousness according to which a mental state M is conscious if the subject has knowledge of M's occurrence. According to Hossack's theory every conscious mental state (or as Hossack puts it "every experience and every action") counts as an instance of self-knowledge: a mental state is conscious only if the subject knows of its instantiation.

higher-order theories of consciousness fit this description. Sartre is offering an argument for the conclusion that self-consciousness couldn't possibly come about through a subject taking up a relation to his own mental states. Hence self-consciousness shouldn't be conceived of as a relational property but should instead be taken to be an intrinsic property of our conscious mental states.

Sartre's argument bears an uncanny resemblance to an argument that can be found in Aristotle. In *De Anima* 3.2, Aristotle notes that we can perceive that we perceive, and wonders how this is so.<sup>32</sup> He goes on to argue that either we perceive that we perceive by one and the same perceptual act or we do so by means of a distinct act of perception. Aristotle argues that if we perceive that we perceive by means of distinct act then we must posit a further act to explain how we perceive the first act. Once we have posited a further act we will need yet another perceptual act to explain how this further act is perceived. Thus we have the beginning of a regress. To end the regress we must posit a perceptual act that perceives itself. Once we concede that some act can perceive itself, we might as well say this from the outset, thus avoiding the threat of the regress.

Sartre takes a similar argument and applies it to views which seek to identify self-consciousness with self-knowledge:<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *De Anima* (425b12-25). There is some disagreement among commentators about whether Aristotle thought there was a capacity responsible for a subject's perceiving that she perceives or whether Aristotle should be read as claiming that there is an activity in virtue of which we perceive that we perceive. For discussion and a defence of the latter reading see Caston (2002). I shall follow Caston in reading Aristotle as discussing the activity of perceiving because to do so fits with my current concerns, but I must confess that I don't have sufficient knowledge of what Aristotle says elsewhere to begin to defend such a reading.

<sup>33</sup> I don't mean to suggest that Aristotle and Sartre return the same answer to the question how is it that we can perceive that we perceive. Caston (2002) argues that Aristotle held a view of consciousness much closer to that of Brentano, according to which every perceptual act is directed upon itself. Kosman (1975) defends a reading of Aristotle that stresses the continuity between his position and that of the phenomenologists, in particular Sartre.

“The reduction of consciousness to knowledge in fact involves our introducing into consciousness the subject-object dualism which is typical of knowledge. But if we accept the law of the knower-known dyad, then a third term will be necessary in order for the knower to become known in turn, and we will be faced with this dilemma. Either we stop at any one term of the series – the known, the knower known, the knower known by the knower, etc. In this case, the totality of the phenomenon falls into the unknown; that is we always bump against a non-self-conscious reflection and a final term. Or else we affirm the necessity of an infinite regress (idea, *ideae* *ideae*, etc.) which is absurd...Consciousness of self is not dual. If we wish to avoid an infinite regress, there must be an immediate, non-cognitive relation of the self to itself.” (Sartre, 2000: xxviii-xxix)

Sartre’s argument in this passage mirrors Aristotle almost exactly, but before we can see how it will be helpful to reconstruct his argument somewhat.

First off it should be noted that while Sartre frames his discussion in terms of consciousness, it is in fact self-consciousness that he is discussing. In the previous section, where I introduced the phenomenologist’s conception of consciousness, I noted that in general they (intentionally) do not distinguish consciousness from self-consciousness. There we saw Sartre claim that to be conscious of something is also to be self-conscious. Moreover, there is further evidence that Sartre is in fact talking about self-consciousness at the end of the passage where he says “consciousness of *self* is not dual”.

As I have already explained, I take the target of the argument in this passage to be theories which take self-consciousness to be a relation between a subject and her conscious mental states. When Sartre talks of “the subject-object dualism...typical of knowledge” and the “knower-known dyad”, I take him to be referring to the relation of representation a subject can stand in to her conscious mental states. This representation might be a second-order representation in virtue of which a subject represents that she

is in an intentional state M, or it might be a representation of the kind posited by Brentano – a representation that is somehow directed upon itself in such a way as to represent its own occurrence.

Sartre says that any view of this kind will fall foul of an infinite regress. He begins by noting that it will not do to conceive of the representation as a two-place relation between a subject and a mental state she is in. It is necessary he tells us, for such an account to introduce “a third term” in order for “the knower to become known”. I take him to mean that it is necessary to introduce an additional layer of representations in order for the subject to be conscious that he himself is in a mental state M. To introduce this additional layer of representation is, Sartre claims, to take the first step on a path that leads to an infinite regress. We might challenge Sartre on this point, for we have seen that a Brentanian will conceive of self-consciousness as self-knowledge, while nevertheless offering a one-level account of self-consciousness. We shall see however that Brentano’s account of self-consciousness is vulnerable to a different objection, so let us ignore this possibility for the time being.

Sartre doesn’t say why we need to introduce an additional layer of representations, but we can fill in his reasoning here without too much trouble. Sartre is rejecting a proposal that takes self-consciousness to be a two place relation of representation a subject stands in to a mental state. We can see why this cannot be right by considering how a subject P might stand in a relation of representation to another subject’s Q’s mental states. But of course standing in such a relation of representation wouldn’t make P self-conscious of being in Q’s mental state. Suppose the state in question is a pain state. It is certainly true that we can be conscious of another person’s being in pain by representing that this person is in pain. However when we

represent that another person is in pain this doesn't for the most part (ignoring the possibility of sympathetic pain) make us conscious of ourselves being in pain. The pain I thereby experience belongs to the other person and not to me. Any account which identifies self-consciousness with a two place relation between a subject and a mental state will fail to distinguish the case in which a subject is representing his *own* mental states from the case in which he is representing some other subject's mental states. A subject will not be self-conscious by representing a mental state M, he must also represent that *he* is representing M.

Now recall Aristotle's argument. If we explain how we perceive that we perceive by introducing two perceptual acts, the second of which is directed at the first, we will have to introduce a third perceptual act to explain how the second perceptual act is perceived, and so on *ad infinitum*. Sartre applies this same argument to the account which equates self-consciousness with self-knowledge. I have just explained why we must introduce a further layer of representation (Sartre's "third term") if we are to account for the knowledge a subject has that he is in a mental state M. Sartre claims that once we have introduced a third layer of representations we will have to introduce a fourth layer of representations to explain how the subject knows that he knows he is in M, and so on *ad infinitum*.

The way to terminate the regress is to say that there comes a point at which the subject no longer needs to know that he knows, or in Aristotle's case, that the subject no longer needs to perceive that he perceives. Each additional layer of representation has been introduced to explain how a subject can *know* that he is in a conscious state M. If we say that there is a point at which we no longer need to introduce an additional representation Sartre thinks this amounts to conceding that there is a point at which "the

totality of the phenomenon falls into the unknown". Just a few passages earlier in his Introduction Sartre has rejected the possibility that consciousness could be "ignorant of itself" as absurd. A consciousness ignorant of itself is unconscious, and Sartre (following Descartes) was of the opinion that there is nothing in the mind of which a subject is not conscious. There is much about ourselves which, according to Sartre, we *choose* not to see, but there is nothing about ourselves of which we are entirely ignorant.

Nowadays, knowing all that we do from cognitive psychology, few of us will be prepared to join Sartre in his rejection of the unconscious. For those willing to allow the existence of unconscious mental states there is then, a way out of the regress Sartre has described. Whether it robs Sartre of his argument for the dependence thesis remains to be seen.

Before I consider this possibility in more detail we should note that it is not a possibility that Brentanian's can take up. Brentano also employs an argument along the lines of Aristotle's in arguing against higher-order accounts of consciousness which appeal to unconscious mental states to block the regress that would otherwise ensue. Brentano thinks he has found another way of blocking the regress without introducing anything like an unconscious mental state. He appeals instead to mental states which are directed at themselves and as a result represent their own occurrence. Brentano may have found a way out of the regress without appealing to unconscious mental states but it has been argued that he does so only by presupposing what he is trying to explain.<sup>34</sup>

Recall that according to Brentano every mental state is directed towards two objects, a primary object which is usually some worldly state of affairs

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<sup>34</sup> See Zahavi (1999: 30-1). Zahavi credits this argument to the Heidelberg school of philosophers, specifically to Cramer and Pothast.



and a secondary object which is the mental state itself. Consider Brentano's example of hearing a tone. Brentano claims that when I hear a tone, I am conscious of the tone and I am also coconscious of my experience of hearing the tone. Now we might be entitled to ask whether I am also conscious of this coconsciousness. Brentano replies that I am:

"In the same mental phenomenon in which the sound is present to our minds we simultaneously apprehend the mental phenomenon itself. What is more, we apprehend it in accordance with its dual nature insofar as it has the sound as content within it, and insofar as it has itself as content at the same time." (Brentano, 1995: 179)

According to Brentano a single mental state can make me:

- (1) Conscious of a tone.
- (2) Coconscious of my hearing the tone.
- (3) Conscious of my being coconscious of my hearing the tone.

Brentano cannot allow that (3) is a distinct object from (2), for if he does he will have a new regress on his hands: he will have to introduce a further conscious state which is conscious of being conscious of being coconscious. Brentano must say that when I am coconscious of my hearing the tone I am also conscious of my being coconscious. Then self-consciousness isn't something that is brought about by a mental state's being directed upon itself. The secondary object is instead already in "possession of self-awareness" as Zahavi puts it. What (3) describes is a state in which I am conscious of the tone and of myself hearing the tone. To be conscious of myself hearing the tone is to be self-conscious. Brentano must say that this self-consciousness form a part of the secondary object which a mental state is directed towards when it represents its own occurrence. Supposing this

possibility is coherent, something I will not challenge here<sup>35</sup>, it seems that Brentano finds a way out of Aristotle's regress only by giving us a circular explanation. I conclude that a Brentanian account of self-consciousness as self-knowledge fails. Let us turn our attention now to higher-order theories.

Aristotle and Sartre's argument will only prove effective against higher-order theories if it is assumed that all mental states are conscious. This is something that all proponents of higher-order theories deny. Thus to pursue the regress argument against these theories would require us to defend the claim that there are no unconscious mental states. I am convinced that such a claim must be false, so rather than attempt to show that higher-order theories fall foul of a regress I shall offer an alternative line of attack.

I will argue, in the spirit, if not the letter of phenomenology, that reflective self-consciousness has certain features which cannot be explained by any act of reflection. These are features that can only be explained by granting that conscious mental states are already self-conscious prior to any act of reflection. The features in question will already be familiar to us from our earlier discussion of reflective self-consciousness, but I shall nevertheless offer a brief reminder of them.

Recall that reflective self-consciousness attaches to I-thoughts, the

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<sup>35</sup> Bell (1990: 19-23) argues that Brentano's position must ultimately collapse into incoherency. Brentano tells us that a representation of a sound without a representation of an act of hearing is conceivable but that a representation of an act of hearing without a representation of sound is a contradiction. Thus he conceives of a representational state's directedness upon itself as being dependent upon its directedness towards some primary object. Brentano also wants to say that it is one and the same representational state R that can be directed upon two distinct objects. The representational state R that is directed at a primary object is one and the same as the representational state R\* which is directed upon itself. But on Brentano's own account of parts and wholes, if x is a part of y then x is not identical with y. It follows then that Brentano cannot claim both that R\* and R are "two aspects of one and the same unitary phenomenon" the former depending on the latter, and also claim that R = R\*. The claims that R\* and R are two parts of the same whole contradicts the claim that the representational which is directed at a primary object is identical with the representational state directed at itself.

judgements a subject makes in self-ascribing a thought or experience. We saw earlier that when a subject entertains an “I-thought” she cannot fail to realise that it is herself she is thinking about. Perry’s (1979) story of the supermarket shopper following the trail of sugar illustrates the point well. Imagine I am in the supermarket following a trail of sugar in search of the person with a torn bag of sugar in their basket. When I discover it is me with the torn bag sack of sugar and I think to myself I am making a mess, I know something that I do not know when I think that the person with a torn bag of sugar is making a mess. I know that I am thinking about myself. Of course it is true that I was also thinking about myself when I thought about the person with the torn bag of sugar, but at the time I had this thought I didn’t know I was thinking about myself. Whereas when I think that I am making a mess, I cannot fail to know that I am thinking about myself just by having this thought.

The thought that I am making a mess is an I-thought; it is a thought in which I self-ascribe an action of which I am now conscious, the action of making a mess. It is a feature of I-thoughts in general that a subject cannot fail to know he is thinking about himself. It is I-thoughts to which reflective self-consciousness attaches. Thus any adequate account of reflective self-consciousness must explain how a subject cannot fail to know he is thinking about himself when he is reflectively self-conscious.

I-thoughts are also, to borrow Shoemaker’s term, immune to error through misidentification (henceforth “IEM”).<sup>36</sup> A subject cannot think, for instance, that she is experiencing pain and think something false because she is

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<sup>36</sup> Shoemaker distinguishes what he calls “absolute immunity to error through misidentification” and “circumstantial immunity to error”. The statement “I am in pain” is absolutely immune to error because its immunity isn’t contingent on anything else the subject believes. The statement “I am seeing a table” is circumstantially immune to error because its immunity is based on a belief of the speakers that she is currently seeing a table under normal viewing conditions.

mistaken about who it is that feels pain.<sup>37</sup> Shoemaker argues that I-thoughts are not subject to error through misidentification because the subject doesn't identify herself at all when she self-ascribes a thought or experience. That is to say an individual doesn't need to first identify an individual S that is herself and then predicate of this individual the property of being in a particular conscious state. If she did need to identify herself when self-ascribing a conscious state, there would be a possibility of her erring about who it is that is in a conscious state when she self-ascribes a conscious state. Yet we have seen that when one entertains an I-thought, there is no such possibility of error. I-thoughts are reflectively self-conscious. Thus the second feature of I-thoughts that an account of reflective self-consciousness must accommodate is IEM.

Before I consider whether higher-order theories of consciousness can accommodate these two features I have taken to be essential to reflective self-consciousness, it is worth noting that a proponent of the dependence thesis is perfectly able to accommodate them. Consider first the claim that when I think I am F I cannot fail to know that the subject that I am thinking is F is myself. The dependence thesis says that F, a conscious state, is also pre-reflectively self-conscious. Recall that pre-reflective self-consciousness modifies the way in which a conscious state occurs for a subject. To say that a state is pre-reflectively self-conscious is to say that the state occurs in such a way that the subject is conscious of himself being in this state. I cannot fail to know I am thinking about myself when I think I am in F, because F occurs

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<sup>37</sup> Not all the predicates I can apply to myself are in this way immune to error through misidentification. Only those predicates that I can know to apply to myself non-observationally just by instantiating them are in this way immune to error. The thought I am bleeding isn't immune to error through misidentification. I might be in a tangle of bodies and mistake someone else's blood for my own, to use an example of Wittgenstein's (1958: 66-7). Any thoughts I can form about my own mental and bodily states directly and immediately without recourse to observation will however be immune to error through misidentification (see Shoemaker (1968: 562)).

for me in such a way that I am conscious of myself having F. All I do when I judge that I am in conscious state F is make explicit the consciousness I already have of myself. I transform the implicit awareness I have that I myself am the subject of F into an explicit awareness of myself as the subject of F.

What about IEM? I-thoughts are IEM, we have seen, because I do not have to identify myself as the subject of F when I think I am F. According to the dependence thesis I do not need to identify myself as the subject of F because F is pre-reflectively self-conscious. I have F in such a way that I am conscious of myself having F. When I think that I am F I make explicit the consciousness I already have of myself. I do not need to identify which individual is the subject of F because when F occurs I am conscious that it is me having F. Thus we will see how the dependence thesis succeeds where reflection theories fail. It gives us a way of accommodating both features of I-thoughts. Let us consider whether higher-order theories can accommodate these two features beginning with higher-order perception theories.

##### 5. Higher-Order Theories of Consciousness and the Dependence Thesis

Higher-order perception theories (henceforth “HOP” theories) say that a subject becomes conscious of being in a mental state M when M is scanned by an internal monitoring mechanism.<sup>38</sup> This monitoring mechanism is hypothesised to function in much the same manner as the senses which are directed outwards, except that it has as its function, the monitoring of a subject’s own mental states.

A proponent of HOP theory will say that a subject comes to think that she\* is in M by means of a non-conscious mental state modelled on perception.

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<sup>38</sup> See Lycan (1990/1997 & 1996) for recent defence of HOP theory.



Such a proposal immediately runs into trouble if we take HOP theorists at their word and model the access we have to our own states of mind on perception as it is ordinarily understood. We can see this by considering just a few features of perception as it is ordinarily understood by us.<sup>39</sup>

Each perceptual experience a subject undergoes will supply that subject with information about a multiplicity of objects. A subject can put this information to use in identifying the objects of his experience. There are several ways in which he can do so. He can identify or misidentify an object as being of a certain kind. He can identify an object perceived at one time with an object perceived at another time. This is something he might do by perceiving a resemblance between an object's properties at different times. Alternatively the object might be one that he is continuously observing in which case he will be in a position to perceptually track the object over time.

If we are to understand introspective knowledge as a form of perceptual knowledge, at least some of the features I have just described must also be true of introspection. Does introspection supply us with information about a multiplicity of objects? No, it provides us with information about one and only one object over time, ourselves.<sup>40</sup> Does introspection involve the identification of an object, the person doing the introspecting, in the various ways described above? No, the judgements we make about ourselves based on introspection are IEM. If introspection is to be understood as a mode of perception, it must be a mode of perception which doesn't require

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<sup>39</sup> Here I am indebted to Shoemaker. See in particular his (1994/1996, lecture 1) and his (1986).

<sup>40</sup> Martin (1997) argues that the awareness we have of our own bodies is a kind of perception which supplies us with information about one and only one object at any given moment. I do not wish to dispute this claim, though some have argued against the claim that bodily awareness is perceptual in nature (see for instance Gallagher (2003)). Perhaps the awareness we have of our bodies is best thought of as a kind of perception, but bodily awareness doesn't make us reflectively self-conscious. Even if some such case can be made for construing bodily awareness as perceptual in nature, it will be of no help to the HOP theorist who is attempting to give us an account of reflective self-consciousness.



that we identify ourselves. For supposing that the relevant mode of perception does involve something akin to identification of a self we will have failed to accommodate IEM. HOP theories will thereby fail one of the tests we have set for an adequate account of reflective self-consciousness.

In treating introspection as perception, we are looking for a mode of perception which is such that it supplies information about one and only one object, and doesn't require the identification of this object. This is a mode of perception unlike any with which we are familiar. Given these significant differences, one might wonder what work there is left for the analogy with perception to do. Perhaps there can be a mode of perception which supplies us with information about one and only one object – bodily awareness may satisfy this description. It is however hard to conceive of a mode of perception that doesn't require the subject to identify the object perceived. As soon as we say that the subject must identify herself when she introspects, we introduce the possibility of misidentification, but this brings the view of introspective knowledge as perceptual knowledge into direct conflict with the claim that I-thoughts are IEM.

Could HOP theories explain the knowledge I have that I am thinking about myself when I entertain an I-thought? I shall argue that they can do so only by presupposing what they are seeking to explain. Thus HOP theories fail both tests I have set for an adequate theory of self-consciousness.

When I know that I am thinking about myself I know that an identity holds between the person that is having this thought and the object of this thought. To see this, recall once again what happens when I discover that it is me making a mess in the supermarket. I realise that the person having the thought <I am making a mess> is identical with the person making the mess. Let us assume for the moment that HOP theories do take the mode of

perception by which I have introspective access to my conscious states to involve identification of myself as the person making the mess, thereby rejecting IEM. Either I identify myself on the basis of some of my perceived properties in the same way as I might identify some other person, or else I receive information about myself which somehow allows me to identify myself demonstratively. Let us consider each of these possibilities in turn.

If a subject S is to identify herself by means of properties  $[p_1, p_2, p_3...p_n]$ , she must know that she is the unique possessor of these properties. For we have seen how it is a feature of introspection that it gives us access to the conscious states of one and only one subject at any given moment. How can S know that she is the possessor of these identifying properties? If we say she knows she has properties  $[p_1, p_2, p_3...p_n]$  because this fact is something she perceives we must ask again how S knows that she is perceiving herself rather than some other individual when she perceives an individual that has properties  $[p_1, p_2, p_3...p_n]$ ? Perhaps she makes use of further identifying properties  $[q_1, q_2, q_3...q_n]$  in order to single out herself as the person with identifying properties  $[p_1, p_2, p_3...p_n]$ . If so, we will face the same question once again: how does S know that she is the person with identifying properties  $[q_1, q_2, q_3...q_n]$ ? By now we should see that a regress has begun. It is a regress which can be ended only by allowing that S can know she is thinking about herself without any recourse to identification. What we are trying to explain is how I come by this knowledge. Thus it would seem that a proponent of a HOP theory must presuppose what he is seeking to explain or else run the risk of incurring a vicious regress.

There is at least one way out of this mire for a proponent of a HOP theory. He could deny that the subject needs to be in possession of any identification information in order to perceive that he\* is in a particular

conscious state. When we identify an object *x* demonstratively we do not need to make reference to perceived properties of *x* which distinguish *x* from other objects. When one identifies an object by means of a demonstrative expression such as “this” or “that” it is necessary that there be what Evans (1982) describes as an “informational link” connecting one to the object that one identifies. The subject gets information about the position of her body, her location in space, and of what she is doing at any given moment. Could it be that she can exploit information of this kind to identify that she is herself *S* when judging that she\* is in a mental state *M*?

When I think about myself by means of “I” there is no possibility of my failing to refer to myself. This is one of the lessons we can take from Descartes’ *cogito*. The one proposition Descartes entertains which he concludes is not subject to doubt is the proposition “I think”. No demonstrative expression has this feature of guaranteed reference. It is consistent with any use of “this” or “that” that the entity we pick out by means of these expressions fails to exist, perhaps because it is imagined or hallucinated. Equally when a subject takes himself to refer to the same object at different times by means of a demonstrative it is possible for him to make a mistake. Perhaps the object he refers to at a later time is qualitatively identical but numerically distinct from the object he referred to at an earlier time.

These possibilities to one side there is an additional problem which renders demonstrative identification ill-suited to play the role of “I” in I-thoughts. It seems perfectly possible for *S* to single out an object by means of a demonstrative expression which happens to be *S* but for *S* to fail to know she is referring to herself.<sup>41</sup> Yet the HOP theorist is appealing to

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<sup>41</sup> See Castañeda (1966) for arguments along these lines against analysing first-person

demonstrative identification to explain how a subject knows that she is thinking about herself when she thinks an I-thought. Any attempt to model the subject's identification on demonstrative identification must fail to capture what it has set out to explain. For recall that we are currently considering whether HOP can account for a subject's knowledge that he is thinking about himself when he entertains an I-thought. I conclude then that HOP theory fails to give us a satisfactory account of reflective self-consciousness. Let us turn our attention now to higher-order thought theories (henceforth HOT theories) having given HOP theories a run for their money.

HOT theorists introduce a distinction between introspective and non-introspective consciousness which doesn't seem to be available to HOP theorists. According to HOT theory a mental state is non-introspectively conscious when it either is or could be accompanied by a HOT. HOT theorists disagree amongst themselves as to whether a mental state must actually be accompanied by a HOT or whether it suffices for a creature to be disposed to produce a HOT.<sup>42</sup> I can't see how being disposed to produce a HOT could make it the case that an experience *actually* seems or feels a certain way to a subject.<sup>43</sup> For this reason I shall confine my discussion to

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reference as a demonstrative form of reference. The very same difficulty arises for the first proposal which claims a subject can identify herself by means of some identifying properties. Again it is possible for an individual to single out herself by means of some properties she has but fail to realise she is referring to herself. See footnote 20 for one of Castañeda's examples.

<sup>42</sup> Dennett (1978) and Carruthers (2000) defend a dispositionalist account of HOT theory, while Rosenthal (1986; 1990 & 1993) defends an actualist version of HOT theory.

<sup>43</sup> Carruthers (2000: ch.9, §3) tries to finesse this difficulty by appeal to consumer semantics (see Millikan (1984) for the account of consumer semantics Carruthers draws on). A consumer system is a system that uses a representation in the course of guiding behaviour, applying recognitional concepts, making inferences etc. Carruthers argues that it is presence to such consumer systems that confers on a representation its phenomenology. Particularly important in Carruthers' account is the presence of a representation to a theory of mind module which is capable of producing HOTs. Being presented to such a consumer system renders the creature capable of thinking that an experience seems or feels a certain way.

Carruthers' account responds to the problem I have just raised but still the suspicion remains that there is something magical at work in his account. How can the mere *disposition* to think that one is undergoing an experience generate an experience that

higher-order theories which take a mental state to be conscious if the creature *actually* represents that it is itself in this mental state.

HOT theories claim to be able to recognise the special epistemic access a subject has to his own conscious mental states. This is something they take themselves to have explained by appealing to the non-inferential access that a subject has to his experiences when they are accompanied by a HOT.<sup>44</sup> Recall that a subject becomes introspectively conscious when he makes a conscious mental state the target of a further HOT. The HOT that accompanies a subject's conscious mental state gives the subject unmediated epistemic access to his own conscious mental states. All the subject need do in order to know his own conscious mental states in the first person is make a conscious mental state he is in the object of a further HOT. This HOT will give the subject direct and immediate epistemic access to his own conscious mental states.

How on this theory, do I know that it is me I am thinking about when I think I am in a conscious state F? When a person says 'I am in pain' we take this utterance of 'I' to refer to its speaker, the person that produced this utterance. Rosenthal (2002 & 2004) has argued that we should think of 'I' as functioning in an analogous way in a HOT. When I token a HOT the content of which is <I am in a mental state M>, I produce a thought that refers to me, for it is me that has tokened this thought. "I" works in such a way that each HOT I have represents a mental state I am in as belonging to me, the person

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*actually* seems or feels a certain way? If phenomenal character is conceived of as something of which a subject is actually conscious, I cannot see how the appeal to what consumer systems *could* do with a representation is ever going to succeed in accounting for phenomenal character. This is a difficulty that disappears once we think of phenomenology as something *with which* a creature is conscious of things in its environment. Then we can appeal to the presence of a representation to consumer systems to account for how a representation can be known from the inside. I will make a move along these lines in chapter 7.

<sup>44</sup> For an example of this kind of explanation see Rosenthal (1990/1997: 737-8).

that has produced that HOT. This is not to say that the content of a HOT should be taken to be <the producer of this thought is in a mental state M>.<sup>45</sup> When a subject thinks I am in M he doesn't *actually* refer to himself as the thinker of this very thought: the HOT he tokens doesn't describe him in this way. Nevertheless by tokening a HOT a subject is thereby disposed to think about himself in this way. This is because "I" works in such a way as to forge a connection between a token thought and the thinker of this thought. It is in virtue of this connection holding that the subject is thereby disposed to think of himself as the thinker of the thought in which "I" occurs.

Can such a view recognise the phenomenon of IEM? Recall that I-thoughts are IEM insofar as it is not possible for me think that I am in a conscious state F and think something false because, although someone is in F, it is not me that is in F. Rosenthal distinguishes between a strong form of IEM and a weaker variety. A proponent of strong IEM will claim that when I think I am in F, I cannot be wrong about whether it is I *myself* that is in F. The weaker form of IEM says that when I think I am in F I cannot be mistaken that I am the individual who *thinks* he is in F. Rosenthal rejects strong IEM. He claims that if I am labouring under the misconception that I am Napoleon, I will misidentify myself when I token an I-thought. Since in these circumstances I will be mistaken about who it is that I am. Rosenthal infers I must be able to make a mistake about which person it is I am thinking about when I token an I-thought. Suppose I think I am in pain. If I think I am Napoleon, Rosenthal claims I will misidentify myself when I think I am in pain for I will think Napoleon is in pain. It is on this basis, so far as I can tell, that Rosenthal rejects the stronger form of IEM.

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<sup>45</sup> Rosenthal (2002) notes that if every HOT was about itself, we would have to say that "each HOT makes one conscious of that very HOT, and hence that all HOTs are conscious." (p.331) Yet Rosenthal wants to say that we are only conscious of a HOT when we make it the object of an act of reflection. This objection was first raised by Natsoulas (1993).



Rosenthal is right that we can sometimes misidentify ourselves, as I would do if I were to suddenly think that I am Napoleon. I am not persuaded however that he has established we can misidentify ourselves when we token an I-thought. In the case Rosenthal describes I misidentify myself by thinking about myself as Napoleon, but I do not think Napoleon is in conscious state F when I think I am in conscious state F. As has often been noted I can still use “I” to think about myself even if I suddenly find myself amnesiac, I can for instance think to myself <who am I?>.<sup>46</sup> Thus even though I can be confused about my own identity it doesn’t follow that when I use “I” either in thought or talk, I will be mistaken about who it is I am referring to.

Rosenthal thinks that when I employ the first-person pronoun to refer to myself, it is not my use of “I” that singles me out from other individuals. Rosenthal claims that there is no single way in which we identify ourselves when we refer to ourselves in the first-person. Instead we appeal to a whole range of considerations, such as bodily features, events from our past, various psychological propensities and dispositions.<sup>47</sup> What unifies these disparate factors is that in each case I believe something about myself in the first-person, but it is not the fact that I think about myself in the first-person in each of these cases that does the work in singling me out from other individuals. Rosenthal seems to think that I identify myself by means of all the propositions I believe about myself. Presumably Rosenthal will say of the amnesiac case that when I use “I” to refer to myself in such circumstances I can single out the thinker of the thought in which a token of “I” occurs but I cannot single out myself.

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<sup>46</sup> The example is Anscombe’s (1994).

<sup>47</sup> See Rosenthal (2002: §IV & 2004 §V)

One will only accept Rosenthal's argument against the stronger form of IEM if one grants to him that we do indeed identify ourselves by means of these various beliefs. For then it will be possible for us to hold false beliefs about ourselves, and hence misidentify ourselves as a consequence of these false beliefs. I can't see why any advocate of strong IEM will go along with Rosenthal's account of self-identification. They will deny that in order to know we are thinking about ourselves when we token an I-thought we must identify ourselves by means of the various beliefs we have about ourselves. We know we are referring to ourselves when we token an I-thought because to token an I-thought is to think about oneself self-consciously. Thus a proponent of strong IEM will reject any role for first-person beliefs of the kind Rosenthal describes. If Rosenthal is to justify his rejection of strong IEM he needs to persuade us of his own account of self-identification. All he has shown so far as I can tell is that there is an alternative position one can take on self-identification to that taken by proponents of strong IEM. I cannot find any reason for preferring his account to the one I have endorsed above.

Rosenthal does allow that I-thoughts have what he describes as a "weak" form of IEM. A subject cannot think that she is in a conscious state F but be mistaken about who it is that *thinks* she is in F. Rosenthal explains: "The error I cannot make is to think, when I have a conscious pain, for example, that the individual that has that pain is someone distinct from me..." (2004: 171). Rosenthal explains this immunity to error as being a consequence of the phenomenon of first-person reference.<sup>48</sup> The content of my thought that I am in a mental state M, refers to me, the individual I could describe as the thinker of this thought. If when I think I am in pain, I am also thereby disposed to think that I am the individual who thinks he is in pain, it is not

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<sup>48</sup> See Rosenthal (2002: 344-9 & 2004: 168-176, pp.173)

possible for me to make the mistake of thinking that the individual who thinks that he is in pain is someone else other than me. This is because having the thought I am in pain makes me disposed to think that I am the person having this very thought. Weak IEM falls out of the feature of I-thoughts whereby just by having such a thought I am disposed to think that I am the person having it.

HOT theory does seem to allow for weak IEM at least. Is accounting for weak IEM enough to explain what it is for a subject to be reflectively self-conscious? Strong IEM was introduced to explain one of the ways in which when a subject tokens an I-thought she is self-conscious. It was argued that the subject doesn't need to identify herself because when she thinks I am in M she is conscious of herself, she is self-conscious. Weak IEM falls out of the disposition a subject has when he thinks about himself in the first person to think that he is the thinker of this very thought. Thus Rosenthal will have to say that the subject is conscious of himself – he is self-conscious – in virtue of instantiating this disposition.

Rather than press Rosenthal on this claim, let us consider whether his account can handle the second feature of reflective self-consciousness I described. Recall that when I think <I am making a mess>, I know that the person that is making a mess is identical with the person having this thought. Can HOT theory account for this knowledge? I think not.

The account Rosenthal has given of self-identification is such that when I think "I am F" I am disposed to think <the thinker of this very thought is F>. I use the various beliefs I have about myself to determine that I am the thinker of this very thought. The trouble is that these various beliefs leave plenty of room for me to wonder whether it is really me that is F. This conflicts with my claim that I-thoughts do not leave room for doubt of this kind. Just by my

having such a thought, I know I am identical with the thinker of this thought. This is knowledge that HOT theory cannot account for. The account HOT theory has given of self-reference will always leave it open for me to wonder whether it is me that is F when I think <I am F>. This is a question which I have argued shouldn't make sense given an adequate account of reflective self-consciousness.

I conclude then that HOT theory also fails at least one of the tests I have set for an adequate theory of reflective self-consciousness. We have considered three different versions of the reflection theory and found each of them wanting. I take this to supply support for the dependence thesis. I will finish up by briefly considering the relevance the argument of this chapter has for the claim that naturalists cannot admit subjective facts. I will argue that the account we have given of phenomenal character can help to make this claim more precise. First of all let me briefly summarise the argument of this chapter so far.

The aim of the chapter has been to explain why there is something rather than nothing it is like for a subject to undergo a conscious experience. I began by arguing that a state is like something for a subject – it has a “phenomenal character” – when it can be known in the first-person. A state can be known in the first-person I suggested only because it seems or feels a certain way to its subject.

We then sketched two possible accounts of phenomenal character, both consistent with an intentionalist account of phenomenal properties. The first claimed that a state's phenomenal character is something of which a subject is conscious. The second claimed that phenomenal character is something with which a subject is conscious. I went on to argue that higher-order theories subscribe to the first account of phenomenal character and

intentionalists to the second. This left us needing to choose between these two distinct accounts of phenomenal character.

In the latter half of the chapter I introduced the phenomenologist's account of consciousness as pre-reflective self-consciousness. According to this account, a state has phenomenal character when a subject implicitly represents that he himself is in this state. I argued for the phenomenological account of phenomenal character over that of the higher-order theorist by defending the dependence thesis: the phenomenologist's claim that a state can become reflectively self-conscious only if it is already pre-reflectively self-conscious. We saw earlier in the chapter that when a subject has first-person knowledge of a conscious state or activity he is self-conscious. The self-consciousness that accompanies first-person knowledge is reflective self-consciousness. According to the phenomenologist then, a subject can have first-person knowledge of a mental state only if M is pre-reflectively self-conscious. We have also argued that a state can be known in the first-person only if it seems or feels a certain way to a subject, only if it has phenomenal character. By defending the claim that reflective self-consciousness depends on pre-reflective self-consciousness we get an argument for the phenomenologist's account of phenomenal character. By arguing that higher-order theories cannot account for reflective self-consciousness we have also in effect argued that they cannot account for first-person knowledge. I have claimed this is precisely what they must explain if they are to account for phenomenal character. Thus the argument of this section has not only supplied a defence of the dependence thesis. It has also given us a reason to prefer the phenomenologist's account of phenomenal character over its rival. Once we think of phenomenal character as that which makes it possible to know one's own mind in the first-person, it

will follow that only the phenomenologist can explain what it is for a conscious state to have phenomenal character. For only the phenomenologist can explain how a state can be known in the first-person.

I will finish up by returning to the argument that naturalists cannot admit subjective facts. Recall that it was argued that naturalists give us an account of reality which abstracts away from a particular subject's point of view as much as is possible. By taking science as a guide to where there is, the phenomenologist argued that naturalism must fail to acknowledge all of the ways in which the reality we experience depends on us for its existence. Standing behind this sketch of an argument is the assumption that science trades exclusively in objective descriptions of reality, where a description is "objective" if it doesn't make reference to a subject or a subject's point of view. If science gives us objective descriptions of reality, it is inferred that science must leave out from its description of reality any properties and entities the existence of which is dependent on subjects and their points of view.

For many philosophers it has seemed that phenomenal character must be an example of a property that depends for its existence on subjects of experience. Something like this view of phenomenal character as an essentially subjective property stands behind the thought that a scientific description of consciousness must fail to account for phenomenal character. The account of phenomenal character which I have advanced in this chapter tells us why phenomenal character might be thought to be essentially subjective. It also uncovers an assumption behind the thought that any property that is essentially subjective must be left out from a scientific description of reality. Let us take each of these points in turn.

The account of phenomenal character I have proposed says that an



experience has phenomenal character when it can be known in the first person, and that a conscious state can be known in the first-person when it is pre-reflectively self-conscious. To say phenomenal character is essentially subjective is to claim that necessarily, if there exists an experience E that seems or feels a certain way then there also exists some subject for whom experience E seems or feels a certain way. We can see why this might be true on the account the phenomenologist has given us. Phenomenal character is essentially subjective on this theory because whenever an experience seems or feels a certain way, a subject implicitly represents himself having this experience. It is a subject's representing himself having an experience that makes it the case that the experience he is having seems or feels a certain way to him. We must make reference to the subject having an experience in order to account for phenomenal character because it is the subject's consciousness of himself having this experience that makes it the case that the experience has a phenomenal character.

I have said that we can use this account of phenomenal character to explain why phenomenal character must be missing from an objective description of reality. I take it that Sartre put his finger on the intuition that drives this thought when he said that a person's body is 'either a thing among other things, or it is that by which things are revealed to me. But it cannot be both at the same time.' (2000: 304) Sartre is claiming here that when we are aware of ourselves as subjects we are not aware of ourselves as objects, as one "thing among other things".<sup>49</sup> Any objective description of

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<sup>49</sup> This is a claim that has been argued against at length by Cassam (1997). Merleau-Ponty holds a position which differs from Sartre's in important respects. He describes self-awareness as an awareness of a subject-object. Like Sartre, and unlike Cassam, he argues that the awareness we have of ourselves as subjects is qualitatively different from the awareness we have of ourselves as objects. This is a distinction he captures by distinguishing what he calls "the phenomenal body" from the "objective body" (see for instance Merleau-Ponty's discussion of Schneider in Part 1, ch.3, pp.105). Of course Merleau-Ponty doesn't think that the phenomenal body is a distinct body from the objective

reality might be able to capture what we are conscious of when we are conscious of ourselves as objects. There is nothing about this consciousness that is particular to me. However when I am conscious of myself as subject of an experience I am aware of myself *qua* subject. I am aware of the ways in which my experiences seem or feel to *me*. Sartre thinks it the latter kind of awareness that cannot be described as an awareness of a thing among other things. It is an awareness that is particular to me. It is the awareness I have of the way my experiences seem or feel to me which will be missing from any objective description of the conscious mind.

This characterisation of what it is for a property to be essentially subjective puts us in a position to state the phenomenologist's argument against naturalism more precisely. The argument proceeds as follows:

(P1) Naturalism gives us objective descriptions of reality.

(P2) To be aware of oneself as subject is *not* to be aware of oneself as an object.

(P3) A conscious state S has phenomenal character only if the subject that is in this state is aware of herself as being in S – if she is aware of herself *qua* subject of S.

(P4) The objective descriptions of the natural sciences can represent the awareness we have of ourselves as an object.

(P5) No objective description can represent the awareness we have of ourselves as subjects.

(P6) Naturalism will leave out from its description of reality, the awareness we have of ourselves as subjects.

(CON) Naturalism will leave phenomenal character out from its description of reality.

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body. His view is that each of us has one body which is presented to us in two different ways. What Merleau-Ponty argues against is any attempt to reduce the phenomenal body to the objective body. In other words, he argues against views which would try to identify the ways in which I represent my bodies when I am aware of my body as subject the ways in which I represent my body when I am aware of it as an object.

The next chapter will argue that naturalism can admit subjective facts. It will argue against the claim that there is something particular to me about the experiences I undergo that cannot be given an objective description. Thus I will be rejecting (P5). Once we have shown that naturalism can admit subjective facts, this will clear the way for me to make use of the phenomenologist's descriptions of consciousness in developing a naturalistic account of phenomenal consciousness.

## Chapter 6

### Introduction

I have attributed to phenomenologists the view that the conception of reality we take from naturalism will prove incomplete by failing to include subjective facts. My aim in this chapter will be to argue that the phenomenologist is wrong to claim that a naturalist conception of reality couldn't include subjective facts. I argued in chapter 3 that it is the existence of subjective facts which is responsible for the gap in our scientific explanations of the conscious mind. Supposing this is right, it follows that what the naturalist must do to close the gap is to show how subjective facts can be assimilated into a scientific account of the mind. In the final chapter I shall sketch an account of the conscious mind which attempts to do just that. There I will argue that the naturalist can bridge the gap by developing an account of the conscious mind which takes its lead from phenomenological description.

So far the phenomenologist's case against naturalism has rested on the assertion that naturalists can include in their account of what is real only those facts that can be represented from no particular point of view. Since subjective facts are facts that can only be represented from a particular point of view, the phenomenologist concludes that any naturalistic conception of reality must fail to include subjective facts.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> My definition of "subjective facts" as facts that can only be represented from a particular subject's point of view may look confused at first glance. It might be objected that when we talk about representations that can only be produced from a point of view we are talking about our mode of epistemic access to a fact. It may be true that there are certain modes of access to the world that are essentially tied to a point of view. It certainly doesn't follow that there are any facts which are dependent on our taking up a point of view. (Nagel's discussion of what it is like to be a bat and Jackson's knowledge argument are often accused of making this kind of error. See for instance Mellor (1991a); Moore (1997, ch.3); Peacocke (1989); Van Gulick (1993/1997)). I have responded to this kind of worry in chapter 3. Phenomenologists claim that the world we experience is literally shaped by our ways of representing it. On this view our ways of representing things do not just constitute our mode of epistemic access to the world. They can also play a role in constituting the objects we experience. The extent to which one finds this persuasive will of course all depend on the

I shall argue that the tension that seems to exist between a commitment to subjective facts and a naturalist conception of reality is only apparent. The argument I have just sketched rests on an assumption I shall label “the independence assumption”. It claims that a complete and exhaustive conception of reality will be composed of representations that can be produced independent of any particular point of view. Thus a naturalist who is committed to the independence assumption will indeed endorse a conception of reality that has no room in it for subjective facts.

In chapter 1 I identified two naturalising strategies: naturalisation by assimilation and naturalisation by elimination. A naturalist who endorses the independence assumption must adopt the latter strategy; he must seek the elimination of subjective facts. However, it is generally the case that the naturalist will seek to eliminate some property or entity only when that entity or property ceases to serve any explanatory purpose. Thus a naturalist would seek to eliminate subjective facts only if he could identify a set of facts represented from no particular point of view which perform all of the explanatory work of subjective facts. I shall argue that there is no such set of facts. It follows that the independence assumption must be rejected. Without the independence assumption the argument the phenomenologist has given against naturalism fails. So we can conclude that a naturalist could, in principle, make room for subjective facts. The work of showing that a naturalist can, in fact, accept a commitment to subjective facts will be carried out in my final chapter.

In section 1 I outline two arguments given in previous chapters for believing in the existence of subjective facts. I show how these arguments

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considerations phenomenologists advance in favour of this claim. See chapters 2 and 4 for discussion of these considerations.

proceed from claims about the kind of representation characteristic of conscious experience. Section 2 reconstructs the argument the phenomenologists give for the conclusion that a commitment to subjective facts is incompatible with naturalism. In Section 3 I outline my strategy for refuting this argument. This strategy involves first showing how subjective facts can be assimilated and then developing an argument for the conclusion that they cannot be eliminated.

Both the arguments that I have given for saying that there are subjective facts proceed from a claim about the kind of representation characteristic of conscious experience. One way to show that subjective facts can be assimilated would be to show that the kinds of representations to which appeal has been made in arguing for subjective facts can be assimilated. Section 4 describes more precisely this class of representations. I show how representations of this kind can meet the requirements for assimilation. Section 5 argues that representations of this kind play an essential role in explaining behaviour. I will take this result to establish the ineliminability of subjective facts. If subjective facts are ineliminable, the independence assumption must be false. It cannot be the case that a complete and exhaustive conception of reality will be composed of representations from no particular point of view. Without this assumption the argument against naturalism fails. We will no longer have any grounds for thinking that there is an incompatibility between naturalism and a commitment to subjective facts. I will have shown that room can be found within naturalism for a commitment to subjective facts.



1. Two Arguments for Subjective Facts

In the previous chapters I have given two apparently independent arguments in defence of the claim that there are subjective facts. The first argument was given in the course of developing an answer to the question why our experiences should feel or seem a particular way to us. I shall call it “the argument from the contents of experience”. The answer I returned to this question identified phenomenal properties with representational properties: an experience seems or feels a certain way, I said, in virtue of its representational content. Phenomenologists make a general claim about how our thoughts and experience get their representational content. They claim that our intentional states have representational content before we take up any relation to the world. I have interpreted this idea as claiming that our thoughts and experiences have a representational content which originates in our operative and cognitive modes of understanding. These modes of understanding literally shape or constitute the kinds of situations we can represent.

How does the argument from the contents of experience get from this claim to the conclusion that there are subjective facts? Suppose we agree with the phenomenologist that our operative and reflective modes of understanding constitute the situations we can represent. A creature could share a world with us – it could represent what we represent – only by coming to share our ways of understanding the world. Facts that can be represented only by coming to share our modes of understanding are facts that can only be represented from a point of view – the point of view of creatures who share our modes of understanding. It follows that the facts we can represent are subjective facts. The argument from the contents of experiences gives us a reason for believing in subjective facts by appealing

to the role our modes of understanding play in constituting the world we think about and experience.

The second argument for subjective facts was sketched at the end of the previous chapter. I shall label it “the argument from the experience of content”. This argument was developed in the course of returning an answer to the question of what it is for an experience to seem or feel a certain way to its subject. I claimed that an experience seems or feels a certain way to a subject when it is knowable in a first-person way. I proceeded to argue that an experience can be known in this way only if it is also already pre-reflectively self-conscious (henceforth “PRSC”), which is to say that an experience can be known in a first-person way only if I am aware of myself *qua* subject of this thought or experience.

We saw Sartre assert that the awareness I have of myself *qua* subject is different in kind from the awareness I have of myself *qua* object. To be aware of oneself *qua* subject is, Sartre thinks, to be aware of oneself in a way that no one else can be aware of you. It is this point that will form the basis for the argument from the experience of content. Before we can see how we must unpack what Sartre has in mind.

In chapter 5 I characterised PRSC in terms of two types of properties which I shall refer to as “P<sub>1</sub>” and “P<sub>2</sub>” respectively. Whenever a subject is PRSC properties of these two types will be instantiated. The first property, P<sub>1</sub>, we can characterise as the property of representing some object or state of affairs. The second property, P<sub>2</sub>, is a property of P<sub>1</sub> which modifies the way in which the subject is representing an object or state of affairs. P<sub>2</sub> makes the subject simultaneously aware of herself undergoing an experience and of the object she is experiencing.

This characterisation of PRSC can help us to explain the sense in which to be aware of oneself *qua* subject is to be aware of oneself in a way that no one else can be aware of you. Only I can instantiate  $P_2$  and in the process be aware of *myself* instantiating property  $P_1$  – the property which consists of being in a representational state which purports to represent an object  $x$ . If anyone else instantiates this property  $P_2$ , they will be aware of themselves being in a state which instantiates  $P_1$ . Instantiating  $P_2$  will not suffice to make them aware of me undergoing an experience purporting to represent some object  $x$ . It follows that I have a way of being aware of myself that is available only to me and to no one else but me.

The latter conclusion forms the basis for the argument from the experience of content. Suppose there is a fact which holds when a subject is undergoing a conscious experience as of  $x$ . According to the above characterisation of PRSC, this fact will obtain only if two representational properties are instantiated,  $P_1$  and  $P_2$ . When  $P_2$  obtains the subject will be aware of herself being in a state which instantiates  $P_1$ . The way that  $S$  will thereby represent herself is a way in which no one else can represent her. When  $S$  represents herself in this way, she represents a fact that can only be represented from her point of view. If anyone else were to instantiate  $P_2$  they wouldn't represent  $S$  undergoing an experience as of  $x$ , but would instead represent themselves. Thus the fact that obtains when a subject undergoes a conscious experience as of  $x$  will, on this account of conscious experience, be a subjective fact. It will be a fact that can only be represented from a subject's point of view.

The argument from the contents of experience, and the argument from the experience of content seem to take very different routes to the conclusion that there are subjective facts. There is however an important connection

between them. Each argues from a different feature of the structure of conscious experience. The first argument proceeds from a claim about how our perceptual experiences get their intentional contents. The second argues from a claim about the modes of representation characteristic of our conscious experience. In both cases it is claimed that there is something about the intentional structure of consciousness that warrants an appeal to subjective facts.

There is a further connection between the two arguments worth mentioning before I turn to the main concern of this chapter, the anti-naturalist conclusion phenomenologists draw from the existence of subjective facts. In chapter 2 I explained how our operative understanding shapes the contents of our experience when we are skilfully dealing with things. This account was based on a description of our existence as persons skilfully acting in pursuit of some project or goal. I will argue that the descriptions Sartre and Merleau-Ponty give of PRSC also derive from descriptions of our existence as persons acting in the world. What these descriptions highlight is an aspect of our existence as persons neglected by Heidegger, namely our embodiment.<sup>2</sup>

Heidegger as I have been interpreting him describes our being-in-the-world as consisting of our knowledge of how to find our way about in the world. The understanding I have of myself and my own existence is shaped by the activities in which I engage, and the public understanding of those activities.<sup>3</sup> Merleau-Ponty and Sartre in no way wish to contradict this description of our existence. Instead they wish to supplement it. What their

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<sup>2</sup> For a critique of Heidegger along these lines see Alweiss (2003)

<sup>3</sup> Here I am drawing on Division 1 of *Being and Time*. In Division 2 Heidegger will describe the understanding we have ourselves derived from others as "inauthentic". He will explain how an individual can take up an authentic relation to herself. The existential concerns of Division 2 however do nothing to remedy Heidegger's neglect of the body.

notion of PRSC adds to Heidegger's account of being-in-the-world is an emphasis on the role embodiment plays in shaping our operative understanding.

Merleau-Ponty describes how each of us experiences the world through his or her body. He identifies what I have been calling "operative understanding" with this understanding I have of things through my body. One of the ways in which I can perceive a thing's spatial properties, for instance, is by being prepared to act on that thing in appropriate ways.<sup>4</sup> In advance of taking hold of an object, I will for instance scale my grip in way that is appropriate to the object I am reaching for. In directing my behaviour appropriately towards a thing, I manifest a peculiar kind of bodily understanding of that thing. In order to perceive a thing as requiring certain movements of me, I must have some sense of which movements of my body will be appropriate to that thing and which will not, as well as of the possible movements open to me more generally. This selection from the possible repertoire of behaviours involves some understanding on my part; it involves an understanding of which movements will be appropriate for grasping the object of my perception. This understanding forms an important part of what I have been calling "operative understanding". It forms a part of the body of knowledge I put to use in successfully negotiating the world while going about my day to day business.

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<sup>4</sup> In fact Merleau-Ponty will describe two senses we have of a thing's spatial properties, "spatiality of position" and "spatiality of situation" (1945/1962: 100). This is a central theme in his discussion of Goldstein's patient Schneider in Book 1, ch.3. For further discussion of this distinction see Kelly (2002). Kelly explains how Merleau-Ponty's distinction fits with a hypothesis that the neuroscientists Milner and Goodale (1995) make about the workings of the visual system. Based partly on their work with a patient suffering from Carbon Monoxide poisoning, Milner and Goodale hypothesise two distinct streams of visual information flow in the brain, the ventral and dorsal stream. Kelly argues that this finding fits with Merleau-Ponty's claim that there are two distinct ways of understanding a thing's spatial properties. The first is essentially bodily and is drawn on in reaching and grasping for a thing. The second is cognitive and is drawn on in making reports and judgements about a thing's spatial properties.

This construal of our embodiment as shaping our understanding of entities and their properties helps us to make sense of the peculiar claim Merleau-Ponty and Sartre make repeatedly that our bodies shouldn't just be understood as physical objects.<sup>5</sup> What Merleau-Ponty and Sartre are denying here is that our bodies are simply empirical items in the world with the same status as any other empirical item. My body isn't simply an empirical item in the world for it is the condition of the possibility of my understanding. It gives form to my perceptual experiences.

Merleau-Ponty and Sartre share in common an account of the subject according to which 'the body is the subject of perception' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 206). We have just seen Merleau-Ponty claim that it is through our bodies that we experience a thing's spatial properties. It is my body that experiences, and understands a thing's spatial properties as I reach and grasp for a thing. If it is my body that is the subject of my experiences, we can say that I am aware of myself *qua* subject by being aware of things through my body. To say that the body *is* the subject of conscious experience is to say that it is a subject's body that is aware of the objects of her experience. The body isn't just the means by which a subject experiences objects: it isn't merely an instrument which affords access to the things in a subject's environment. A subject's experiences literally belong to her body; it is a subject's body that undergoes those experiences.

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<sup>5</sup> Recall Sartre's claim that either my body 'is a thing among other things, or else it is that by which things are revealed to me. But it can not be both at the same time.' (1943/2000: 304) Merleau-Ponty famously rejects the distinction Sartre is insisting on here between what we might call the "lived body" and the "perceived body". He points out that when one hand touches the other the body is perceiver and perceived at one and the same time. (See the discussion of so-called "double sensations", (1962: Part 1, ch.2, pp.93). For Merleau-Ponty this kind of experience highlights a more general truth, that the body can be both the subject and the object of our experiences. My embodied existence transcends the distinction between subject and object insofar as it contains elements of both.



This account of subjectivity as embodied tells us what it is for an experience to be PRSC. We can say that a subject S is PRSC when S is conscious of her own body undergoing an experience at the same time as she is aware of the object or state of affairs her experience purports to represent.<sup>6</sup> On this understanding of PRSC to be aware of oneself *qua* subject is to be aware of one's own body undergoing an experience.<sup>7</sup>

The two arguments I have given for subjective facts converge in Merleau-Ponty's conception of our subjectivity as essentially embodied. Both arguments for subjective facts turn out to be grounded in an appeal to our being-in-the-world. The sense I have of my embodiment forms a central part of the knowledge I draw on in successfully going about my day to day business. It is a core part of my being-in-the-world which, I have argued, forms the background that makes possible a subject's operative and reflective understanding. We have just seen that this sense I have of embodiment consists in the awareness I have of my body undergoing my experiences. It is this bodily form of awareness that I have been calling PRSC. It follows that for Merleau-Ponty PRSC is a core aspect of a subject's being-in-the-world.

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<sup>6</sup> This is an idea that will be taken up in much more detail in the next chapter, where I will present empirical work which strongly supports this characterisation of conscious experience.

<sup>7</sup> Sartre has a different take on PRSC to the one I have just presented. For Sartre the kind of self-consciousness I have when I am PRSC is purely negative. In order to be presented with an object in experience Sartre claims I must be conscious of myself as *not* being the object of my experience. See the discussion of "presence" in Part 2, chapter 3 (1943/2000). There Sartre will tell us at length how "The thing...is that which is present to consciousness as not being consciousness." (*op cit.* 174) Sartre denies that it is possible for me to be aware of an object X without also being aware that I am not X. All there is to a subject's PRSC for Sartre is awareness that the object of his awareness is something other than himself. To be aware of this fact Sartre thinks requires that the subject also be aware of himself. Merleau-Ponty is deeply critical of this view of PRSC. Indeed it forms the basis for a more general disagreement between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty about the nature of the relation between mind and world. Where Sartre conceives of this relation as holding between two radically different kinds of entity – being-in-itself and being-for-itself, Merleau-Ponty will insist in keeping with his view of PRSC, that the human body is both a being-in-itself and a being-for-itself.

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's description of our embodiment we can say that the two arguments for subjective facts are related in the following way. The first argument takes our operative understanding in general and makes an argument for subjective facts based on this phenomenon. It is our being-in-the-world that makes possible our operative understanding. The second takes a specific aspect of our operative understanding, namely the sense we have of our embodiment, and argues for subjective facts from this feature. Now we have reminded ourselves of the reasons that have been given for subjective facts let us consider once again how these considerations are employed by the phenomenologist to arrive at their anti-naturalist conclusion.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> I have been arguing that PRSC should be understood as the mode of representation characteristic of conscious experience. Kelly (2002) argues that we should think of the distinction between attitude or mode of representation and content as breaking down in the case of behaviours that draw on what I have been calling "operative intentionality" (and Kelly following Merleau-Ponty calls 'motor intentionality'). One reason Kelly think this distinction breaks down is because he thinks that states with operative intentionality do not have propositional content. The skilful activity just is the representation in the case of states that have operative intentionality. In discussing Milner and Goodale's patient D.F. he tells us 'she seems...not to be able to represent the orientation of the slot at all except by means of posting the card through it' (*op cit* p.388). Simplifying Kelly's reasoning somewhat, the idea seems to be that there will only be room for making a distinction between a representation's mode and content in cases where representational content is propositional. States that have operative intentionality have non-conceptual content and non-conceptual content is non-propositional. Therefore the traditional distinction between mode and content doesn't hold for operative intentional states.

My characterisation of PRSC seems to conflict with Kelly's conclusion. I think the existence of PRSC may give us a way of making the traditional distinction between mode and content without treating operative intentional content as a variety of propositional content. Unfortunately I cannot argue for this claim here. This point to one side, what Kelly has done is give us a further way of making precise the connection between the two arguments I have given for subjective facts. What his argument highlights is the way in which the activity we are engaged in shapes operative intentional content at the same time as it shapes our modes of representing. To be aware of oneself *qua* subject is to experience the world through one's body. To understand an object operatively in terms of one's dealings with it is likewise to experience that thing through one's body. Kelly shows us how PRSC and operative understanding can be understood as one and the same phenomenon.

## 2. The Anti-Naturalist Argument

Merleau-Ponty presents his version of phenomenology as uncovering a sphere of our existence which remains hidden so long as we continue to think about the world in naturalistic or scientific terms. He describes phenomenology as a 'return to that world which precedes' scientific theorising and 'to which every scientific schematisation is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is.' (1962: ix)

Merleau-Ponty seems to be saying here that there is something phenomenology can uncover which we can never come to know through our scientific modes of theorising. What he seems to have in mind is the thought that there are certain unreflective modes of understanding (which I have characterised as operative modes of understanding) that we abstract away from when we take up the standpoint of the scientist. Science only ever gives us an abstract form of knowledge, the kind of knowledge we can attain by adopting the detached impersonal method of inquiry characteristic of the natural sciences. What we leave behind are our concrete, engaged ways of understanding the world. According to the existential phenomenologists it is these modes of understanding which are basic or fundamental. Indeed we saw back in chapter 2 how the existential phenomenologist will try to argue that our reflective modes of understanding depend on our pre-reflective modes of understanding, in the sense that the former couldn't exist without the latter.

At the end of chapter 2 I explained how Heidegger thought of being-in-the-world as something like a transcendental condition which makes possible both reflective and operative intentionality. What exactly are "transcendental

conditions”? In Kant’s philosophy transcendental conditions define the limits or the boundaries of our knowledge. According to Kant we can have knowledge of an objective world only insofar as our experiences have the form of space and time imposed upon them, and only insofar as we can think in accordance with the pure concepts of the understanding. What these phenomenologists share in common with Kant is the idea that our experience and thought must be *conditioned* in certain ways.<sup>9</sup>

Heidegger’s claim that an entity’s being depends upon our modes of understanding is intended to be a transcendental claim. The idea is that our practices, concerns and interests which taken together comprise our being-in-the-world, constitute the condition of the possibility of *understanding* something as something. For Heidegger it is our *understanding* of something as something that is necessarily conditioned. Our operative and reflective modes of understanding must of necessity conform to certain conditions, and it is these conditions I am calling “transcendental”.

Doesn’t a claim along these lines commit existential phenomenology to a variety of transcendental idealism? I don’t think so.<sup>10</sup> Heidegger tells us in his 1927 lectures on Kant:

‘Physical nature can only occur as intraworldly when world, i.e. Dasein, exists. Nature can, however, very well be in its own way without occurring as intraworldly, without human Dasein, and hence a world,

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<sup>9</sup> They depart from Kant in rejecting his idea of a necessarily unknowable, thing in itself. This is just as well, for there is a long tradition extending back to Hegel which argues that to say we cannot know the thing in itself is to say something self-stultifying. See Moore (1997: ch.6) for a recent, characteristically clear formulation of this objection.

Heidegger insists that there is no sense in which a thing has being or an identity of its own independent of our modes of understanding. Our understanding of being shapes both what an entity is, as well as determining whether it is. Thus there would seem to be no room in Heidegger’s ontology for the existence of something – a thing in itself – that is not subject to our modes of understanding.

<sup>10</sup> Blattner (1994) argues for a reading of Heidegger as a transcendental idealist. See chapter 2, §5 for a fuller defence of the position I take in this section. I discuss Blattner’s reading briefly in footnote 24 of that chapter.

existing; and it is only because nature is by itself occurrent that it can also confront Dasein within a world.' (Heidegger (1997: 19) quoted by Carman (2003: 157))

Heidegger is conceiving of the "world" in this quotation as the place in which we perceive and act. He is claiming that the world understood in this way couldn't exist without us and our modes of understanding, but nature certainly could, and would. Heidegger is making a distinction between the "world" understood as a totality of ready-to-hand things, and "nature" understood as a totality of present-at-hand things. Now of course entities only exist as present-at-hand or as ready-to-hand when we understand them as such. However we can understand Heidegger as claiming that the entities which we understand as present-at-hand are the very same entities which exist independently of us and our modes of understanding. Thus there will be no room for an unknowable thing-in-itself which is a defining feature of any form of transcendental idealism.

Central to the existential phenomenologist's anti-naturalism is the denial that the *only* sense in which an entity can truly be said to exist is as something present-at-hand, existing independently of us. Naturalists say that science provides a complete and exhaustive account of what exists, but science gives us descriptions of entities as they exist independently of us. Thus the entities and properties which will appear on the naturalist's list of what there is are those properties and entities that exist independently of us. The existential phenomenologist complains that this is to level-off all the others ways in which an entity can be said to exist. In particular it ignores all of the entities and properties the existence of which essentially involves us.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Sellars (1963) can profitably be read as grappling with a version of this problem. Sellars sides with the naturalist in this debate.

Why agree that the only entities and properties naturalists admit into their ontology are entities and properties which exist independent of us? The idea I take it is that scientific theories aim to represent the world independent of any particular point of view. It is assumed that in doing so they aim to represent a reality that is there anyway, existing independently of us. The scientist will detach herself as much as possible from her own personal perspective on this reality in order to achieve a view of reality as it exists independent of her perspective.<sup>12</sup> The reason why the scientist attempts to describe the world from no point of view is so that she can describe the world as it exists independently of us and the peculiar interests and concerns which characterise our point of view on reality.

What the phenomenologist objects to in naturalism is the idea that to form a true conception of reality we must abandon our ordinary modes of understanding and represent the world from no point of view. I shall label this the "independence assumption". The independence assumption says that a true conception of reality will be composed of representations from no particular point of view.

Existential phenomenology diagnoses two errors inherent in the independence assumption. First of all, as already mentioned, naturalists are charged with mistakenly supposing that an entity's being is exhausted by what can be discovered by the natural sciences. The existential phenomenologist will insist that science only ever accounts for the existence an entity has independently of us. In the process, it overlooks all the ways in which an entity's existence is dependent on us.

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<sup>12</sup> This is the conception of scientific practice employed by Nagel in his (1986) and elsewhere. A similar idea is found in Williams' idea of an absolute conception, see Williams (1978: 64-8). For a recent defence of the possibility of achieving an absolute conception see Moore (1997, ch.4).



The first objection rests on the idea that our modes of understanding literally shape an entity's being. To understand an entity as something it has been claimed that we must represent that entity from a particular point of view, the point of view constituted by our being-in-the-world. Entities are understood as having a particular identity which marks them out from other entities only in virtue of the practices, concerns and interests definitive of our being-in-the-world. It follows that there are ways in which entities exist which essentially involve us and our being-in-the-world. This contradicts the naturalist's claim that the only entities and properties which truly exist are those described by the natural science whose existence in no way involves us.

Second, it is argued that the naturalist forgets how all of our understanding, including the reflective understanding which the naturalist prioritises, is dependent on us and our being-in-the-world. It is the second objection that all of our modes of understanding are conditioned by our being-in-the-world that is doing much of the work in the case the existential phenomenologist presents against naturalism. The naturalist, it is claimed, forms a conception of reality composed of representations produced independently of any particular point of view.<sup>13</sup> It has been argued that every representation we can produce independent of a particular point of view will in fact presuppose the point of view constitutive of our being-in-the-world. Thus there is something which cannot be represented by theories formed from no particular point of view, and that is our being-in-the-world.

We can reconstruct the anti-naturalistic argument as follows:

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<sup>13</sup> I gave an account of how this is possible in chapter 2. The idea was that in taking up a reflective standpoint we first decontextualise entities and their properties and then recontextualise them using the models and theories of the natural sciences. This process of recontextualising gives us knowledge of entities as they are independent of us, I suggested.

## Making Room for Subjective Facts

(1) Let us assume for a reductio the independence assumption – the claim that a complete and exhaustive conception of reality will be composed of representations formed independently of any particular point of view.

(2) There exists a point of view on reality, such that any representation we produce can only be produced from this point of view. The existential phenomenologist calls this point of view “being-in-the-world”.

(3) Any conception of reality, including that which we form from the natural sciences, will derive its intelligibility from the point of view characterised by our being-in-the-world.

(4) There is something that cannot be represented independent of any particular point of view, and that is our being-in-the-world.

(5) Hence there is something that a conception of reality formed from no point of view can never include but must always presuppose.

Premise (5) contradicts premise (1)

(6) The independence assumption is false.

(7) Naturalists are committed to the independence assumption.

Conclusion: Naturalism must fail to provide a complete and exhaustive conception of reality.

I will argue that premise (7) is mistaken – the naturalist needn't endorse the independence assumption. Without the independence assumption the phenomenologist has no argument for the conclusion that naturalism is incompatible with a commitment to subjective facts. A naturalism that accepts the existence of subjective facts is a naturalism that can accept much of what is important in phenomenology.

### 3. Making Room for Subjective Facts

In chapter 1, we saw that there are two ways to naturalise an entity or property. I labelled these two strategies for naturalisation “elimination” and “assimilation” respectively. I will begin with a reminder of the difference between the two strategies for naturalising a putative property or entity.

The first strategy we can call “Naturalisation by Assimilation” (NBA for short). In chapter 1 I took a proponent of NBA to be committed to showing the following:

(NBA): For any putative natural phenomenon P there is (1) a set of conditions  $[c_1, c_2, c_3 \dots c_n]$  specifiable without reference to P, and (2) P is realised by this set of conditions.

What is the nature of the realisation relation which NBA seeks to identify? The notion of realisation is intended to characterise the relation between P and the set of physical conditions the presence of which is sufficient for P. In particular realisation talk is introduced to accommodate the possibility of P being realised by a variety of distinct physical conditions. If P can be realised by distinct physical conditions, we cannot take P to be type identical with any of its realisers. For it will always be possible for P to occur in the absence of any one of its particular realisers.<sup>14</sup>

The notion of P standing in a relation of realisation to physical conditions buys a degree of autonomy for our non-physical descriptions of P. The realisers of P might form such a heterogeneous class that we make no explanatory gain by describing P at the level of the conditions that realise P. Where this is not true and we can replace P with a description of the physical

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<sup>14</sup> Indeed it may even be possible for P to occur in the absence of any of the realisers we have identified thus far. Of course if materialism is true, there must be some physical conditions which P is realised by. However it may well be that we can never exhaustively specify P's class of possible realisers.

conditions that realise P without any explanatory loss, the appropriate naturalising strategy to adopt is that of naturalisation by elimination (“NBE” for short). A proponent of NBE is committed to the following claim:

(NBE): For any explanation in which P occurs, the set of physical conditions  $[c_1, c_2, c_3 \dots c_n]$  that realise P can be substituted for P without any explanatory loss.

The independence assumption requires the naturalist to seek the elimination of subjective facts. It says that a complete and exhaustive conception of reality can be formed from representations that are from no particular point of view. This is to say that a complete and exhaustive account of reality will *not* include a commitment to facts that can only be represented from a subject’s point of view. A naturalist who accepts the independence assumption cannot allow for the existence of subjective facts. S/he must attempt to eliminate subjective facts.

Generally naturalists only adopt NBE when appeal to some putative natural phenomenon P can be shown to serve no explanatory purpose. If the appeal to subjective facts can be shown to do genuine explanatory work, there will be no need for the naturalist to eliminate them. Of course I will only be able to demonstrate the real explanatory work subjective facts can do by demonstrating concretely how a naturalist could assimilate facts of this kind. This is something I won’t attempt in the remainder of this chapter. It is a challenge I shall take up in my final chapter. The remainder of this chapter will explain how NBA is consistent with a rejection of the independence assumption. I will begin by arguing that naturalists could assimilate

subjective facts. Having done so, I will offer a reason for thinking that subjective facts cannot be eliminated.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. Location Dependent Representation

The two arguments I have given for subjective facts – the arguments from the content of experience, and the experience of content – have both proceeded from claims about the kind of representational states characteristic of conscious experience. I am going to concentrate on the argument from the experience of content for the remainder of this chapter. My first aim will be to characterise a kind of representational state that might make a subject aware of herself at the same time as it makes the subject aware of something in the world. I appealed to representational states of this kind in explaining what it is for a state to be phenomenally conscious. Suppose I can show that representations of this kind can be assimilated by naturalism. Then I will have demonstrated that at least one of the reasons I have given for believing in subjective facts is consistent with naturalism. This will still leave us needing to show that a naturalist pursuing assimilation can accept the argument from the contents of experience. I will make such an argument in the first part of my final chapter.

The argument from the experience of content says I have a way of representing myself which is available only to me and to no one else. Any

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<sup>15</sup> This argument will however rely on the account I have given of conscious experiences as PRSC. On the assumption that this theory of consciousness is correct, I will have given an argument for the conclusion that subjective facts can earn their explanatory keep. However it remains to be shown that this account of consciousness can really earn its explanatory keep. Since my aim is solely to refute the anti-naturalist argument this assumption is harmless. I am assuming the phenomenological account of conscious experience solely in order to show the naturalist need not accept the independence assumption. My aim is to show that *pace* the anti-naturalist argument, a naturalist could and should accept the existence of subjective facts. The work of describing what a naturalistic theory of subjective facts might look like must wait till my final chapter.

account of the type of representation characteristic of conscious experience must accommodate this feature. It must explain how my experiences represent me in a way that no one else can represent me.

Our theory of representation for conscious experience must also capture the difference between experiences that are PRSC and experiences that are made to be RSC (reflectively self-conscious) through an act of introspection. Introspection on an experience of the blue sky for example, will make a subject conscious that she herself is experiencing the blue sky. Through her act of introspection the subject will become explicitly conscious that she herself is undergoing an experience of this kind. Reflective self-consciousness is however no part of an ordinary conscious experience. The subject won't normally be explicitly conscious of herself when she is undergoing a conscious experience. Nevertheless I have claimed that there is a kind of self-consciousness that normally accompanies our ordinary conscious experiences. I have claimed that a subject is always implicitly or peripherally conscious of herself at the same time as she is explicitly conscious of what she is experiencing. An account of the type of representation characteristic of conscious experience must in addition identify a type of state that can make the subject explicitly conscious of something in the world and implicitly conscious of herself.

The type of representation we are attempting to describe has content essentially tied to a subject's point of view. Let us begin by considering the more general phenomenon of representations that are essentially tied to a point of view. I shall call this class of representations "location dependent representations" ("LDRs" for short). Having identified how LDRs work, we can then apply what we have learned to the case of representations whose contents are essentially tied to a *subject's* point of view.



A representation R is “location dependent” if there can be no difference in the location from which R was produced without there also being a difference in R’s content. Photographic representations qualify as LDRs. There can be no difference in the location from which the photograph was produced – the time and place at which it was taken – without there also being a difference in what the photograph depicts. Taking the photograph from a particular place (a particular location) will capture one part of a scene that will be captured in a different way, or perhaps not at all, if one varies the place from which the picture is taken. Taking the photograph at a particular time will determine the kind of light that is captured in the photograph.

LDRs represent in two kinds of way. They have contents which purport to represent some object or state of affairs *explicitly*. I shall argue that an LDR also *implicitly* represents the location from which it has been produced. Consider by way of illustration the following example. Scattered around town in Edinburgh are brass plaques placed in the pavement which represent to tourists the best places for taking photographs of the city.<sup>16</sup> All the photographs taken from one of these plaques, will share a similar content, they will depict similar scenes. Indeed it is not too misleading to say that the fact that a photograph’s depicts a particular view of the castle is dependent on the photograph’s having been taken from one of Edinburgh’s recommended vantage points. Now I want to say that the location from which a photograph is taken is implicitly represented in the photograph. It is implicitly represented because taking a photograph with a particular content depends on the photograph being taken from a particular location. Taking a picture from a brass plaque facing Edinburgh’s castle will entail (other things being equal) a picture of a particular view of the castle.

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<sup>16</sup> Thanks to Denis Walsh for the nice example.

Clearly a photograph does not represent the location from which it was taken in the same way as it represents a view of the castle. The brass plaque a tourist stood on to get his picture of the castle does not figure in what we see when we look at the resulting photograph of the castle. The location from which the photograph was taken does not itself form a part of the scene the photograph depicts.

Still I want to say that the brass plaque is implicitly represented in the resulting photograph of the castle. The scene a photograph explicitly represents is one that belongs to the location from which it is taken. If I want to take a photograph which is roughly of the same view, I will be able to produce one (other things being equal) by finding the brass plaque from which this photo was taken. I will thereby be able to produce a photograph of roughly the same type.

One way to think about what I am calling implicit representation is to think of LDR's as having a content which include what Perry (1986) has described as "unarticulated constituents". An unarticulated constituent forms a part of the content of a thought or utterance even though there is no part of the thought or utterance which designates this constituent. The example Perry gives to illustrate this phenomenon, is the statement 'it is raining'. This statement conveys information about the place at which the utterance is made. Yet there is no expression or component of this utterance, which designates or stands for this place. Somehow the statement conveys information about a place without this place forming a part of what is represented.<sup>17</sup> Perry says this is possible because the representation has as a part of its content, an unarticulated constituent.<sup>18</sup> I say this is possible

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<sup>17</sup> At least this will follow if we suppose that what is represented is a function of a sentence's component words and what those words stand for.

<sup>18</sup> See for instance Perry (1986/2000: 172).

because the location from which this utterance is produced is implicitly represented by the utterance.

Location dependent representations form an interesting class of representations insofar as they demonstrate how a single representational state can represent in two distinct ways. An LDR represents an object or state of affairs explicitly, and the location from which it has been produced implicitly. In this respect LDRs are just like conscious experiences which I have claimed also represent in two ways. A conscious experience explicitly represents some object or state of affairs, and implicitly represents the subject undergoing this very experience.

There is however an important difference between LDR's and conscious experiences. The location from which the representation is produced in the case of conscious experiences will be the location of the subject's body. Following Merleau-Ponty and Sartre I have claimed that a subject just is his or her body. Our subjectivity is constituted through the sense we have of our embodiment. It follows that what conscious experiences implicitly represent isn't merely the location from which the experience is had. Conscious experiences implicitly represent a *subject*.

What we need if we are to give a representational account of PRSC is a way of capturing the difference between implicitly representing a *location* and implicitly representing a *subject*. My experiences cannot carry this information in the same way that a photograph can carry the information that it was taken from a particular location. I said that a photograph carries this information insofar as what is depicted in the photograph entails that it was taken from a particular location. Certainly it is going to be true that what my conscious experiences represent entails that these experiences have been produced from a particular location, the location of my body. This fact about

my experiences only suffices to show that they implicitly represent a location. It doesn't establish the sense in which they carry information about me *qua* subject of an experience.

According to Merleau-Ponty to represent oneself *qua* subject is to represent one's body undergoing an experience. It is to represent one's body as the owner of an experience. That my body is undergoing an experience isn't among the things my experiences explicitly represent. If my experiences explicitly represented that my body was undergoing an experience, I would be introspectively aware of my experiences the whole time, which I am patently not. Somehow then my experience must carry the information that my body is undergoing an experience without this being among the facts my experience explicitly represents.

I mentioned above how we might think of my being implicitly represented in experience by analogy with Perry's notion of an unarticulated constituent (see Perry (1986/2000)). Pursuing this analogy we might say that a subject represents his body as the owner of his experiences when a subject's body forms a part of the contents of one's experiences as an unarticulated constituent. Perry's example is the utterance 'it is raining' which contains the indexical expression 'here' as an unarticulated constituent. Towards the end of his paper Perry suggests that we might understand perception as carrying information about ourselves in a similar way. He suggests that a subject could figure among the things that this subject is experiencing on a given occasion, but as an unarticulated constituent.<sup>19</sup> When a ball is coming towards me, for instance, I duck. How do I know to duck – because my experience carries information that the ball is approaching my head!

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<sup>19</sup> Perry (1986/2000: 182)

While this seems promising enough, it cannot be the whole story about what it is for me to implicitly represent that my body is undergoing an experience. Thinking of my body as forming a part of what I experience as an unarticulated constituent only captures the sense in which my body could be among the objects of my experience on any given occasion. In order to account for PRSC we must explain what it is for me to implicitly represent my body *qua* subject. To do this we must account for the ways in which by implicitly representing my body in every experience I thereby give form to the objects of my experience. Recall my earlier example of how I understand a thing's spatial properties – a thing's having a particular shape say – through the sense I have of my embodiment. If we are to account for my implicitly representing my body in experience, we must explain the ways in which my implicitly representing my body plays an active role in shaping the experiences I undergo.

This is one of the remaining questions that will be taken up in the final chapter. In particular we will need to say much more about how one gains a sense of subjectivity by being in a state which implicitly carries information about one's own body. I have said enough for now for us to see how, on the view of conscious experience I have been arguing for, a theory of representation for conscious experience must go.

Consider the two requirements I laid down at the beginning of this section. The first said that a satisfactory theory of representation for conscious experience must recognise the sense in which my experiences represent me in a way that no one else can represent me. On the account of representation just sketched this is true because only my experiences implicitly represent my own body. Anyone else will have experiences that

represent their own body. They will not have experiences that implicitly represent my body.

The second requirement called for us to develop an account of representation which registers the significant differences between being PRSC and being RSC. Again the notion of implicit representation can help us to meet this requirement. A subject will be RSC through an act of introspection. Through this act of introspection, the subject will come to explicitly represent that she herself is undergoing a particular experience. When an experience is PRSC, the subject doesn't explicitly represent that she is undergoing an experience. She nevertheless enjoys an experience that carries this information. She does so because she is in a state which implicitly represents that her body is in a state explicitly representing some object or state of affairs.

Among the tasks facing a naturalist who seeks to assimilate subjective facts is the development of an account of what it is for a subject to be implicitly represented in experience. If we can explain in naturalistic terms what it is for an experience to represent a subject's point of view we will be on our way to giving an account of subjective facts in naturalistic terms.<sup>20</sup> The remainder of this chapter has the goal of showing that such an account could in principle be given, pace the phenomenologist's anti-naturalist argument. In the remainder of this chapter I will employ the technical machinery I have just introduced to explain how we can at last set aside the phenomenologist's doubts about naturalism.

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<sup>20</sup> Of course, giving an account of implicit self-representation will form only one strand in a naturalistic account of subjective facts. We will also need to tell a naturalistic story about being-in-the-world more generally and about how our existence as persons can shape the kind of world we live in. I will attempt to outline the beginnings of such a theory in the next chapter.



### 5. Refuting the Independence Assumption

The reconstruction I have given of the phenomenologist's Anti-Naturalist argument derives its force from the premise which claims that the naturalist is committed to "the independence assumption". I take the motivation for this premise to be a view of science as describing a reality as it exists independently of us.<sup>21</sup> To describe such a reality it is assumed that the scientist must detach herself as much as possible from her particular subjective take on the world. She must try to produce representations that are objective – representations whose contents do not vary from location to location.<sup>22</sup>

In the remainder of the chapter I shall assume that it is right to think of the naturalist as offering a conception of reality where this conception is composed of objective representations. Now consider NBA once again which says that for every putative natural phenomenon P there is a set of conditions which can be described without reference to P which realise P. I take the proponent of NBA to be committed to the view that wherever we have a subjective fact there will be (1) some set of conditions which realise this fact, and (2) these conditions can be given an objective representation.

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<sup>21</sup> Of course this is a controversial view of science. It is one that will for instance be rejected by anti-realists. One response to the anti-naturalist argument as it has been presented above would be to reject the independence assumption by arguing for an anti-realist conception of scientific practice. However, I have been arguing that existential phenomenologists can be read as committed to some form of realism. Thus I am reluctant to pursue this line of response. Instead I shall be arguing that contrary to appearances the independence assumption is quite compatible with a commitment to subjective facts.

<sup>22</sup> Moore (1997: ch.2) has characterised the kinds of representations in terms of two features, which he labels "comprehensiveness of coverage" (henceforth "CC") and "comprehensiveness of appeal" (CA). A representation has CC when it combines 'various things that are known into a single representation' (Moore, 1997: 21). Such a representation tells us how distinct representations can be true. Moore persuasively argues that this is amongst the fundamental goals of science. A representation has CA the less it relies on any particular point of view. Representations of scientific laws are a central example of representations that have CA. Representations of this kind are examples of shared conceptions of the world which anyone can come to participate in just by acquiring mastery of the necessary concepts.

When I say that every subjective fact is realised by a set of conditions that can be given an objective representation, I mean the following. A subjective fact is a fact that can only be represented from a subject's point of view. Take a fact that meets this description, for instance the fact that I am undergoing a conscious experience. A proponent of NBA is committed to the claim that this fact – the fact that I am undergoing a conscious experience – is realised by a set of conditions that can be objectively represented.<sup>23</sup>

Suppose something along these lines can be shown for the class of representations in terms of which I have characterised conscious experience. Then we will have shown that subjective facts can be assimilated. To refute the independence assumption all we will need to do is show that subjective facts cannot be eliminated.

Let us begin by considering the case of LDRs that are not conscious experiences. At least some of our indexical thoughts and utterances – thoughts and utterances expressed using expressions like “I”, “here” or “now” – will fit this description.<sup>24</sup> These thoughts and utterances have contents that vary depending on when, where, and by whom they are produced.<sup>25</sup> There is however every reason to believe that the facts our indexical thoughts and utterances represent can meet the two conditions for assimilation set out

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<sup>23</sup> Notice that this is not to say the fact that I am undergoing a conscious experience is itself a fact that can be given an objective representation. There may well be explanatory gains to be made from appealing to subjective facts that are lost one we appeal to the facts that can be given an objective representation. Indeed this is exactly what I shall argue when I attack the independence assumption later in this chapter.

<sup>24</sup> Some of our indexical thoughts and utterances will be about conscious experiences, in which case they will be LDRs in which the location that is implicitly represented is a subject.

<sup>25</sup> When I say that “I am happy”, for instance, I utter a sentence whose content purports to refer to me, and the way I feel at the time I utter this sentence. An utterance of this sentence is true if the speaker of this very sentence is happy. This sentence as uttered by me may express a truth, while the very same sentence “I am happy” may be used by someone else to say something false. If we are to establish whether the sentence is true or not we must establish who has uttered the sentence. The truth of this utterance depends in part on facts about its speaker. It is in this sense that indexical representations can be said to have contents that depend on a location or point of view.

above. The facts our indexical thoughts and utterances represent will generally be facts that can be given an objective representation.

To see this we need to first make a type-token distinction for indexicals. This distinction corresponds to a distinction Kaplan makes between content and character. What Kaplan calls “character” attaches to types of indexical thoughts and utterances, and what he calls “content” applies to tokens of those types. A sentence’s character is, according to Kaplan, a function from the context in which the sentence is used (“the occasion of use”) to truth conditions which specify a token sentence’s content.<sup>26</sup> If for instance, I say that I am sitting, the character of the sentence I have uttered will enable us to determine that what I have said is that <JK is sitting>. The character of this sentence tells us that sentences of this type represent whoever it is that has produced them at a particular time. Since I am the speaker of this sentence, this particular token represents me.

Is the situation that obtains when JK is sitting, a situation realised by conditions which can be given an objective representation? To this question we can surely return a positive answer. The situation in this case consists of a certain person JK standing in a relation of sitting to some object, say a chair, at the time of this utterance. Is this situation realised by conditions that can be given an objective representation? There is nothing about the description I have just given of this situation which requires one to take up a

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<sup>26</sup> Kaplan describes ‘character’ as a function from an occasion of use to a singular proposition. A proposition is “singular” when among the constituents of which the proposition is composed is the referent of a singular term. According to Kaplan, singular terms do not pick out their referents via the propositions of which they are part but instead refer directly to the individuals they designate. However, it should be noted that singular terms are only able to refer directly to the individuals they designate because of their character. It is in virtue of its character that a singular term refers to the particular individual it does on each occasion that it is used. I can remain neutral as to whether we should understand representational content in terms of singular propositions or not.

particular location. We can safely say that for this indexical representation the fact that is represented is one which can be assimilated by the naturalist.

What about conscious experiences? Is the fact that I am undergoing a conscious experience a fact which is realised by a set of conditions that can be given an objective representation? Certainly there is nothing in the phenomenologist's anti-naturalist argument to suggest that this is not the case. However we will not really be in a position to assess this question adequately until we have some substantive proposal before us about the conditions that realise subjective facts. I conclude for now that the phenomenologist has given no reason for thinking that the following is not the case. Wherever there is some subjective fact, there is a set of natural conditions that realise this fact which can be given an objective representation.

Of course the naturalist won't seek assimilation if subjective facts do no explanatory work. I will finish up by arguing that subjective facts play an essential role in explaining behaviour.

It is something of a commonplace nowadays that indexical representations play an essential role in explaining behaviour. To see this consider again Perry's familiar example of following a leaking bag of sugar. It is only when I realise that it is me that is making a mess that I am caused to stop and rummage through my shopping basket. No objective representation or location independent representation I can produce will suffice to cause this action on my part – only the representation that it is *me* who is making the mess will motivate me to act in this way.<sup>27</sup> An objective representation will

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<sup>27</sup> The role that location dependent representations play in motivating action isn't peculiar to what we might call first-person representations, representations the contents of which purport to refer in the first-person. Say I want to watch something on television at 8pm, but I also want to get some reading done before it starts. The belief that causes me to stop reading and turn on the television is the belief that it is *now* 8pm. This belief differs in

only suffice to cause me to act in this way if it is combined with a belief that I am the person that this representation purports to refer to.

Perry's point (following Castañeda) is that the content of any indexical representation will be such that I do not need to form this further belief that I am the person this representation has as its referent. This is something I already realise just by representing myself in the first person. Thus my representation that I am making a mess represents something different from the representation that the shopper with a torn bag of sugar is making a mess even though I am the shopper with the torn bag. The representation that I am making a mess suffices on its own to pick me out whereas the representation that the shopper with the torn bag of sugar is making a mess won't suffice to pick me out until I know that I am this shopper.<sup>28</sup>

Now consider the theory of conscious experience I have endorsed. According to this theory conscious experiences are a variety of LDR, in which the subject is implicitly represented. Indexical representations just are LDRs. Perry has given us an argument for the conclusion that LDRs play an essential role in explaining behaviour, a role that cannot be played by any objective representation. Assuming that conscious experiences are LDRs,

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content from the belief that the program starts at 8pm. Having the latter belief doesn't make me stop reading; I have this belief all the while that I am reading. It is only when I believe that it is now 8pm that I act. The same conclusion applies to the indexical "here". Suppose I am lost but I have a map which tells me how to get to the university. The map will not help me unless I know where I am; once I know that I am here where "here" picks out a particular location on the map, then I can use the map to plot a route to the university. The map is useless to me in planning a course of action until I know my own location on it. These kinds of examples and many others are explored by Perry in his classic (1979) paper and more recently in his (2000: ch.'s 5 &6)

<sup>28</sup> This was something we saw in chapter 5 when we discussed first-person thought. There it was argued that when I ascribe some property to myself in the first-person, I do not first ascribe this property to an individual and then establish that this individual is me. The judgement I form in thinking about myself is to borrow Evan's terms "identification free" (see Evans 1982: ch.7, pp.181). For further discussion see my discussion of reflective self-consciousness in chapter 5, pp.17-18.



we can say the same of conscious experience. We can say that conscious experiences also play an essential role in explaining behaviour.

If this is right then subjective facts cannot be eliminated. The argument from the experience of content sought to establish the existence of subjective facts based on considerations to do with the mode of representation characteristic of conscious experience. Perry has shown that representations of this type (LDRs) play an ineliminable role in explaining behaviour. It follows that subjective facts cannot be eliminated. If subjective facts cannot be eliminated, the independence assumption is false. For the independence assumption requires the naturalist to eliminate subjective facts. Without the independence assumption, the anti-naturalist argument set out above fails.

I shall argue in the next chapter that there are certain conditions which can be described in the terms of the natural sciences which make possible our being-in-the-world. I shall call these conditions “enabling conditions” for without these conditions our existence wouldn’t be possible. Suppose that these enabling conditions exist, does it follow that our being-in-the-world is something that can be described independently of any point of view? No. All that follows is that our being-in-the-world is realised by conditions that can be described independently of any point of view.

NBA doesn’t require us to say that every fact obtains independently of us. The first worry behind the anti-naturalist argument was that a naturalist conception of reality will include only those entities and properties that can be described from no particular point of view. NBA allows for the existence of entities and properties that depend on us so long as the existence of these entities and properties is entailed by the existence of other entities and properties described by the natural sciences. NBA can thus allow the



conclusion that the entities and properties which populate our world can be understood in many ways, some of which contribute towards shaping the existence of those entities and properties.

All that needs to be the case is the ways we have of existing which in turn shape the reality we inhabit are entailed by the kinds of conditions that can be described by the natural sciences. If this can be shown, the naturalist can allow that there are many ways in which entities exist some of which depend on us. She can accept this as a truth about us and the world we live in without giving up on the idea that there are conditions which make all of this possible which can be represented objectively.<sup>29</sup>

The project of naturalising phenomenology which I will take up in the next chapter recognises that our ways of representing the world originate in our ways of existing as persons. It attempts to identify what the conditions are that enable us to exist as we do, where these conditions are understood as forming a part of a single objective reality, the natural world. A naturalised phenomenology will agree that our being-in-the-world makes possible our ways of representing reality, which in turn shape many of the objects of our experience. However, a naturalised phenomenology will also insist that our existence is that of an animal, and that *qua* animals we form a part of the natural world. Hence there are conditions which underlie our existence and make it possible which can be described in the terms of the natural sciences.

A conclusion to this effect requires concessions from both the naturalist and the existential phenomenologist. It requires the naturalist to concede that our ways of representing the world originate with our being-in-the-world.

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<sup>29</sup> With the added qualification, of course, that the latter representations are produced against the background of our being-in-the-world.

Moreover the naturalist must recognise that these ways of representing the world can literally shape the objects we experience.

The existential phenomenologist must likewise make concessions. He must recognise that there are certain conditions that must be in place if we are to exist as we do, and these are conditions that can be described by the natural sciences. While it is true that without our being-in-the-world there could be no intelligible representation whatsoever, it is also true that in the absence of certain conditions describable by science there could be no being-in-the-world. This in no way denies that entities can exist in many ways, some of which depend on our modes of understanding. It is to insist that in the absence of certain conditions we couldn't exist, and nor could we understand anything, and that these conditions are ones that can be described by doing science.

## Chapter 7

### Introduction

So far I have shown that naturalists could, *in principle* accept the existence of subjective facts, but it remains to be shown *how* they can do so. This chapter will take up the remaining challenge. I have set out two lines of arguments in defence of the claim that there are subjective facts. First it was argued that we must appeal to subjective facts to account for the contents of experience. A large part of the chapter will be taken up with developing a naturalistic account of the contents of experience. The second argument for subjective facts – the argument from the experience of content – was given in the course of returning an answer to the question of why there should be something rather than nothing it is like to be a conscious creature. I argued that all conscious experiences are also pre-reflectively self-conscious. Thus the second goal of this chapter will be to sketch a naturalistic account of pre-reflective self-consciousness.

In the first section I shall explain how I understand the project of naturalising phenomenology. Some naturalistically inclined phenomenologists have proposed the use of phenomenology in the design of experiments. Subjects are instructed in the methods of phenomenology which they then put to use to arrive at first-person data. This first-person data is then employed to interpret data from brain scans recorded during the experiments.<sup>1</sup>

While this strikes me as a fascinating and potentially fertile approach to the study of consciousness, what I have in mind by naturalised

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent discussion of this kind of approach see Gallagher (2003b). The inspiration behind this methodology comes from Varela's idea of a Neurophenomenology, see Varela (1996) and the lengthy introduction to Petitot *et al* (1999) for a description of the general approach.

## Naturalising Phenomenology

phenomenology is something different. I have argued that a naturalistic theory of mind must make room for subjective facts, if it is to successfully close the explanatory gap. I have given two reasons for believing in the existence of subjective facts. Naturalised phenomenology as I shall understand it has as its goal the assimilation of subjective facts.

In section 2 I return to the account of intentionality I have given in chapter 4. There it was argued that there is a distinctively phenomenological species of intentionality. A similar notion of intentionality has recently received discussion under the heading of “phenomenal intentionality”. Phenomenal intentionality is taken to be a species of narrow content which supervenes on a subject’s neurophysiological states. In section 3 I will argue that some caution is required in treating phenomenal intentionality as a variety of narrow content. Sections 4 and 5 examine whether the enactive view of perception can supply an account of phenomenal intentionality.<sup>2</sup> I argue that it can but only supplemented with a richer account of how we can perceive what J.J. Gibson called “affordances”. I will also argue that such an account can remain neutral on the question of whether phenomenal intentionality is a species of narrow content.

Central to what I called the argument from the contents of experience is the thesis that intentionality originates in our being-in-the-world. If the theory of intentionality I have advanced is to be shown to be consistent with naturalism, I must show how the notion of being-in-the-world can be assimilated within a naturalistic theory of mind. In particular I must make sense of the claim that our understanding of being can literally shape or

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<sup>2</sup> The enactive approach to the study of visual perception has as its origins in J.J. Gibson’s ecological theory of perception. The term was first used in Varela et al (1991) and has recently found a powerful defence in the work of O’Regan and Noë, see for instance their (2001) and Noë (2004).

## Naturalising Phenomenology

constitute the objects of our experience. In section 6 I argue that this conception of experience calls for a radical overhaul in how think about the function of perception. We can no longer think of perception as serving the function of *detection*. Instead we must instead understand perception as serving a function for an animal in the context of a particular environment or milieu. This understanding of perception is, I shall argue, in conflict with any view which takes perception to be detection. However such a revision in our understanding of perception will clear the way for a naturalistic account of being-in-the-world.

In section 7 I take up the challenge to the naturalist to supply an account of pre-reflective self-consciousness. In the final part of this chapter I return to the idea that the subject is implicitly represented in experience. I suggest that recent work on the role of motor imagery in skilful behaviour may provide us with the beginning of a story to tell about what it is for a subject to be implicitly represented in experience.<sup>3</sup>

By the end of this chapter I will have introduced empirical research which indicates that much of what the phenomenologist claims about the nature of conscious experience can be assimilated by naturalism. If the argument of this chapter is correct, there is a view of the mind already available to the naturalist which has found room for subjective facts. I have argued that making room for subjective facts is the key to closing the explanatory gap. It follows that cognitive scientists and neuroscientists have already begun to discover the tools for closing the explanatory gap. To the extent that it is has seemed otherwise to some philosophers, this is perhaps because they have failed to attend to the phenomenology of conscious experience closely

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<sup>3</sup> However we shall see that there is some reason to doubt whether this can be the whole story, for there is reason to think that a conscious experience could be PRSC even in the absence of motor imagery.

# Naturalising Phenomenology

enough. They have brought to bear prejudices which are not borne out by close attention to phenomenology.

## 1. The Project of Naturalising Phenomenology

Let us begin by returning to the idea of a naturalised phenomenology introduced in passing in my introduction. Francisco Varela (1996) sets out the following working hypothesis for the project of naturalising phenomenology. According to Varela phenomenology should be understood as standing in a relation of “reciprocal constraint” to the sciences of the mind.<sup>4</sup> Phenomenology supplies detailed descriptions of conscious perceptual experience and the ways in which it is given form by our being-in-the-world. A naturalised phenomenology, according to Varela, will use these descriptions as data for uncovering new third-person descriptions of the physiological basis for consciousness.<sup>5</sup> Phenomenology constrains the science of consciousness by supplying it with descriptions of conscious experience which it is the task of science to explain. At the same time the descriptions phenomenology supplies of experience, are also constrained by what the science of the mind has to tell us about the nature of perception.

Varela characterises phenomenology as providing a disciplined method for studying consciousness from a first-person perspective. Varela proposes that scientists train subjects in the use of the phenomenological reduction. Subjects can then use the phenomenological reduction as a window onto their own minds, in order to obtain first-person data. Varela conceives of a science of consciousness which uses this data in conjunction with third-person data from neuroscience to construct models of conscious experience.

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<sup>4</sup> See Varela (1996: 351)

<sup>5</sup> See Gallagher (2003b); Lutz and Thompson (2003) and Borrett, *et al* (2000) for accounts of naturalised phenomenology along these lines.



## Naturalising Phenomenology

The distinctive contribution the practice of phenomenology can make is to contribute data to the science of mind that might otherwise go unnoticed.

This general methodology has recently been put into practice by the neuroscientist Antoine Lutz.<sup>6</sup> Lutz and his colleagues exposed subjects to a 3D perceptual illusion. Subjects were asked to fixate for several seconds on a dot pattern containing no depth cues. At the end of this period the pattern was changed to one with binocular disparities. Subjects were asked to press a button as soon as they perceived the emergence of a 3D shape. EEG signals were recorded throughout the trial. Immediately after subjects had pushed the button, they were asked to describe their experience. In these reports subjects would use what Lutz calls “phenomenal categories” which the subjects had devised for describing their experiences during a prior training session. During this training session, subjects were asked to direct their attention to their own mental processes during the task and to the ‘felt-quality’ that accompanied the emergence of the 3D image (Lutz and Thompson, 2003: 43). Lutz characterises this redirection of attention to experience as it is lived through, as corresponding to the phenomenological reduction. Thus he thinks of the phenomenal categories the subjects were later to make use of in their reports, as corresponding with perceptual invariants discovered through the practice of something akin to the phenomenological reduction. ‘In dialogue with the experimenters’, he tells us ‘(subjects) define their own stable experiential categories of phenomenal invariants to describe the main elements of the subjective context in which they perceived the 3D shapes.’ (*op cit*, 44)

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of these experiments see Lutz *et al* (2002), and Lutz and Thompson (2003)

## Naturalising Phenomenology

Following the experiments, the reports the subjects made using these phenomenal categories were used to interpret the EEG data. Lutz hypothesised that each phenomenal invariant would be 'characterised by distinct dynamical neural signatures before stimulation' reflecting the degree to which the subject was ready for the emergence of the 3D shape. These 'signatures would' it was hypothesised 'condition the neural and behavioural responses to the stimulus'. (*op cit*, 45)

Lutz *et al* did indeed find interesting correlations between the phenomenal categories subjects employed in their reports and patterns in brain activity as measured using EEG before the stimulus. They found that the states of preparation in subjects 'modulated...both the behavioural response and the dynamical neural responses after the stimulation'. In addition they found that the 'shape of the synchrony patterns' while varying across subjects 'were stable in individual subjects throughout several recording sessions'. (*op cit*, p.46)

While I certainly do not mean to diminish the importance of the work that Lutz and his colleagues are carrying out, it doesn't seem right to me to describe this work as phenomenological. This research is better thought of as establishing the importance for the scientific study of consciousness of data arrived at through the careful use of introspection.

As I understand Husserl, he employed the method of bracketing in order to describe the different kinds of intentionality characteristic of consciousness, and how these different kinds of consciousness constitute the world we experience and think about. Husserl uses the term "constitution" to capture the sense in which consciousness contains the conditions necessary and sufficient for the existence of the objects we experience.

## Naturalising Phenomenology

Lutz's experiment certainly isn't studying anything akin to constitution as Husserl understands it. Perhaps Lutz was thinking of the emergence of the 3D figure as something akin to constitution. However the reason subjects come to perceive a 3D figure in this experiment is because of the binocular disparities present in the dot pattern they perceive. The subjects do not come to perceive a 3D figure through constituting acts of consciousness of the kind Husserl describes. Lutz may have devised a disciplined method for studying variations in subjective experience. He may have also discovered interesting correlations between these variations in subjective experience and brain activity. Striking as these findings are, they don't have very much to do with phenomenology as it was practiced by Husserl, and the existential phenomenologists.

I take phenomenology to have an important contribution to make to the scientific study of consciousness through the descriptions it gives of intentionality, and how our conscious experiences come to exhibit intentionality. It is these descriptions of intentionality which naturalists must assimilate if they are to provide a satisfactory account of consciousness. The phenomenologist's account of intentionality entails the existence of subjective facts. It follows that naturalism can assimilate the account of consciousness we find in phenomenology only if it can assimilate subjective facts. It is this task that will occupy our attention across the next two sections.

### 2. The Phenomenal Intentionality Thesis

Naturalistic theories of intentionality have often supposed that 'if intentionality is real, it must really be something else'.<sup>7</sup> They have supposed that it must be possible to give a reductionist account of intentionality which accounts for

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<sup>7</sup> Fodor (1987: 97)

## Naturalising Phenomenology

intentionality in non-intentional terms. Fodor (1987) captures the spirit of much work in this area when, in discussing what it will take to integrate intentionality into the natural order, he says: 'what we want at a minimum is something of the form ' $R$  represents  $S$ ' is true iff  $C$  where the vocabulary in which  $C$  is couched contains neither intentional nor semantic expressions.' (*op cit*, p.32) I shall call accounts of intentionality which seek to identify non-intentional or non-semantic conditions necessary and sufficient for a state to count as a representation, "reductive" accounts of intentionality.

Reductive accounts of intentionality have thus far proven to be something of a failure. Their defects can be brought out by thinking of cases in which our thoughts or experiences fail to refer to anything. In cases of reference failure, there is nevertheless something that the thought or experience has the *goal* of representing correctly. What reductive accounts have so far failed to explain is what it is for a representation producing system to have a goal of this kind.<sup>8</sup> No one has yet succeeded in identifying conditions which are necessary and sufficient for an organism to have the goal of representing correctly.

Must a naturalistic account of intentionality also be a reductive account of intentionality? I have claimed that naturalistic accounts come in two varieties; they either eliminate or assimilate some putative natural phenomenon. I am assuming that elimination isn't the appropriate strategy to adopt when looking for an account of intentionality. The appeal to intentional content does essential explanatory work in explaining our behaviour which cannot be done by explanations which do not attribute content-bearing states to an agent.<sup>9</sup> That leaves naturalisation by assimilation. Must a naturalist

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<sup>8</sup> For a persuasive defence of this conclusion see Walsh (2002).

<sup>9</sup> Many philosophers have attempted to argue for this conclusion, satisfactorily to my mind. See for instance Dretske (1988); Fodor (1989); Horgan and Woodward (1985); Rudder-

## Naturalising Phenomenology

seeking to assimilate intentionality aim for a reductive account of intentionality?

I will present a theory of intentionality which explains how our conscious experiences get their content by reference to certain skills or capacities of a perceiving animal. A reductive account of these skills and capacities would seek to characterise them in non-intentional terms. We will see that the skills and capacities in question must be understood as the skills of a particular animal acting in pursuit of certain goals. I doubt that there is any way of accounting for intentionality in naturalistic terms that doesn't somehow advert to a representational system and the goals it has, though this is not something I can attempt to argue for here. Still I think the naturalist can assimilate intentionality. The practical understanding I shall appeal to in explaining how an experience get its content attributes to an animal skills and capacities which are susceptible to explanation by cognitive scientists and neuroscientists. This practical understanding cannot however be understood apart from the goals and purposes of the organism which the animal acts to bring about. So even though we might not be able to give a wholly reductive definition of intentionality, we are nevertheless beginning to understand how intentionality could be realised by conditions describable by the sciences of mind.

The question I will take up in what follows concerns what it is for a conscious perceptual experience to have an intentional content.<sup>10</sup> I will not be proposing a more general account of intentionality. The intentional

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Baker (1987 & 1995). To enter into this debate here would take me to far away from my concerns in this chapter which is to offer a naturalistic account of the conception of conscious experience I have proposed in previous chapters.

<sup>10</sup> I will be seeking to give a naturalistic account of what I called in chapter 2 "operative intentionality". I shall argue that perceptual content is operative intentional content. I will not attempt to account for what I called "cognitive intentionality", the kind of intentionality belonging to propositional attitudes.

## Naturalising Phenomenology

content that our conscious experiences carry is importantly different from beliefs, desires and other of the so-called propositional attitudes in that there is good reason to think that it is, at least partially, non-conceptual.<sup>11</sup> A child or animal, for instance, could very well perceive Clyde playing the piano or smell the toast burning (to borrow two examples from Dretske (1993/1997)) even if it did not possess the concept of a piano or of burning toast. More generally we can say that a conscious experience E has non-conceptual content if a creature can undergo E while not possessing the concepts required for specifying what it is that E represents. Supposing that experiences do have non-conceptual content, then the question arises of what it is for an experience to have a non-conceptual content. In particular what is it for a creature to represent P rather than Q when the creature lacks the concepts required for specifying what it is representing? This is one of the two questions that will occupy me for the remainder of this chapter.

The phenomenologist takes a perceptual experience to have an intentional content which is constitutively determined by its phenomenology. The first thing to note is that an experience's having a particular phenomenology need not place a requirement on the subject with respect to the possession of concepts. I take it that an infant and I share something in common when we smell the burning toast. We both undergo experiences with a phenomenology characteristic of smelling burning toast, though only I possess the concepts required for saying what I am experiencing.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Whether an experience's representational properties could be entirely nonconceptual is an interesting question which I cannot take up here. Bermúdez (1995) draws upon work in developmental psychology to argue that an experience could have a content that is entirely nonconceptual. Peacocke (1994) disagrees, arguing instead that a representation has different layers of content some of which are nonconceptual and others of which are conceptual. Peacocke has however since changed his mind, see the appendix to his (1994/2003).

<sup>12</sup> There is a large question as to whether possession of concepts changes the character of a subject's experience across the board. McDowell (1994, lecture III) seems to want to claim that the fact that human beings are speakers of a language transforms the kinds of



## Naturalising Phenomenology

I don't mean to deny that concept-possession might be a necessary condition for enjoying *some* kinds of experiences. Think about the wine-taster who can discriminate qualities in the wine he is drinking that escape my palate. Arguably he is in possession of recognitional concepts that I haven't myself mastered, and this gives him a richer appreciation of wine than I myself enjoy. This is not to say that I don't enjoy wine, but it is to say that I don't enjoy wine in the same way as a wine-taster. He enjoys an experience with a richer phenomenology than me as a consequence of the recognitional concepts he has acquired.

An experience's phenomenology, I argued in chapter 4, is a joint product of (a) the entities and properties in the world which the experience seems to present to a subject, and (b) the ways in which an experience presents those entities and properties. (a) and (b) correspond to the contents of experience and mode of presentation respectively. Consider my experience of a round plate that looks elliptical to me. On the one hand my experience presents to me a plate that is shaped round. This is not however how the plate is represented in my experience. The way in which the plate is represented is such that it looks elliptical to me. I have suggested that my experience of something that is round but that looks elliptical is the joint product of the

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experiences we can enjoy as compared with other animals. (He adopts this thesis from Gadamer, see his lecture VI.) McDowell acknowledges that our experience shares something in common with that of non-human animals, which he characterises as 'perceptual sensitivity to our environment' (McDowell, 1994: 64). However he claims that we exhibit this perceptual sensitivity 'in a special form. Our perceptual sensitivity to our environment is taken up into the ambit of the faculty of spontaneity, which is what distinguishes us from them.' (op cit, 64) This leads McDowell to deny that there is a common component to the experiences we enjoy and those of non-human animals. I would like to agree with McDowell that the possession of concepts and a language *may* transform our experiences without denying that there is a layer of content to our experiences which is non-conceptual. I am also sympathetic to the claim that the kinds of experience enjoyed by animals may be very different from our own, though I am less inclined than he to put this difference down to the role of language and concept-possession. Rather the difference between the experiences of animals and our own has more to do with what non-human animals are interested in representing, for more on this point see my discussion in section 6.

## Naturalising Phenomenology

factors described in (a) and (b). My experience presents me with a round plate. However the way in which it does so is by presenting me with something that looks elliptical.<sup>13</sup>

An experience can of course have the phenomenology it does without successfully representing anything in the subject's environment. My experience can present to me something that seems to be a cat say when I am in fact experiencing a fox. I can even see something that seems to me to be a cat when there are no animals of any kind around whatsoever. Nevertheless in both these cases my experience *purports* to represent a cat. My experience purports to represent a cat insofar as it has certain representational properties – the properties characteristic of experiences that represent cats – in virtue of which it is assessable for truth or falsity.

Now consider again the claim I have attributed to phenomenologists which says that an experience's intentional content is constitutively determined by its phenomenology. This is to say that an experience is assessable for truth or falsity in virtue of what it is like to undergo this experience, where what it is like to undergo an experience is analysed in terms of the two conditions I have just described. I shall label this proposal "The Phenomenal Intentionality Thesis".

All theorists are agreed that sensory experiences have intentional features in virtue of which they are assessable for truth or falsity. What differentiates the phenomenal intentionality thesis from other theories of intentionality is the claim that a sensory experience is assessable for truth or

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<sup>13</sup> My claim that there is a way in which an experience presents a plate say, when it looks elliptical doesn't require me to introduce any non-representational properties. A plate looks elliptical, I shall claim because of factors to do with the context in which it is being perceived. In this case it is because the plate is being viewed from a particular angle that it looks elliptical. The fact that it is being viewed from this angle forms a part of the viewing conditions. Here I am influenced by the account of perceptual constancy phenomena given by Kelly (2001/2003).

## Naturalising Phenomenology

falsity just in virtue of what is like for a subject to undergo this experience. Most naturalistic theories of intentionality suppose that there is some relation to the world which accounts for an experience having the intentional features it does. This relation might be causal covariation under ideal conditions, or a relation to the world that holds when the consumer systems that make use of representations to generate actions are functioning properly.<sup>14</sup> The phenomenal intentionality thesis denies that a subject must stand in any particular relation to the world in order to be assessable for truth for falsity. All that is required for an experience to have the intentional features it does is for there to be something it is like for the subject to undergo this experience. What makes it the case that an experience has the particular correctness conditions it does is fully determined by the ways in which this experience presents the world as seeming to its subject.

Perhaps an example will help. Consider my experience as of a white rabbit. My experience presents me with a creature that is furry, has floppy ears and bucked teeth, is coloured white *etc.* These descriptions capture some of the ways in which my experience presents the rabbit as appearing. This experience will be accurate if there is indeed a rabbit present in my environment having the features I have just described. What is it for my experiences to have these intentional features? I claim my experience has these intentional features in virtue of the ways in which it presents the world as *seeming* to me. The world *seems* to me to contain a rabbit, and this is what makes it the case that I am undergoing an experience which *represents* the presence of a rabbit.

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<sup>14</sup> For the first kind of view see Stampe (1977) and for proponents of the second kind of view see Millikan (1984) and Papineau (1993).

## Naturalising Phenomenology

In chapter 4 I distinguished between a strong and a weak reading of the phenomenal intentionality thesis. According to the strong reading, there is no relation to the world which our experiences depend on for their content. On this view an experience can present the world as seeming to be a certain way whether or not the world of material things exists.<sup>15</sup> The weaker reading denies that there exists a particular relation to the world which a subject must stand in if s/he is to represent an object *x*. This is consistent with saying that a subject must stand in some relation to the world if her experience is to have the content it does.

In what follows I will be developing a naturalistic account of perceptual intentionality which endorses the weaker reading of the phenomenal intentionality thesis. I will propose an account of perceptual intentionality which takes the contents of perception to be constitutively determined by phenomenology while at the same time allowing that an experience's phenomenology may depend on factors outside the subject's head. In the next section I will say something about why I think a naturalist seeking an account of phenomenal intentionality ought to favour the weaker reading of the phenomenal intentionality thesis over the stronger reading. My aim will be to bring out exactly in what sense an experience's phenomenology could involve things in the subject's local environment.

Before I consider the strong reading in detail it is worth noting that if it were correct, the project of assimilating phenomenal intentionality into a naturalistic account of the mind would turn out to be very difficult undertaking indeed. Not only would we have to explain how the brain generates

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<sup>15</sup> Loar (2003) and Horgan and Tienson (2002) both endorse the strong reading of the phenomenal intentionality thesis. In chapter 4 we saw that some caution is required in attributing the strong reading to Husserl even though he did on occasion come close to defending such a position. For an interpretation of Husserl which does attribute the strong reading to him see for instance Dreyfus (1982) and McIntyre (1982).

phenomenal consciousness – Chalmers' hard problem. We would also have to explain how the brain could generate states that exhibit intentionality intrinsically.<sup>16</sup> I shall present an account of phenomenal intentionality which shows how it might be possible for the brain to achieve this. However the biological plausibility of this account increases considerably once we allow that the brain might not be doing all of this work on its own. I will argue that an account of phenomenal intentionality ought to allow room for the environment and a creature's embodiment to also play a role in generating its intentional states.

### 3. Against the Strong Reading of the Phenomenal Intentionality Thesis

It is natural to think that an experience has the phenomenal character it does regardless of whether the experience is veridical or not. The infamous argument from hallucination rests on the possibility of a subject undergoing a hallucinatory experience which is qualitatively indistinguishable from a veridical experience.<sup>17</sup> To say that two experiences are "qualitatively indistinguishable" is to say that a subject undergoing the two experiences would be unable to detect any difference between them. To illustrate consider a subject enjoying a veridical experience of an apple. We seem to be able to conceive of this subject's brain being tampered with so that when he blinks the apple could be destroyed without the subject noticing any change in his experience. In order for our subject to continue to undergo an experience as of an apple all that seems to be necessary is for us to hold

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<sup>16</sup> Horgan and Tienson (2002) end their paper by noting the following implication of their view: 'conscious intentional states are intrinsically, by their very nature, directed toward whatever they are directed toward. Thus, the hard problem includes this: why should a mental state that is grounded in this physical or physical/functional state be by its intrinsic phenomenal nature directed in this precise manner? And this is a very hard problem indeed.' (Horgan and Tienson 2002: 530)

<sup>17</sup> See Valberg (1992) for an excellent discussion of the argument from hallucination.

## Naturalising Phenomenology

constant whatever neurophysiological activity realises his experience. Thus it would seem that a subject could undergo an experience with the phenomenology characteristic of a veridical experience of an apple without standing in a relation to any existing apple. If what it is like to undergo an experience does suffice to determine an experience's intentional features, it would seem that an experience can have the intentional features it does independent of any relation a subject stands in to the world.<sup>18</sup>

This argument relies on the questionable assumption that there are neural correlates of conscious experience with contents that, in a sense to be explained, 'match' the contents of experience.<sup>19</sup> Noë and Thompson (2004) define a neural correlate of consciousness as a minimal neural representational system N such that (1) N is sufficient for the occurrence of some experience E and (2) there is a match between the content of N and E.<sup>20</sup> There are really two claims that the above argument assumes, both of which can be challenged. The first assumption is that there is a system of neural activity, N which is *sufficient* for the subject to undergo his experience as of an apple. I'll call this "the neural substrate assumption". The second assumption is that this neural substrate has a representational content which matches the content of the conscious experience a subject enjoys. I'll call this the "matching content assumption".

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<sup>18</sup> This is a conceivability argument and like any argument of this kind it is subject to the normal kinds of worries one might have about the relation between conceivability and possibility. Wilson (2004: ch.10) exploits a point of this kind in arguing against the phenomenal intentionality thesis. He attacks the notion of phenomenal intentionality because he takes it to entail individualism – the view that intentional content is to be individuated narrowly. I shall be defending a notion of phenomenal intentionality which is compatible with Wilson's attack on individualism. Thus I can fully concur with his attack on Horgan and Tienson's strong reading of the phenomenal intentionality thesis without giving up on the idea of phenomenal intentionality altogether.

<sup>19</sup> Here I will draw on arguments to be found in Noë & Thompson (2004).

<sup>20</sup> They attribute this definition to Chalmers (2000) but I have not been able to read this paper.



## Naturalising Phenomenology

The neural substrate assumption implies that a subject's embeddedness in a particular kind of environment plays no role in determining an experience's phenomenology. A subject could be a brain in a vat and enjoy experiences with just the same phenomenology. Many philosophers have believed that something along these lines is true, but whether they were right would seem to be an empirical question. One empirical possibility that surely shouldn't be ruled out from the armchair is that the representational vehicles underlying our experience extend into the world. This is to say that the conscious experiences we enjoy could be the result of dense and continuous interactions taking place between body, brain and an animal's surrounding environment.<sup>21</sup> On this understanding of conscious experience, the environment in which an animal is embedded will make a significant contribution to the character of a subject's experience. It will form a part of the feedback loop which on this view is the minimal sufficient condition for a subject's enjoying a conscious experience.

The moral is that only further empirical research will enable us to establish whether there is a neural substrate which suffices to give us the kinds of experiences we enjoy. It is empirically possible that there is no neural substrate sufficient to generate conscious experience, but that instead our experiences are identical with representational vehicles that extend into the world.

One more comment on the superficial appearance of conceivability that attaches to hallucination scenarios. Whatever plausibility attaches to these thought experiments may well derive from the fact that something else, a

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<sup>21</sup> Hurley (1998: ch.6); Noë (2004, ch.7 & 2005); Rowlands (2002 & 2003: ch.10); Thompson and Varela (2001); and Wilson (2004, ch.9) all defend an externalist account of the vehicles of conscious experience, "externalist" in that it takes the vehicles in question to extend into the world, through feedback loops that essentially involve interactions with things in the subject's external environment.

## Naturalising Phenomenology

demon or some other kind of deity, a super-intelligent scientist, a supercomputer, is enlisted to construct an environment which resembles our own. It is an empirical question whether it is our brain which ordinarily constructs this appearance for us or whether the environmental setting in which a creature is embedded itself plays an ineliminable role in giving us the kinds of experiences we enjoy. If the latter, then brain-in-the-vat stories are only conceivable to the extent that some other virtual environment can be created to play the role currently played the environments we inhabit.<sup>22</sup>

This brings me to the matching content assumption. The matching content assumption says that for any given experience E there is a system of neural activity N with a representational content that matches E's representational content. What does it mean to say that E and N match in content? Returning to the subject looking at the apple, the idea is just that by keeping the activity in neural system N constant, we could continue to cause in this subject an experience as of an apple. The experience as of an apple we manage to reproduce is, we are to suppose, qualitatively indistinguishable from a veridical experience of an apple. Thus we can say that N and E match in content if whatever features E represents, N also represents. Given that we can produce an experience E just by holding the activity constant in N, it is natural to think that a match in content of this kind does indeed obtain.

However again there are empirical reasons for being suspicious of such a claim. The matching content assumption seems to commit us to the existence of a system of neural activity which is the bearer of a representational content as rich as the contents of experience. The first point to note is that there is some controversy about how rich the contents of

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<sup>22</sup> Noë (2004, ch.7: 218) makes what I think is the same point.

## Naturalising Phenomenology

experience are. When Ernst Mach (1886) drew a picture of himself stretched out in his armchair, the picture he drew was of a visual field, uniform and high resolution in its detail. However there are number of reasons for doubting whether this accurately reflects what our visual fields are like.<sup>23</sup> Consider our visual perception of colour, for instance. We hardly perceive the objects at the margins of our visual field to be coloured at all, whereas the objects that are at the centre of visual field appear to be coloured in splendid detail. Alva Noë tells us:

'Rods and cones are not evenly distributed across the surface of the retina. Outside the high resolution central (foveal) region, there are increasingly few cones. As a result of this, the eye is nearly colour-blind in its parafoveal region. Despite these defects we do not experience the world as black and white at the edges.' (Noë, 2004: 37)

Consider for example my experience of the colour of the carpet I am standing on which is a uniform muddy brown. Do I experience the muddy brownness of the carpet at the periphery of my visual field just as much as I experience its muddy brown at the point in my visual field which I am currently fixating? Suppose we say I do. In order to explain how this could be we have to hypothesise mechanisms in the brain which correct for the limitations in the image of a scene that falls on our retina at any moment. It is the matching assumption that commits us to a hypothesis of this kind. If we suppose that what we experience is a scene uniformly detailed in the information it gives us about the colours of things, it is tempting to think this is because there is a system of neural states with a content that matches that of our experience. It is this system of neural states which gives me an impression of the carpet I

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<sup>23</sup> Here I am indebted to arguments in Noë (2004, ch.2).

## Naturalising Phenomenology

am currently standing on as being uniformly muddy brown all the way around me.

There is however another possibility. Perhaps our experience doesn't represent a world that is high resolution and uniform in its detail from the centre of our visual fields to their margins. All the detail is there in the world ready to be tapped as when we need it, simply by the movement of our head or body, so why do we need to construct detailed representations of the way things are in the world at each moment? Surely we need to represent only as much detail as is required for what we are doing. What we visually perceive at any given moment may be function of what we have our gaze fixed upon at the time.<sup>24</sup>

That something along these lines might be true is borne out by the phenomena of change-blindness. Usually when a change takes place in a visual scene our attention is alerted to the change by some kind of flicker of movement. This led to the prediction that if we could somehow be prevented from noticing the flicker of movement we could also fail to notice changes, even when they were happening right in front of our eyes.<sup>25</sup>

In one striking study Simons and Levin (1998) showed that subjects could fail to detect a change in a person they are giving directions to. Hayhoe, Bensinger & Ballard (1998) asked subjects to perform a copying task involving blocks. In this experiment subjects regularly failed to notice a change in the model they are copying. Perhaps the most well-known study of this kind (Simons and Chabris 1999) subjects were given the task of

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<sup>24</sup> O'Regan (1992) has suggested that a creature's local environment may be thought of as functioning as kind of external memory which is available to be made use of by the senses, just as (some of) our memories are available for recall, as when we need them. This idea is also discussed in O'Regan and Noë (2001: 946).

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of these experiments and their implications see Noë, Pessoa, and Thompson (2000).

## Naturalising Phenomenology

watching a basketball game and watching the number of times one or the other team takes possession of the ball. Many subjects performing this task failed to notice the presence of a man in a gorilla suit strolling through the centre of play.

The most conservative reading we can give of these studies suggests that if our brains are in the business of producing detailed representations of our environments from moment to moment, the information these representations carry may not be available for the formation of memories and the making of verbal reports. To the extent that we think we have a conscious experience of a scene in all its glorious detail, this conservative reading would have it that we are mistaken. What we consciously perceive in a visual scene at any given moment will be as much or as little as we are attending to in the visual scene at that moment.

A more radical reading of these experiments takes them to count as evidence against the brain constructing rich internal representations of our environment from moment to moment. On this reading, we fail to detect the changes in these cases because those changes aren't represented by us. I am not going to attempt to decide between these two ways of thinking about the change blindness results. Either way change-blindness seems to have significant implications for the matching assumption. The change-blindness experiments seem to conflict with the following claim:

(1) Conscious experiences seem to present us with a world in all of its detail, and this detail is reproduced by the representations our brains construct of a visual scene.

This is just a statement of the matching assumption. Thus at first glance the change-blindness would seem to come into conflict with the matching

assumption. There are at least two ways of responding to the falsity of (1).<sup>26</sup>

We could say:

(2) We are mistaken about how our experiences seem to us (see Dennett (2002)). There is no detail in our conscious experience, we just think there is. What the change blindness experiments show is that we don't see that world in all its detail. They highlight just how wrong we can be about our conscious experiences. It seems to me that this interpretation of change-blindness is quite consistent with the matching assumption. One could say that there is a neural representational system N the content of which matches the contents of visual experience. We might say that mistakes arise when we come to say or judge exactly what it is we are seeing, and it is this mistake that the change-blindness experiments have brought to light.

There is another possible response however, which isn't consistent with the matching assumption. It says:

(3) There is as much detail in our conscious experiences as there has always seemed to be but there is very little in the way of detailed information in the representations our brains produce. Our experiences seem to present us with a world rich in information, and this is exactly what they do. All of the detail we seem to experience is out there in the world. Our sense that we experience this detail is a reflection of the fact that this detail is there for us to explore using our senses. Thus, the matching assumption is false. Our experiences are richer in content than the neural representations which enable those experiences.

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<sup>26</sup> Actually there is a third possibility I can think of. We could say that neither our conscious experiences nor our neural representations are detailed in the information they give us about a visual scene. The change blindness experiments show that we are mistaken about the character of our experiences. They show this by showing that there are changes that take place which our brains do not represent. If this is right our neural representations are as impoverished in the information they carry as our conscious experiences. Thus the matching assumption holds. The difficulty this response faces is that it doesn't explain the mistake it attributes to us, whereby we take our experiences to present a visual scene to us in all of its detail. The advantage of (2) and (3) is that they at least attempt to do justice to the ways in which our experiences ordinarily present the world.



## Naturalising Phenomenology

In what follows I will assume that the sense we have of seeing the world in all its detail isn't an illusion. I am going to assume that this is a datum that needs to be explained. What the change blindness experiments show is that we don't perceive all of the information there is in the world in one go.<sup>27</sup> The results of these experiments provide evidence against the claim that the brain is constantly engaged in constructing what we might call a snapshot of a scene. While a snapshot would capture all of the detail in a scene including any changes that might take place from moment to moment, the representations our brain produces do not seem to be like this. The possibility I want to take up next is that the brain doesn't generate phenomenal intentionality on its own. Rather our experiences get their phenomenal intentionality from a variety of practical understanding or knowledge that accompanies all of our conscious experience. This understanding might consist in part of knowledge of how movement will affect the ways in which an object is sensed by us. While it is undoubtedly true that the brain constitutes a necessary or enabling condition in this account of phenomenal intentionality I shall propose, the account I will give is consistent with saying that neural activity isn't a sufficient condition for phenomenal intentionality. Thus the account I shall give of phenomenal intentionality is incompatible with the strong reading of the phenomenal intentionality thesis.

### 4. Husserl and Merleau-Ponty on Phenomenal Intentionality

In the last section we encountered a puzzle. Our experiences seem to present us with a world elaborate in its detail, and yet the visual representations our brain constructs do not seem to reproduce anything like all of this detail. What we need to explain then is why it seems to us that we

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<sup>27</sup> Here I am following Noë, Pessoa and Thompson (2000) and Noë (2004: ch.2).

## Naturalising Phenomenology

experience all that detail given that it doesn't look like this is something made available by the internal representations our brain produces.

A good starting point for addressing this question is to return to a related puzzle which we saw Husserl raise in chapter 4. There we saw Husserl point out that an object is never fully given in experience: there is always more to an object than it presents to us at any given moment.

'In principle a physical thing can only be given "one-sidedly....A physical thing is necessarily given under simple modes of appearance...but what is "actually" predelineated is accompanied by a horizon, by a more or less vague zone of indeterminateness.' (Husserl, 1913/1972 §44, 100)

What Husserl has in mind is the uncontroversial fact that when I look at a house say, what I see of the house will depend on where I am standing in relation to it. Furthermore, I cannot see the entire house at once. All I see of the house at any given moment will be the sides of the house that are visible to me, and there will always be other aspects of the house that aren't visible to me at the time. I nevertheless have a sense of the whole house as present to me in my perception.<sup>28</sup> How can this be?

I take it that the puzzle Husserl has raised exactly parallels the question raised by the change blindness studies. These studies suggest that although we experience a world which seems elaborate in its detail, not all of this detail is reproduced in the visual representations our brains construct.<sup>29</sup> How

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<sup>28</sup> If you are not persuaded of this, consider the difference in what it is like to see something you know to be a stage prop, a two-dimensional façade, and a genuine house. We can even suppose that the two-dimensional façade is an exact replica of the front of a house. Still there is a difference in what it is like to look at something one knows to be the façade of a house and what it is like to look at a genuine house. The difference resides not in what one is currently presented with in experience but in what one would expect to see if one were to move around the thing. In the case of a façade one expects to see something that is flat, whereas in the case of a genuine house one expects to find other sides of the house that were previously hidden from view come into one's line of sight.

<sup>29</sup> To be more precise, if all of this detail is reproduced in the internal representations the brain is busy producing, not all of this information is made available to consciousness.

## Naturalising Phenomenology

is it that our experiences give us a sense of a world that goes beyond what we are representing at each moment?

The answer Husserl returns to this question doesn't seem to me quite right, but it will nevertheless be instructive to consider where he goes wrong. Husserl thought that the parts of the object that are not currently perceived are nevertheless represented in experience. Those aspects of the object which are not currently seen form what Husserl calls a 'horizon of indeterminateness' (see the above quote). In every perceptual experience Husserl tells us that 'the sides of the object which are actually perceived refer to sides which are not yet perceived but which are only anticipated...as aspects to come in perception.' (Husserl, 1931/1973: §19, 82)

Husserl's view seems to be that based on the side of the thing currently in view we form anticipations about the other sides of the thing that would come into view through our exploration of the thing. For Husserl the hidden aspects of things are not materially present in experience but they are nevertheless represented in the form of hypotheses about what I would see if I were to change my relation to the object. These hypotheses can be either confirmed or falsified by my further exploration of the thing. What is it for me to have an experience as of a lemon for instance when I am seeing only the lemon's facing side? Husserl would have us believe that I perform something akin to an act of interpretation whereby I take the part of the thing I am seeing to belong to a lemon. This interpretation I give can be confirmed or disconfirmed by further exploration of the lemon. Perhaps it's a wax lemon, and I discover this by taking hold of it and feeling its weight, or by trying to cut into it.

Is it really the case that the hidden sides of a thing are represented in the form of expectations or hypotheses I have about what I would see if I were to

## Naturalising Phenomenology

change my spatial relation to a thing? Certainly if this were true it would explain why I have a sense of seeing a world in all its elaborate detail. I experience the world in this way as a result of the many expectations I am constantly forming about what my local environment contains.<sup>30</sup> Husserl's reply makes the object of perception into a sum of the actual and possible views one can take on it. The lemon as it is perceived by me is nothing but the actual parts of it I am currently presented with in my experience of it, and the other possible views which I hypothesise I could take on the lemon were I to alter the spatial relation I stand in to it. The intentional content of my experience – its purporting to represent a lemon – is in no way dependent on the existence of the lemon. I could form the hypothesis that the thing I am presented with is a lemon, and thereby undergo an experience that presents me with what seems to be lemon, no matter whether the lemon existed or not.

Of course this could be the way perceptual intentionality works – it could be that this is how perceiving creatures come to stand in an intentional relation to the objects of their experience. If so, it will turn out that phenomenal intentionality is indeed an intrinsic property of our conscious experiences. We have a sense of a thing's presence including the parts of it

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<sup>30</sup> This is slightly misleading. Husserl is well aware that we cannot be constantly engaged in forming hypotheses about the absent aspects of a thing. He makes a distinction between what he calls "active" and "passive" synthesis by way of acknowledging this point. (See for instance the recently translated series of lectures from 1918-1926 devoted to this distinction, see Husserl (1970/2001). One of the last works Husserl wrote (1948/1973) also contains extensive discussions of this distinction.) Husserl describes the simplest forms of perception as involving what he calls "passive synthesis". Active synthesis by contrast is what a person engages in when he makes judgements about the objects of his experience – when he judges that the cover of the book is coloured red, say. Husserl claims that the process of forming hypotheses about a thing's hidden sides can also be passive, in that it needn't involve a person actively forming beliefs or making judgements about a thing's hidden properties. The expectations we form about what further exploration would reveal of a thing can be driven purely by our past and present encounters with a thing. We can, as a result of our past experiences of houses say, take the front side of the house we are looking at to indicate the presence of other sides of the house which are not currently visible to us.

## Naturalising Phenomenology

that aren't currently in view, through the generation of hypotheses. Of course we have to take the side of a thing that is currently in view to 'refer' (in Husserl's words, see above) to other possible views one could take on the object. The hypotheses I form about the objects of my experience aren't completely unconstrained. However the representation that results is one that is formed independently of the relations I happen to stand in to the world.

Suppose we were to treat this as a serious empirical hypothesis about how we come to have experiences of the presence of three-dimensional material things given that what we start out with is a one-sided point of view on a thing. Understood in this light we could take Husserl to be claiming that our brains could achieve the representation of a full-fledged material thing independently of our relation to that thing or any other thing.<sup>31</sup> This is something our brains could achieve through the formation of expectations or anticipations about what further exploration of the thing would reveal. If we were to take Husserl's descriptions of perception and turn them into an empirical hypothesis we could say that the brain is constantly engaged in producing something like a simulation of reality. This simulation is then tested out on the world through our actions.<sup>32</sup>

Merleau-Ponty offers a different solution to our problem of how we can have a sense of being presented with a whole object when we are sensing only a part of it. Whereas Husserl takes the hidden sides of a thing to be

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<sup>31</sup> This is of course not what Husserl was saying; we saw in chapter 1 that Husserl was most definitely not a materialist.

<sup>32</sup> For a recent proponent of such a view see Metzinger (2003: 50-62). He tells us that in his opinion: 'some of the best work in neuroscience' (here he cites Singer 2000 and Leopold and Logothetis 1999) 'suggests a view of the human brain as a system that *constantly* simulates possible realities, generates internal expectations and hypotheses in a top-down fashion, while being constrained in this activity by....a constant stimulus-correlated bottom-up stream of information, which then finally helps the system to select one of an almost infinitely large number of internal possibilities and turns it into a phenomenal reality.' (Metzinger, 2003: 51) This seems to me more or less what Husserl would say if he took the brain to be responsible for constituting our experiences of the world rather than the transcendental ego.

## Naturalising Phenomenology

perceptually absent, Merleau-Ponty takes them to be in an important sense positively present in experience. Sean Kelly (2004) characterises the difference well:

'Husserl thinks that it is indeterminate, from the point of view of the current visual experience, what the features of the back-side of the object are. Merleau-Ponty by contrast thinks that my current visual experience contains something that is itself an indeterminate presentation of the back. For Husserl, it is not yet determined what I see; for Merleau-Ponty what I see is indeterminate.' (Kelly 2004: 81)

Merleau-Ponty claims that the hidden sides of the object form a part of what my experience represents, not only in the form of anticipations or expectations, as we have seen Husserl claim. A thing's hidden sides affect the movements I would direct towards it in reaching and grasping for that thing, for instance. In virtue of the role the hidden sides play in guiding my movements, Merleau-Ponty thinks we should say that the thing's hidden sides are presented in my experience *now*. They are not represented in the form of expectations I have about what my *future* exploration of thing would uncover. Rather they form a part of what I experience in the here and now. Merleau-Ponty talks of 'an indeterminate vision, a vision of something or other'<sup>33</sup> which 'is not without some element of visual presence.' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 6)

That the hidden sides of a thing are indeterminately present in experience is something that Merleau-Ponty thinks is borne out by the fact that the movements I direct towards the thing are sensitive to the hidden parts of the

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<sup>33</sup> Kelly (2004: 80-1) argues that the phrase '*vision de je ne sais quoi*' which is translated by Colin Smith as 'vision of something or other' ought to instead read 'vision of I do not know what'. He argues for reasons that will become clear in a moment that this better captures Merleau-Ponty's claim that 'we must recognise the indeterminate' – the hidden sides of a thing, say – 'as a positive phenomenon' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 6)



## Naturalising Phenomenology

thing. How can the parts of an object which are currently not visible to me nevertheless make a contribution to how I direct my movements towards a thing? Merleau-Ponty's answer to this question appeals to a bodily understanding I have of the thing. There is a sense in which I understand a thing's shape, size and weight through the knowledge I have of how to direct my movements towards that thing. This knowledge doesn't consist in my having reliably formed beliefs about exactly which movements would be appropriate to the object of my perception. In particular it doesn't involve my believing that the thing has certain hidden properties that are not currently in view, and that these hidden properties make certain behaviours appropriate and others inappropriate. Rather the knowledge in question is practical knowledge; it is knowledge of how one ought to act given the object that one is currently seeing.

As will come as no surprise by now, I intend to follow Merleau-Ponty. I will claim that it is by virtue of our possession of practical knowledge that our experiences have the phenomenology they do. I have said that our conscious experiences have their intentional features in virtue of their phenomenology. Thus it will follow that an experience has the intentional features it does in virtue of our practical knowledge.

I will argue for this thesis in two stages, corresponding to the two components in terms of which I have characterised an experience's phenomenology. Recall that I have said an experience's phenomenology is determined by (1) the objects and properties an experience seems to present and (2) the ways in which those objects and properties are presented in an experience. I will set about showing that each of these aspects of an experience's phenomenology can be constitutively determined by a subject's practical knowledge. I will look in part to the enactive theory of perception for

## Naturalising Phenomenology

an account of the practical knowledge in terms of which I shall account for an experience's phenomenology.

### 5. The Enactive Theory of Perception

According to the enactive theory, perception isn't something that just passively happens to us; it is something we, as perceiving creatures, do. Our perceptual experiences are something we act out through our movements. Perception is no longer understood as a process that takes place in the brain. The brain is of course a necessary condition for perceiving but it may not be a sufficient condition, as was argued above. Perceiving is instead taken to be a skilful activity of the whole animal which gets played out through the animal's interactions with its environment.

Alva Noë (2002 & 2004, ch.3) has suggested that we should think of the practical knowledge we draw on in perception as knowledge of how the appearance of an object will change with our movements. Each movement will bring about a change in what the object presents to us. As we move around a table, for instance, what we experience of the table will change with our movements. We can think of our visual perception of the table's shape as constituted by our knowledge of all the changes our experience of the table's shape can undergo as we move relative to it. Part of what it is for an experience to present what seems to be a table then is for us to know how the appearance of the table will change as we move around it. This practical knowledge is constitutive of our being presented with what seems to be a table in experience.

One objection one might raise against Noë's proposal is that it fails to do justice to Merleau-Ponty's point that the hidden sides of the object are present in experience albeit indeterminately. Doesn't Noë account for the

## Naturalising Phenomenology

experience I have of a thing's hidden sides in terms of the anticipations (the practical knowledge) I have about what I would see of the thing if I were to move around it? Didn't Merleau-Ponty show us that this description gets the phenomenology wrong misdescribing the hidden sides of a thing as sensibly absent when in fact they are positively present? The hidden sides of a thing are positively present in my experience through the readiness or preparedness I exhibit to take hold of the thing in a certain way.

As an illustration of the phenomena Merleau-Ponty has in mind think about how my body is prepared and ready when I reach for the handle of a mug that is pointing away from me.<sup>34</sup> I relate to the mug through my taking hold of it, through the movements I direct towards it when I reach for it in order to take a drink. My doing so gives me a sense of the presence of its handle even though I am not currently seeing the mug's handle. Of course I can get it wrong and direct my reaching behaviour towards its handle when it has no handle. In this case I will have misrepresented the mug. The fact that I can misrepresent the mug in this way suggests that the handle was a part of my original experience, even though it wasn't any part of the view I had on the mug at the time.

What this objection shows us is that the knowledge which is constitutive of an object's seeming to be present in experience isn't just knowledge concerning the changes the appearances of a thing will undergo with our movement about it or its movement relative to us. We also have to account for the knowledge a creature has of the possibilities for action a thing affords. This knowledge of which actions are appropriate and which actions are inappropriate to the object of our experience can also contribute to what it is for an object to seem to be present in experience. This knowledge doesn't

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<sup>34</sup> This is a favourite example of Sean Kelly's.

## Naturalising Phenomenology

however look to be accounted for in terms of knowledge of sensorimotor contingencies.

Returning to the mug with its handle turned away from me, I am ready to deal with the mug before I direct my movement towards it. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, (discussing a different example) ‘from the outset the grasping movement is magically at its completion.’ (1962: 119) The hidden sides of a thing can be said to be present in my experience insofar as I am ready to deal with the thing, including its hidden sides, in my bodily interactions with it. I am, in other words, drawing upon what I have called my “operative understanding” of the thing when I experience the thing’s hidden sides. This operative understanding prepares me for my dealings with the thing, and enables me to undergo a perceptual experience of thing in its full bodily presence even though I am not presented with the thing in its entirety at any given moment.

The idea that what we perceive are the actions a thing affords is an idea we find in Gibson’s ecological theory of visual perception. Gibson (1979, ch.8) says that the environment of an animal affords opportunities for actions and it is these opportunities that we perceive on any give occasion. Gibson is insistent that visual perception works in such a way that we can pick up on a thing’s affordances directly and immediately. There is no need, Gibson claims, for an animal to reconstruct a scene in its brain based on information made available by the retinal image. Gibson claims instead that the structure of the light in an environment – what he calls “the ambient optic array” – uniquely specifies the layout of surfaces around the perceiving animal.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The perceiving animal is stationed at a point in space at any give time and surrounding this point is light. The light surrounding the perceiving animal, Gibson calls ‘the ambient optic array’. The light is ‘ambient’ because it literally surrounds the perceiving animal. The ‘optic array’ is composed of the light that the animal’s eyes receive from surrounding objects. As I am sat here there are various objects arranged around me on my table, and straight

## Naturalising Phenomenology

The environment the ambient optic array carries information about isn't only composed of surfaces and objects. We also perceive the objects around us as affording us opportunities to do things. According to Gibson the ambient optic array exhibits certain systematic features. He distinguishes between "structural" and "transformational" invariants. The structural invariants in an ambient optic array are a consequence of certain stable and recurring features in the layout of an environment. Transformational invariants relate to ways in which the pattern of light changes with an animal's movements. Gibson claims that each structural invariant is an affordance. Whenever an animal perceives the layout of its environment, what it perceives are, in part, the opportunities an environment with this layout affords for its movement. When, for instance an animal perceives the brink of a cliff, what the animal sees is a surface one side of which can be walked on and the other side of which affords falling off and injury. It perceives such a surface because of a structural invariant in its optic array. Similarly a human being who perceives a red post box sees something that invites the posting of letters. The post box only has this significance, it only invites us to mail letters, because we belong to a community in which letters get written and are transported from one person to another by means of a mail service. Nevertheless, Gibson claims that as the kind of animal that inhabits an environment containing post boxes, we can directly perceive something as a post box. When we do so, what we have done is picked up on a structural invariant in the optic array of creatures like us.

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ahead of me is a picture. All these objects are reflecting light some of which is received by my left eye, some of which is received by my right eye. This light is structured in such a way as provide me with information about the unchanging layout of my surrounding environment at this time. For further discussion of the ambient optic array see Gibson (1979, ch. 5).

## Naturalising Phenomenology

If Gibson is right and we can directly and immediately pick up on the opportunities for action our environment affords this is only because we are drawing upon what I have called our operative understanding. It is our operative understanding for instance that enables us to know that red pillar boxes afford the posting of letters. Some of the simple examples Gibson offers like perceiving a tree to afford shelter, or to be climbable, or perceiving a surface to afford support, do not seem to involve much in the way of operative understanding. Nevertheless I want to say that to pick up on the information contained in the ambient array directly and immediately is to be drawing on one's operative understanding. It is only because one is in possession of this understanding that by perceiving invariant structures in the ambient optic array one can also perceive opportunities for action.

Noë (2004: ch.3, §9) has offered the following helpful suggestion about how to interpret Gibson's claim that the ambient optic array carries information that specifies the layout of one's environment:

'The ambient optic array, simply put, is how things look from here in these conditions. The sense of the Gibsonian claim that the ambient optic array specifies the environment (unlike the pattern of irradiation on the retina), is that how things look from here in these conditions specifies how they are, or rather, it does so for a suitably knowledgeable animal, one in possession of and ready to apply sensorimotor skill.' (2004: 104)

This seems to me exactly right. The claim is threefold.

(1) What Gibson calls the structured invariants present in the ambient optic array can be identified with how the environment appears to us at any given moment.

(2) How the environment appears to an animal at any moment specifies how things are in its local environment. This is a statement of the phenomenal



## Naturalising Phenomenology

intentionality thesis according to which an experience's phenomenology is constitutive of its intentional features.

(3) An animal's possession of practical knowledge (what Noë refers to as 'sensorimotor skill') determines how the environment appears to an animal on any given occasion.

Noë errs slightly in his characterisation of this practical knowledge. His description of the practical knowledge we draw upon in perception doesn't really bring out the ways in which our embodiment can shape our perception of an object and its properties.

Noë characterises our perception of affordances in terms of the possibilities for movement that a thing affords. 'To perceive is (among other things) to learn how the environment structures one's possibilities for movement...' (Noë, 2004: 105) He goes on to mention in passing that we also perceive a thing as affording possibilities for action. However the account he gives of practical knowledge in terms of knowledge of sensorimotor contingencies only tells us what it is to perceive the opportunities for *movement* a thing affords. I shall argue that movement is only one of a class of actions we can perceive a thing to afford.

Noë characterises knowledge of sensorimotor contingencies as knowledge of the systematic ways in which how things look, sound, smell or feel depends on one's movements. There are sensorimotor contingencies that specifically relate to our sensory apparatus. These include the fact that 'when the eyes rotate, the sensory stimulation on the retina shifts and distorts in a very particular way, determined by the size of the eye movement, the spherical shape of the retina, and the nature of ocular optics.' (O'Regan and Noë, 2001: 941) We know what effects our eye movements have on what we are seeing. This constitutes one kind of sensorimotor contingency of

## Naturalising Phenomenology

which we have knowledge. We also know that ‘the flow pattern on the retina is an expanding flow when the body moves forward, and contracting when the body moves backward.’ (op cit) This is another example of a kind of knowledge we have about how our movements can effect what we see.

Another set of sensorimotor contingencies relate to the visual attributes of the objects we are sensing. The visual quality associated with a thing’s shape is, O’Regan and Noë suggest ‘precisely the set of all potential distortions that the shape undergoes when it is moved relative to us, or when we move relative to it. Although this is an infinite set, the brain can abstract from this set a series of laws, and it is this set of laws which codes shape.’ (O’Regan and Noë, 2001: 942) They go on to add ‘the structure of the laws abstracted from the sensorimotor contingencies associated with flat, concave, and convex surfaces, corners and so on, will be a neural-code-independent indication of their different natures.’ (op cit)

What we perceive on any given occasion is on this view the result of our drawing on knowledge of how our sensory experience of a thing will change with our *movements*. This only partially characterises the practical knowledge we are drawing on in virtue of which things seem to us the way they do. In addition we have a knowledge of which actions are appropriate to the object of our perception and which are inappropriate. When we see a heavy box which we are about to lift for instance we prepare our body to deal with the box differently from how we would be ready to deal with the box if we perceived it to be light.

As another example of the phenomena I have in mind consider Milner and Goodale’s patient D.F.<sup>36</sup> Despite D.F.’s not being able to visually identify an object’s features she is nevertheless ‘capable of responding differentially’ to

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<sup>36</sup> I am indebted here to Kelly’s discussion of D.F., see his (2002) & (2003).

## Naturalising Phenomenology

features like an object's size, shape and orientation. She is able for instance to post a card, or insert her hand through a slot set at different angles, even though she cannot report on the angle of the slot. The understanding D.F. has of the slot is a bodily understanding. She understands the slot only through her dealings with it.

I claim that the understanding of a thing we have through our embodiment also plays a constitutive role in determining the ways in which a thing appears to us. We don't only perceive the possibilities for movement a thing affords. We also perceive its possibilities for action in a much wider sense. Crucially we can perceive the opportunities for action a thing affords only because we are in possession of a certain kind of practical knowledge. What we learn from Merleau-Ponty (with Sean Kelly's help) is that there are bodily ways of understanding an object which contribute towards this practical knowledge. These bodily forms of understanding also contribute to determining the content of our perceptual experiences.

I will conclude this section by considering how the second aspect of an experience's phenomenology, the modes of presentation characteristic of our perceptual experiences, might be determined by our practical knowledge. Consider as an example of this second aspect of an experience's phenomenology, perceptual constancy phenomena. Suppose I am looking at a wall painted mint green. What my experience represents is a wall coloured green, yet some parts of the wall appear darker than other parts. I say that these disparities in the appearance of the wall are due to the wall being presented differently under different lighting conditions. Some parts of the wall are better lit than others and this is why some parts of the wall appear lighter than other parts. Now the puzzle that this kind of phenomena raises is how it can be that we see a wall that is uniformly coloured mint green when

## Naturalising Phenomenology

some parts of the wall appear to be darker than other parts. How is it that the wall can be perceived to have a constant colour when some parts of it appear different from other parts?

Noë (2004) characterises this problem in the following terms: 'We experience the presence of a uniform colour which, strictly speaking, we do not see. Or rather, the actual uniform colour of the wall's surface is present in perception amodally, it is present but absent, in the same way as the tomato's backside, or the blocked parts of the cat.' (2004: 128)

Again Noë takes the solution to this puzzle to lie in our knowledge of sensorimotor contingencies. Noë distinguishes between two kinds of sensorimotor contingencies both of which he takes to be relevant to determining our experience of a thing's apparent colour. The first kind relate to 'The way sensory stimulation is affected by changes in a perceiver's geometrical relation to an object...the way stimulation varies as a result of the perceiver's manipulation of an object (e.g. turning it in relation to a light source).' (Noë, 2004: 129) The second kind relate to 'patterns of dependence between sensory stimulation and the *object's* movement, or the object's changing relation to its surrounding.' (op cit, p130)

Noë's answer to the puzzle of how we can perceive a wall to have a uniform colour even though this is not what we are presented with in perception, appeals to the knowledge we have of sensorimotor contingencies of these two types. A thing's apparent colour can vary in all kinds of ways some of which have to do with our movement, others of which relate to variations in lighting conditions and in the colour of the background and surrounding objects.<sup>37</sup> Noë hypothesises that nevertheless we have knowledge of how all these factors combine to determine an object's

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<sup>37</sup> See Noë (2004: 132)

## Naturalising Phenomenology

apparent colour at any moment. Our understanding how a thing's apparent colour will change as viewing conditions change explains how we come to have experiences which present us with coloured things, Noë suggests.

Again it seems to me this is only part (albeit an important part) of the story. Once again we can look to Merleau-Ponty via Kelly (1999& 2004) to supply the rest of the story. Merleau-Ponty thought that the lighting conditions form a part of the context or the background against which a thing appears coloured. He insists that the lighting conditions can play a positive role in determining the kind of experience we enjoy. However it contributes to the way we see things only indeterminately.<sup>38</sup> For Merleau-Ponty (according to Kelly) the lighting context enters into our experience through our knowledge of how *best* to see an object. We know where to move our eyes in order to achieve the best view of an object's colour. We know for instance that dark colours are seen best in bright light, and that bright colours are seen best in dimmer light.<sup>39</sup> What is it for us to see the wall as coloured mint green all over? Merleau-Ponty will say it is for me to know given the current lighting conditions, where I would need to look in order to gain the best view of the object's colour.

Again Merleau-Ponty appeals to a kind of knowledge that is essentially related to my embodiment to explain colour experience. In this case I have knowledge of how the light would have to change in order to see the colour of the thing best of all. Kelly (2004) explains the idea as follows:

'To speak mathematically, I experience the light not as a determinate quantity but in terms of the direction, and perhaps even the slope, of the

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<sup>38</sup> Notice the similarity with the position Merleau-Ponty has taken on a thing's hidden sides – these also enter into experience only indeterminately, by means of the experience we have of them by virtue of our embodiment.

<sup>39</sup> Kelly (2004: 86)

## Naturalising Phenomenology

improvement curve. If we think of the improvement curve as the curve that measures the quantity of light against the quality of the viewing conditions, then what my experience tells me at any given moment is whether more or less light will improve my view, and also perhaps, how drastic the improvement will be. In this way the lighting plays a positive role in my experience but is never registered determinately.' (Kelly, 2004: 85-6)

It is an interesting question which I cannot enter into here in any detail, the extent to which Noë and Kelly have offered competing explanations of the kinds of practical knowledge which might determine the contents of my colour experience. Noë's position looks to me to be not dissimilar to what Husserl might have said on this question. Recall how Husserl took the hidden sides of a thing to be present in experience only in the form of hypotheses about what we would see if we were to change our relation to a thing. Noë's position on our perception of a thing's colour looks to me to involve a similar claim. Noë seems to be suggesting that an important part of what it is to experience a thing as having a uniform colour involves us drawing on our knowledge of sensorimotor contingencies so as to form hypotheses or expectations about how a thing's colour will change under different viewing conditions.

If this is the correct way of reading Noë, it would seem that we do indeed have two competing accounts. Husserl and Noë say that what we might call the perceptual context enters into perception only by contributing to the hypotheses we frame about how our perceptual experiences of a thing will change with our movements. Merleau-Ponty and Kelly say that the lighting context can enter into perception through our bodily understanding of under what lighting conditions the object can be best seen.



## Naturalising Phenomenology

I cannot attempt to decide between these two explanations here. It suffices to note that there are two hypotheses here about how our experiences get their phenomenal intentionality. Both hypotheses can be understood as empirical hypotheses. Thus I take myself to have presented the beginning of a story about how the naturalist might go about assimilating the phenomenologist's idea of phenomenal intentionality. I have proposed an account of phenomenal intentionality which appeals to certain kinds of practical knowledge to account for why the environment appears at it does to an animal on any given occasion. The idea is that being in possession of certain kinds of practical knowledge is what makes it the case that the world appears to us at it does. Admittedly there is more work to be done in explaining just how it is that being in possession of this practical knowledge suffices to make it the case that our experiences present the world as appearing thus and so. This is a task for my future research. On the supposition that possession of this practical knowledge is something that can be given a functional-physical description I take it I have sketched the beginnings of a story about how a naturalist might go about integrating phenomenal intentionality into her thinking about minds.

In the next section I will explain how possession of practical knowledge does look like something that can be explained in functional-physical terms. I will begin by connecting the account I have presented of phenomenal intentionality thus far with the conclusion that there are subjective facts. We will see that the existence of phenomenal intentionality requires us to revise our thinking about the nature and function of perception. However this revised conception of the function of perception finds support in recent work on perception in cognitive science and neuroscience. Thus the shift in our

## Naturalising Phenomenology

thinking about perception required if we are to admit subjective facts, is a shift already taking place within the science of mind.

### 6. Why Perception isn't Detection

Once we concede that there exists a kind of intentionality which is constitutively determined by a subject's practical knowledge in the way I have just described, it is a short step to the conclusion that there are subjective facts. The practical knowledge I have invoked above is nothing other than what I have been calling "operative understanding". In chapter 2 we saw how it is in virtue of our operative understanding that we are able to perceive a thing as calling for or drawing from us certain actions. To perceive an entity in this way is precisely to understand that entity as an entity of a certain kind. It is to understand the entity as an entity that calls for certain actions.

Consider Heidegger's hammer as an illustration of this point. In order to perceive a thing as a hammer, as a thing which can be used to fasten together two piece of wood say, one must draw on one's understanding of how a hammer is to be used. One must represent the hammer in a certain way, in a way that is determined by one's operative understanding of hammers. Now consider someone who hasn't the faintest idea about how to use a hammer or what hammers are for. This creature won't perceive the hammer in the way that we perceive it: the creature won't perceive the hammer in terms of how it is to be used. By hypothesis she doesn't know how hammers are used. Thus she cannot represent a thing as a hammer. It follows then that there are things that can be represented only by a creature with the requisite operative understanding.

Someone might object that this doesn't establish the existence of things that can be represented only given the right operative understanding. It only

## Naturalising Phenomenology

establishes the existence of *ways* of representing that require possession of an operative understanding. The creature can perfectly well perceive something that is a hammer, assuming her senses are all functioning normally. What she cannot do is represent the thing she perceives as a hammer. What she lacks is the recognitional concept for hammers, and this is why she cannot perceive the thing as a hammer.

By way of an initial response to this objection, I would reply that she not only lacks the ability to recognise hammers. She doesn't know what to do with hammers. This is why the existential phenomenologist claims that she doesn't perceive something that is a hammer, something that has the being of a hammer. A longer response requires us to go back to the notion of operative understanding introduced in chapter 2. I introduced the notion of an operative understanding in the course of describing the way of existing characteristic of persons which Heidegger calls "being-in-the-world". Operative understanding was taken to be one of the structures constitutive of our way of existing as persons. This is to say that operative understanding forms a part of what it takes for an animal to be a being-in-the-world. When a creature has the required operative understanding she comes to inhabit a world, a world that contains hammers, for instance, and the other tools of trade characteristic of carpentry. Before she acquires the necessary operative understanding she doesn't live in a world in which anything can appear to be a hammer. She doesn't live in a world in which there are hammers because things of this kind have no significance for her.

For the remainder of this section I want to consider how the latter idea finds support from within naturalism. The claim to repeat is that our ways of existing as persons can literally shape the world we inhabit. Let us begin by contrasting this idea with a rival view of the relation between an animal and

## Naturalising Phenomenology

its environment. This rival view finds its clearest articulation in a natural way of thinking about perception. According to this view the senses function to provide the brain with information about what is going on in the animal's environment (or in the animal's body, in the case of proprioception). On this view a brain state is about a thing *x* in virtue of some relation between the animal whose brain it is, and some event in the animal's environment. The senses are taken to be the brain's window onto the world. The function of the senses is simply to provide the brain with information about what is where.

This view is based on the reasonable claim that were the senses not playing this role for the brain, the animal wouldn't know how things stood either with respect to its local environment or in its own body. I shall call this the "detection view" of perception, so-called because it construes the function of the senses to faithfully report back to the brain how things are in the world external to the brain.

The detection view of perception conflicts with the story I have been telling according to which what we perceive are opportunities for action. On this view the job of the senses isn't simply to report back to the brain about what is where. In addition the senses tell an animal what it should do. This is a job the senses can perform because it is a part of the animal's way of existing to know how to find its way about in the world. This is to say that the animal knows how to make use of the things it perceives to achieve its goals.

Kathleen Akins (1996) has presented a similar view of the senses in attacking what I have called the detection view. Akins characterises the senses as fundamentally "narcissistic"; the animal is constantly posing the question 'how does all of this relate to me?' and it is the job of the senses to

## Naturalising Phenomenology

deliver an answer to this question. Akins gives a nice example to illustrate her proposal, she asks us to think about the function of thermoreception. Given the detection view we would expect the thermoreceptive system to be answering the question 'what is my skin temperature at x' where 'x' picks out a particular region of my body. However it turns out this fails to capture what our thermoreceptive systems do.

There are four different types of thermoreceptors, two of which respond only to extreme conditions of very high and very low temperatures causing in us sensations of pain. When the conditions are not in this way extreme, we rely on thermoreceptors for our sensations of warmth and cold. Akins begins by noting that we have many more cold receptors than warm receptors. Moreover, some parts of the body have more receptors than other parts, and the ratio of cold to warm receptors likewise varies from one part of the body to another. Akins goes on to note that how each receptor responds to a temperature change will depend upon the starting temperature. When a part of the body is already cold, applying a cold stimulus to this part of the body – say you run your hands under a cold tap by accident – will evoke a dramatic response. A warm stimulus will however evoke a gradual decrease in activity in the cold receptors. The reverse is true of warm receptors. If you put already warm hands under a hot tap the warm receptor will burst into life, a cold stimulus will produce a gradual decrease in activity.

What bearing does this have on the detection view of the senses? First it doesn't look right to say that the function of thermoreceptors is to report back to the brain, the temperature of particular bodily regions. One and the same bodily temperature can give rise to a variety of sensations. Akins makes the point as follows: 'thermal sensations are a function of the firing rates of a neural population and because the absolute number and ratio of the two

## Naturalising Phenomenology

different receptors (the cold and warm receptors) differ from one part of the body to another, exactly the same skin temperature can give rise to a variety of sensations.’ (Akins, 1996: 351, my addition in brackets) Furthermore, the response that does occur in a particular part of the body at a particular time will depend on the starting temperature in that part of the body. ‘The felt change in temperature for a specific temperature change will depend upon the starting temperature of the skin. If the temperature of a warm spot is increased at the bottom of its response range, the dynamic burst (very roughly, the firing rate of neurons) will be very small; if it is warmed at the top of its response range, the burst will be very large.’ (op cit, my addition in brackets)

On the basis of points like these, Akins mounts a convincing case against a detection view of thermoreception. She establishes that the function of thermoreception cannot be to record absolute temperature or temperature change at bodily regions. Akins sums matters up nicely:

‘What the organism is worried about, in the best of narcissistic traditions, is its own comfort. The system is not asking, ‘What is it like out there?’ – a question about the objective temperature states of the body’s skin. Rather, it is doing something – informing the brain about the presence of any relevant thermal events. Relevant of course to itself.’ (Akins, 1996: 349)

When we are considering the function of perception the question to ask is not what the senses ought to be detecting. The question we should ask is rather what should the senses be doing, where what the senses should be doing will be decided by the interests of the animal at that time. What the animal is doing will tell us what it needs to be representing. Of course to know what implications the things it is sensing have for action requires skill on the part of



## Naturalising Phenomenology

the animal. It will require the animal to draw on its operative understanding. Thus at first glance Akins' narcissistic view of the senses would seem to fit comfortably with the view of perception I have been presenting from existential phenomenology.

The existential phenomenologist however advances a further claim which doesn't obviously find support in Akins. They claim that not only is it the case that an animal perceives what it is in its interest to perceive, where those interests will be dictated by what the animal is engaged in doing at the time.<sup>40</sup> They claim in addition that the objects an animal perceives have an existence which is *shaped* by the animal's interests. I will argue next that this is an idea that also finds support in psychology and neuroscience.

Akins says: 'Each and every sensory system, no matter how sophisticated or simple, is tied to a set (sometimes a very large set) of behavioural tasks. No matter what else the senses do, in the end, they must inform movement or action.' (1996: 352) There are at least two ways of understanding the claim that each sensory system is tied to set of behavioural tasks. The first reading takes the tie to be instrumental. The information supplied by each sensory system is, on this understanding, made available to other systems that control and generate motor behaviour. The close ties between perception and action on this understanding, just consist in perceptual information being used directly to control motor behaviour.

There is however another more radical way of understanding the close ties between perception and action. On this understanding, perception just is a kind of activity, a probing or exploring of the environment. On this

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<sup>40</sup> Akins' point seems to be that we must understand the function of perception in the context of the behaviours it services. She notes a little later in her paper (p.354) the significant connections there are between the parts of the mammalian brain dedicated to seeing and other parts of the brain dedicated to motor behaviour. This provides important support for the idea of perception as being for the selection of action.

## Naturalising Phenomenology

understanding the connection between perception and action isn't just instrumental; the connection is constitutive. What it is for an animal to sense its environment is just for the animal to engage in a certain kind of activity, the activity of exploring the environment by means of its senses. This is the view we find defended in existential phenomenology. The existential phenomenologist takes there to be a constitutive connection between perceiving and acting. He takes perception to be a mode of skilful engagement with the world.

Now suppose we grant that perceiving is an activity in which the animal engages. It follows that the objects of perception will always be *understood* by the animal in terms of the implications they have for movement and action. This is to say that the ways in which an object figures in our perceptual experience will be partially determined by the animal's operative understanding. The claim that the connection between perception and action is constitutive would seem to imply that the objects of an animal's perceptual experience are indeed shaped by an animal's operative understanding.<sup>41</sup>

This claim that perceiving is a kind of action is one we find outside of existential phenomenology. It is supported by work in cognitive science, neuroscience, and robotics research as well, and has recently been

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<sup>41</sup> Someone might be willing to grant that there is a constitutive connection between perception and action but not be willing to grant that our perceptual experiences shape the objects of our experience. He might say that the object as it is represented is shaped by our ways of existing so there is a constitutive tie between our ways of representing the world and our ways of being. He might however add that there is no such tie between the object itself and our existence.

This is a difficult point which we have found ourselves returning to repeatedly. I don't have anything new to add which I haven't already said elsewhere in response to this kind of objection. I would say however that the weaker claim the objector concedes is enough to establish the existence of subjective facts, as has already been noted earlier (see the final section of chapter 3). For to concede that there are objects or facts or whatever that can only be represented by a creature that has the required operative understanding, is to concede that there are facts which can only be represented from a subject's point of view, that is to say, from the point of a subject that has the right kind of operative understanding.

## Naturalising Phenomenology

defended by a handful of philosophers of perception.<sup>42</sup> It is a central idea in both Gibson's ecological theory of perception and in the enactive account of perception. Ballard (1991) has suggested that 'vision is best understood in the context of the visual behaviours that the system is engaged in' (1991: 57). So far this is compatible with an instrumental understanding of the relation between vision and action, where vision is made use of, perhaps directly, in the control of behaviour. However this is not what Ballard has in mind. He makes clear that the behaviours he has in mind are integral to the activity of seeing itself. Vision as he describes it is active and exploratory. In particular he emphasises the role that gaze control has in visual processing, where gaze control is a collection of processes that enable us to keep the fovea of the eye fixed on a particular target while either we move or the thing our gaze is fixed upon moves. Ballard's account of vision doesn't eschew the role of information processing in vision as did Gibson and his followers. Rather Ballard gives an account of vision where use is made of the animal's behaviour to simplify the kinds of computations its visual system performs.

Rodney Brooks' work in robotics also suggests a view of perception as constitutively tied to action. Brooks' robots are composed of subsystems or what he calls "layers" each of which is dedicated to carrying out a particular activity or task such as detecting and avoiding obstacles, wandering around, scanning surfaces etc. Each layer operates independently of the other layers, the overall behaviour of the robot being under the control of one or the other of its layers. To understand what takes place in each layer we have to consider what the layer is doing. What the layer is dedicated to doing will

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<sup>42</sup> For a review of work in cognitive science, robotics and neuroscience which supports this picture see Clark (1997 and 2000: ch.'s 5 & 6). Also see Hurley (1998: ch.'s 9 & 10); Haugeland (1998, ch.9); Noë (2004, ch.'s 1 and 2); Rowlands (1999, ch.5 and 2003, ch.10); Thompson (1995) and Thompson and Varela (2001).

## Naturalising Phenomenology

often require the use of perception. However the contribution made by perception cannot be understood apart from the activity each layer is dedicated to carrying out. Each activity involves a pattern of interactions with the world. Brooks says in discussing a simple creature built to avoid obstacles:

'...there need be no clear distinction between a "perception subsystem", a "central system" and an "action system". In fact, there may well be two independent channels connecting sensing to action (one for initiating motion, and one for emergency halts), so there is no single place where "perception" delivers a representation of the world in the traditional sense.' (Brooks, 1991: 144)

Consider the layer in a robot of this kind dedicated to initiating motion. Clearly it has to be making use of what it perceives if it is to avoid obstacles. However the use the creature makes of perception cannot be understood apart from what the robot is doing, which is initiating motion, in the case of the layer we are considering. Thus Brooks is a clear example of someone whose empirical work is predicated on the assumption that perception and action are constitutively tied.<sup>43</sup>

As a final example, consider the account Thompson (1995 & 2000) gives of the function of colour perception. Thompson wants to steer a middle course between views of colour perception which take its function to be the detection of surface reflectance properties, and views which take colour to be something the brain projects onto the world. Thompson points out that there are significant differences in colour vision throughout the animal kingdom.

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<sup>43</sup> In fact Brooks willingly endorses the idea that an animal can shape the environment it lives in. Commenting on work in AI which attempts to model special purpose problem solving he has this to say: '...as Uexküll and others have pointed out, each animal species, and clearly each robot species with their own distinctively non-human sensor suites, will have their own *Merkwelt* (perceptual world).' (Brooks, 1988: 141)

## Naturalising Phenomenology

Normal human perceivers are trichromats, which is to say that they possess three different types of cone photoreceptor. Our colour space – the space of different colours we can discriminate between – is three-dimensional. Birds, fishes, amphibians and reptiles are by contrast tetrachromats, they possess a fourth type of photoreceptor. These animals enjoy experiences of colour which are tetravariant, having another hue dimension in addition to ours. Thompson hypothesises that given this difference in the visual apparatus of these creatures, they will be able to perceive novel hues we cannot see.

Thompson takes these differences to indicate that there is no common property which vision in these different animals has the function of detecting. Thompson agrees with Akins that when we are thinking about the function of colour vision the question to ask is “what does colour vision do for the animal in its environment.” (Thompson, 2000: 165)<sup>44</sup> Thompson comes up with the following answer:

‘...the primary role of colour vision may be to enact a perceptual quality space that integrates physically heterogeneous environmental properties into a small number of perceptual equivalence classes. These relatively stable perceptual categories would facilitate the identification of aspects of the environment and then guide behaviour accordingly.’ (Thompson, 2000: 182)

Thus for Thompson the purpose of colour vision isn’t to detect physically invariant surface reflectance properties. It is to make available to the perceiving animal, stable perceptual categories that can be used to meet the animal’s needs in the course of its perceptually guided activities. So it turns

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<sup>44</sup> He cites a co-authored paper Thompson, Palacios & Varela (1992) in support of this claim.

## Naturalising Phenomenology

out that the same thing can have different colours – it can have one colour for me and a different colour for a tetrachromatic pigeon, say.<sup>45</sup>

I conclude then that the argument from the contents of experience for subjective facts is one that a naturalist could buy. A commitment to subjective facts follows from the empirical hypothesis that action and perception are constitutively connected. Whatever empirical work supports this hypothesis, I claim will also support the existence of subjective facts. For perception and action can be constitutively tied only if the animal is drawing on practical knowledge which tells it what the implications for action are of the object it is perceiving. A creature that makes use of its practical knowledge in this way is, I claim, a creature that lives in a world shaped by its existence.

The remainder of my chapter will take up the second reason that was given for introducing subjective facts. This was the phenomenologist's claim that every conscious experience is also pre-reflectively self-conscious. It will turn out that we are already well on our way to having an answer to this question. For I shall argue eventually that the kind of operative understanding that has been appealed to in developing an account of phenomenal intentionality can only be had by a creature that has access to its conscious experiences. A creature that has this kind of access is pre-reflectively self-conscious.

### 7. The Feeling of Ownership

I will begin with a brief reminder of the thesis to be defended – the claim that every conscious experience is also PRSC. This thesis was introduced in answering the question of what it is for an experience to be phenomenally

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<sup>45</sup> See Thompson (2000: 183) for more on this point.



## Naturalising Phenomenology

conscious. An experience is phenomenally conscious when there is something the having of the experience is like for a subject.

I claimed that there is something an experience is like for a subject when the occurrence of this experience is itself experienced by the subject. There is something the experience is like for its subject when that very experience is something the subject experiences. Consider my experience of the blue sky: this experience presents the sky to me as seeming a certain way only if the experience is itself experienced by me. When I do not experience my experiences they do not seem any particular way to me: they lack a subjective character.

Whenever an experience is itself experienced by a subject, I shall say that this experience is accompanied by a *feeling of ownership*. The feeling of ownership accompanies an experience when a subject has a sense of himself having that very experience. A subject's experiencing himself having an experience is an experience of ownership. For "to have" and "to own" are different ways of describing one and the same relation. Thus, when a subject experiences himself having an experience, he also experiences himself as the owner of the experience that is happening to him.

Now I have said that there is something an experience is like for a subject only when the experience is itself experienced. Thus, we can say that there is something an experience is like for a subject only if it is accompanied by a feeling of ownership.

An experience which is accompanied by a feeling of ownership is an experience that is had self-consciously. The kind of self-consciousness that is characteristic of the feeling of ownership should be distinguished from what we might call "reflective consciousness". A subject need not introspect or reflect on himself in order to be consciously aware that he himself is having

## Naturalising Phenomenology

an experience. What I am calling the feeling of ownership accompanies our experiences without us actively or deliberately doing anything. Merleau-Ponty makes the point well:

“At the root of all our experience and all our reflections, we find...a being which immediately recognises itself, because it is its knowledge both of itself and of all things, and which knows its own existence, not by observation and as a given fact, nor by inference from any idea of itself, but through direct contact with that existence.” (Merleau-Ponty 1962:371)

Thus we need to distinguish between a subject's being *reflectively* conscious of himself having an experience and what I labelled in chapter 5, a subject's *pre-reflective consciousness*. It is pre-reflective and not reflective consciousness that must be explained if we are to explain what it is for an experience to have subjective character.

Pre-reflective consciousness is a kind of *peripheral* or *implicit* consciousness a creature has of itself. Consider the sentence ‘Smith is conscious of her thinking that she herself is feeling nervous’.<sup>46</sup> This sentence reports a state of affairs in which Smith is conscious of herself having a particular thought. Moreover, the thought she is having about herself is a distinct state of mind from the feeling of nervousness she is experiencing. The thought the subject has about herself takes as its object the feeling of nervousness. Now contrast this state of affairs with that reported by the following sentence: ‘Smith is self-consciously feeling nervous’. Here, the state of mind reported is not distinct from Smith's feeling of nervousness. Rather, Smith's self-consciousness *modifies* the feeling of nervousness she experiences.

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<sup>46</sup> Here I am drawing on a useful distinction Kriegel (2003 and 2004) makes between *transitive* and *intransitive* self-consciousness.

## Naturalising Phenomenology

Going back to Brentano, we can say that Smith is *primarily* conscious of her feeling of nervousness and she is only *peripherally* or *secondarily* aware of herself having this experience. Thus, the difference between reflective and pre-reflective consciousness concerns the way in which the subject is self-conscious. When a subject is reflectively conscious of herself having an experience, she is *attentively* or *focally* aware of herself and the state of mind she is in. Whereas, when a subject is pre-reflectively conscious she is only *inattentively* or *peripherally* aware of herself having an experience.<sup>47</sup>

A subject is pre-reflectively self-conscious when her experiences are accompanied by a feeling of ownership. If this is right, a naturalistic answer to what I have earlier called “the experience of content question” – the question why there is something rather than nothing it is like to undergo a conscious experience – will lie in an explanation of what it is for an experience to be accompanied by a feeling of ownership.

The feeling of ownership is such that the subject does not experience himself simply as a material thing existing alongside other material things, but instead experiences himself as a material thing that is the owner of various experiences. The subject experiences himself *qua* subject. If we are to explain what it is for an experience to be accompanied by a feeling of ownership, some explanation must be given of what it is for a creature to represent itself *qua* subject.

### 8. Towards a Naturalistic Account of Pre-Reflective Self-Consciousness

In chapter 6 I introduced a variety of representational state which I claimed could make a subject implicitly aware of herself *qua* subject at the same time as making her explicitly conscious of something in her environment. What I

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<sup>47</sup> I am indebted to Kriegel (2004) for this way of formulating the distinction.

## Naturalising Phenomenology

shall set about doing in what remains of this chapter is explaining just what it is for a subject to be implicitly aware of herself *qua* subject. I will suggest that we can understand this awareness as part and parcel of a subject's exercising her operative understanding. PRSC and operative understanding form parts of a single package. Indeed I shall argue that a subject couldn't possibly perceive an object as having implications for her actions if she weren't in this way conscious of herself *qua* subject of this experience.

I characterised PRSC as a form of bodily self-awareness in chapter 6. I said that a subject is continuously aware of her body *qua* subject of her experiences. Let us begin then by clarifying just what this continuous awareness consists in. It would be a mistake to understand it as a form of perceptual awareness. Perceptual awareness is intentional – it is awareness directed towards an object. Yet PRSC isn't intentional. A subject's body isn't among the objects he perceives whenever he undergoes a perceptual experience, though of course it might be on some occasions. I claim instead that a subject is aware of her body as that *with which* she perceives things. To give an example, consider the kind of awareness that accompanies one's experience of running one's fingers across a piece of cloth. When one moves one's fingers across the cloth, one's fingers do not figure among the object of which one is aware, unless one deliberately attends to them. You will nevertheless be aware of your fingers as that with which you are making contact with the cloth.

I suggest then that we think of PRSC as an awareness of one's own body as that with which one perceives. This characterisation of PRSC can help us understand why it should be that the feeling of ownership accompanies each of our experiences. The idea is that whenever a conscious perceptual experience occurs we are aware of our body as that with which we are

## Naturalising Phenomenology

perceiving things. Why should this kind of awareness form a constant backdrop to all of our experiences? I want to finish up by suggesting that it does so because of the role that our practical knowledge plays in constituting the appearance of things.

When one is behaving skilfully one has a sense of which actions are appropriate to what one is doing and which are not. One selects from amongst a number of possible actions which of them is appropriate to the task at hand. It is characteristic of skilful behaviour that one doesn't need to give any thought to what one is doing. One simply knows how to act. One is ready to deal with things, and this readiness consists in an important part in what I have earlier characterised as a bodily understanding we have of the things we perceive. For the most part then my body is ready to take hold of the things with which I deal. This kind of readiness my body exhibits at any given moment is, I have argued, an important determining factor in why things appear to me as they do at any given moment.

Now I want to suggest that my body can exhibit this kind of readiness to deal with a situation appropriately only because I am aware of my body as that with which I perceive things. Consider what happens when I play a tennis serve. To what extent are the movements I make something for which I can take credit? They are certainly not something I know *that* I am doing as I make them. The serve happens too quickly (or it would if I was any good at tennis) for me to know that I am making certain movements. Still these movements are under my control. They are not under my reflective control: they are unreflective or as I have been putting it "pre-reflective". The tennis serve is under my control in that there is something my movements are directed towards bringing about, namely getting the ball to land in the right part of the court. Insofar as this activity is under my control, and I take it that

## Naturalising Phenomenology

it will be under my control if I am a skilled tennis player, I must be conscious of it. The consciousness I have of it is precisely a consciousness of my body as that with which I am acting. It is through this consciousness I have of my body that I am ready to move in ways appropriate to taking a tennis serve.

I conclude then that the two questions I have been attempting to answer about the nature of consciousness meet up in the notion of practical knowledge. My experiences have the intentional content they do in virtue of my practical knowledge. I am able to exercise this practical knowledge only because I am PRSC. PRSC gives me a kind of access to what I am experiencing in virtue of which I am ready to deal with the familiar things which fill my environment. Now clearly there is much more to be said here, but I have at least begun to sketch an answer to the question of what it is to be a conscious creature.



### **Conclusion**

I have been arguing that naturalistic accounts of the mind have run into an explanatory gap because they have failed to recognise the existence of subjective facts. If naturalists are to close the explanatory gap it will only be by making room for subjective facts. My aim in this chapter has been to take up the two arguments that have been given in support of subjective facts, and show how they can be made to fit within a naturalistic account of the mind. In doing so my aim was to show exactly how a naturalist could go about admitting the existence of subjective facts. I take it that I have given an answer which points in the right general direction one might head in, were one to set about naturalising phenomenology. More significantly still I have shown that the phenomenologist's opposition to naturalism is unfounded. For I have shown that the naturalist can easily take on board a good many of the key claims the phenomenologist makes in describing the structure of our conscious experiences.

There is still much work to be done of course. Central to the account I have sketched is the idea of our practical knowledge or operative understanding accounting for phenomenal intentionality. If this account is to get off the ground, I must explain in much more detail just how it is that being in possession of the right kind of practical knowledge can have as a consequence that the world comes to appear in certain ways. There is also much more to be said about the account I have sketched, all too briefly, of PRSC in the final sections of this chapter. One question I was unable to pursue but would have liked to have examined is the relation between this PRSC and certain primitive forms of self-awareness which psychologists in the Ecological tradition such as Neisser (1988) have introduced, and which

## Naturalising Phenomenology

philosophers have recently begun discussing under the banner of nonconceptual self-consciousness (see for instance Bermudez (1998)).

Another intriguing avenue I would like to explore in the future is the relation between PRSC and our consciousness of time. Husserl claimed that every conscious experience has a temporal structure such that it contains a retentive reference to past moments of experience, an openness to the present, and a protentive anticipation of moments of experience that are about to happen. The idea that consciousness has this temporal structure was to prove immensely important for the existential phenomenologists too. Heidegger for instance was to argue that temporality forms the very structure of our being-in-the-world. Thus there is a significant theme here in phenomenology which connects with many of the ideas I have introduced but which I have been unable to tackle within the confines of this project.

Even more intriguing is the possibility of developing a naturalistic account of the claim that our experience, and maybe even our very existence, has this temporal structure. Varela (1999) for instance makes use of data from neuroscience to develop a model of how an experience could have this retentive-protentive structure. While Van Gelder (1999) shows how this idea fits with a dynamicist approach to thinking about mind in recent cognitive science.

There are many large questions which remain to be pursued. Still I have begun the work of developing an account of mind which allows us to understand appearances as essentially subjective as well as taking them to be a part of the fabric of reality. Now that the phenomenologist's arguments against naturalism have been revealed to be without substance, the way has been cleared to begin to develop a naturalised account of phenomenology.

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