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# INTENTIONALITY AND PHENOMENOLOGY

BY

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**Abstract:** This paper examines two recent attempts to articulate a particular relationship between intentionality and phenomenology. Terry Horgan and John Tienson (2002) have argued for what they call the *inseparability thesis*: that the intentional and the phenomenal are, in a certain sense, inseparable. Brian Loar (2002, 2003), following on from earlier work, has argued for a kind of intentionality, *phenomenal intentionality*, that is pervasive and more fundamental than ordinary wide content. Problems with both views can be seen once we consider a number of dimensions to intentionality, and reflect more generally on the notion of phenomenal intentionality itself.

## *1. What is the relationship between intentionality and phenomenology?*

Traditionally, post-behaviorist philosophy of mind and cognitive science has proceeded on the assumption that intentionality and phenomenology can most profitably be treated independently or separately from one another. This may be because intentionality is thought to be significantly more tractable than phenomenology; or because a “divide and conquer” strategy in general is more efficient in dealing with difficult-to-understand phenomena; or because the two are metaphysically quite distinct, even if there is a realm in which they are coinstantiated. Following Horgan and Tienson’s (2002) labeling of this general position as separatism, call the former type of positions *pragmatic separatism*, and the latter-most position *metaphysical separatism*.

Pragmatic separatism amounts to a research strategy that can be adopted independent of one’s stance on metaphysical separatism in much the way in which one might adopt individualism as such a research strategy in the social sciences, or reductionism as a global explanatory strategy in the sciences more

generally, without taking a stand on whether (respectively) social phenomena are constituted by nothing more, ultimately, than the states and actions of individuals, or whether whole entities are nothing more, ultimately, than the parts that comprise them. Pragmatic separatism amounts to a two-part gamble. The first assumes that parsing the mental world into the intentional and the phenomenal provides the basis for conceptual and empirical advances in what we know about the mind. This gamble has gone hand-in-hand with the classic computational theory of mind and traditional artificial intelligence, which have chiefly modeled intentionality independent of considerations of phenomenology. The second gamble is to assume that treating intentionality as a unified phenomenon, such that one can theorize about it and explore it in both the mental and non-mental realms, will turn out to have much the same benefits. This gamble has generated informational and teleological accounts of intentionality, which have assimilated mental states to mechanistic detectors (such as thermostats) and bodily organs (such as hearts and kidneys).

Over the last decade or so, these gambles have been challenged, and separatism of both kinds rejected. As consciousness of consciousness has increased, a number of philosophers have advocated a central role for the phenomenal in our conception of the mental, and in our conception of the intentional in particular. For example, John Searle (1990, 1992) has defended the *connection principle*, the principle that “all unconscious intentional states are in principle accessible to consciousness” (1992, p. 156). Galen Strawson has claimed allegiance to the widespread view that what he calls “behavioral intentionality can never amount to true intentionality, however complex the behavior, and that one cannot have intentionality unless one is an experiencing being” (1994, p. 208). Both of these views appear to make the existence of phenomenology in a creature a pre-requisite for intentionality, at least “original” or “real” intentionality. In doing so, they have brought a focus on *human minds* – rather than, say, animal minds or computers – as the paradigmatic loci of intentional states.

Some recent views go further than this in suggesting more specific and foundational roles for phenomenology vis-à-vis intentionality. Brian Loar has argued that there is a form that intentionality takes – subjective intentionality (1987), psychological content (1988), intentional qualia (2002), or phenomenal intentionality (2003) – that is psychologically pervasive. It is distinct from, and in certain respects more primitive than, the kind or kinds of intentionality that have been discussed in light (or perhaps the shadow?) of the externalist arguments of Putnam (1975) and Burge (1979). Loar thinks that such intentionality is narrow, and in part this is because he views phenomenology as being individualistic. In Loar’s view, there is not simply a general, presuppositional connection between intentionality and phenomenology; rather, there is a form of intentionality that is thoroughly phenomenal and that is manifest as the phenomenal content of a range of particular mental states.

Terence Horgan and John Tienson have recently taken a similar path. They argue for a two-way *inseparability thesis*: that intentional content is inseparable from the phenomenal character of paradigmatic phenomenal states (e.g., pain, visual experience), and that phenomenal character is inseparable from the intentional content of paradigmatic intentional states (e.g., propositional attitudes). In addition, they defend what they call the *phenomenal intentionality thesis*: that there is a pervasive kind of intentionality determined by phenomenology alone. Like Loar, Horgan and Tienson argue that this intentionality is *narrow*, and that in important respects it is *more fundamental* than wide content.

While I think that even the general views typified by Searle and Strawson are problematic, in this paper I shall focus on the more specific proposals made by Horgan and Tienson, and the views of Loar. Both the inseparability and phenomenal intentionality theses seem to me false, and even were the latter true, the significance that Horgan and Tienson attach to it is misplaced. Pinpointing the problems with the Horgan-Tienson position will shed some light, I hope, on the limitations of Loar's more wide-ranging discussion, and the broader issues that their shared position and its defense raise.

## 2. *Dimensions of the inseparability thesis*

One legacy of the attachment that many philosophers of mind had to the intentional during the 1980s was the articulation of various forms of *representationalism* with respect to the phenomenal through the '90s. Dretske (1995), Lycan (1996, 2001), Tye (1995, 2000), and Harman (1990) have all defended versions of representationalism about phenomenal states. The basic idea of such representationalist views is to treat phenomenal states as a type of intentional state, to analyze or understand the experiential in terms of the representational. A key strategy of representationalists has been to point to the transparent or diaphanous character of experience and our reflection on it. When I engage in introspection on the character of my experience, I find that it is thoroughly intentional, so thoroughly so that it is hard to distinguish any purely qualitative, non-intentional remainder of the experience. My on-line reflection on my current visual experience, for example, seems to me to yield only what it is I am currently looking at (books, a computer screen, a telephone, a coffee cup, etc.), what is usually taken to be the *content* of my visual experience. Thus, representationalism serves as a basis for either the rejection of qualia, or their subsumption under the putatively better understood notion of intentionality.

Because of the recent prominence of the intentional and of representationalist views of experience, the two halves to Horgan and Tienson's

inseparability thesis are not viewed as equally in need of justification. Representationalists accept, of course, the idea that the intentional pervades the phenomenal, as Horgan and Tienson (p. 520) acknowledge. Thus it is the second half of their thesis – the claim that paradigmatic intentional states, such as beliefs and desires, have an inseparable phenomenal character – that requires more by way of justification, at least in the dialectical tenor of the times.

There are several dimensions along which versions of the inseparability thesis can vary that make for stronger and weaker views about the relationship between intentionality and phenomenology. Consider three:

- (a) **quantificational range:** Are there just some mental states of which the thesis is true, or is it true of all mental states?.
- (b) **modal intensity:** Are the intentional and phenomenal merely coincident, linked nomologically, physically necessitated, or conceptually or analytically mutually entailing?
- (c) **grain of determinateness:** At how specific a “level” are the intentional and the phenomenological inseparable? At the least specific level, the thesis would apply to the properties being intentional and being phenomenal (cf. Searle and Strawson, quoted earlier); at the most specific level, the thesis would apply to specific mental states (e.g., attitude plus content), such as believing that there is a red tomato in front of me here and now, and having a specific, reddish, roundish visual sensation.

I want to suggest that versions of the inseparability thesis that are strong on *any of these dimensions* are implausible, not only given Horgan and Tienson’s other commitments, but independently.

### 3. *Deflating the inseparability thesis*

Consider these three dimensions to the inseparability thesis in reverse order.

(c) **Grain of determinateness.** Few (if any) intentional states have a specific phenomenal character without which they cannot have the wide content that they have. This is clearest in the interpersonal case, and one reason for finding both pragmatic and metaphysical separability theses plausible is that we can generalize about, for example, propositional attitudes in a robust manner without delving into the phenomenology that (let us suppose) accompanies those states. (See Fodor, 1987, or Dennett, 1981, for example, on the interpersonal reliability of folk psychology.) What an arbitrarily chosen pair of people share phenomenologically when they both entertain the thought that George Bush is President of the United States is anyone’s guess. Phenomenological comparisons are

also notoriously under strain in cross-species cases (Nagel, 1974). Moreover, the finer the grain of determinateness to the experiences, the greater the problem here.

But this is also true *intrapersonally*, even if the variation here is not in general as great, in part because we are creatures of habit mentally as well as behaviorally; it is easy to fall into mental ruts, where the recurring phenomenology is part of the rut. Most pointedly, one and the same intentional state can be realized by a person on two distinct occasions and *have a phenomenology at all on only one of them*. Clearly this is true in cases where an intentional state is *conscious* on only one of those two occasions, but it is also true even when both occurrences are conscious occurrences.

In the spirit of Horgan and Tienson's appeal for a reader to "pay attention to your own experience" (p. 521), I have just done the decisive experiment: I thought first that George Bush is President of the United States, and had CNN-mediated auditory and visual phenomenology that focussed on one of his speeches. I then took a short break, doodled a little, wandered around the room, and then had a thought with that very same content and . . . nothing. Or at least nothing distinctly Bush-like, as in the first case. I just drew a blank, realized my coffee was finished, and moved on. To be honest, I am not sure whether the drawing a blank or the phenomenal feel of realizing my coffee was finished was the phenomenology that accompanied the thought that George Bush is President of the United States, or whether I was mistaken in some more basic way about what my phenomenology *was*, or about what thought I was entertaining.

However, there is nothing unusual or weird about this, although I don't claim that *everyone* will find that they have the same results when they attempt their own replication of the experiment. (It is instructive, however, to try this out on a class of students, and note some of the wild variation in what is reported. And things would no doubt get worse in this respect were we to leave the sanctity of the philosophy classroom.) Some, no doubt, will report as Horgan and Tienson themselves do. But do these different results show that *I* was mistaken about what I thought, or that I mischaracterized or just missed my phenomenology? No, phenomenology is sometimes like that, tricky to coax out, difficult to map to states with specific content, even fickle or uncooperative. And not attached unwaveringly to intentionality, at least at a relatively fine-grained level of determinacy.

**(b) Modal intensity.** This brings me to the sense in which phenomenology *cannot* be separated from intentionality. As I have intimated above, Horgan and Tienson employ what I shall call the methodology of *imaginative evocation* in motivating and discussing the inseparability thesis. That is, they provide possible scenarios that we are invited to imagine in order to convey some idea of the sort of thing that the phenomenology of intentional states is, why it exists, and why the inseparability thesis is true. But this methodology, despite its increasing deployment in thinking about

consciousness, is inherently unsuited to making even a *prima facie* case for anything but the modally weakest versions of the inseparability thesis, namely, that phenomenology and intentionality are coincident in some range of cases. To establish modally stronger theses through thought experiment they would have to show that we *cannot* have intentional states without a corresponding phenomenology (or phenomenology without intentionality).

We might think, however, that their methodology issues at least a challenge to those who would deny the inseparability thesis: given that their examples putatively point to a general feature of intentional states, and their inability to conjure mental states without a corresponding phenomenology, the separatist must describe an occurrent, intentional state that has no phenomenology at all. Yet even if we accept these discussions as shifting the burden of proof in this way (and I am not sure that we should), there are several problems here.

First, as I indicated above, I do not myself seem to have any problem in identifying occurrent intentional states that lack a phenomenology (distinct from their intentionality) or, more accurately, whose phenomenology I feel in no special position to identify with any degree of certainty. Representationalists such as Harman (1990) report similar abilities. Since I trust the reports of Horgan and Tienson (or rather, I trust them no less than I trust my own erstwhile introspective attempts), it seems that the right conclusion to draw is that there can be differences in what the methodology of imaginative evocation produces in this particular case. The further conclusion that these differences are a result of one's different theoretical starting points is tempting. Such a conclusion would be devastating for the methodology that Horgan and Tienson use.

Loar (2002, 2003) employs the same methodology, putting particular emphasis on a thought experiment that involves thinking of an *isolated brain* that has just the same phenomenal experience as you when you are having a particular visual experience (say, seeing a lemon). Loar says he "will be content if you grant at least a superficial coherence to the thought that my isolated twin-in-a-vat has visual experiences exactly like mine" (2002, p. 90), but it is difficult to grant even this if your view is that brains need to be both embodied and environmentally embedded, and actively so, in order to provide the basis for *any* visual experience at all. Precisely such a view has been recently articulated and defended by Susan Hurley (1998, 2001) and by J. Kevin O'Regan and Alva Noë (2001a, 2001b; see also Noë, 2002a, 2002b, in press). For someone who thinks that embodiment and embeddedness are essential features of visual experience, the thought Loar invites us to entertain is no more and no less conceivable than is the thought that there is a box filled only with air that has just the visual experience that I am having at a particular moment. Those who think that mere air *could* instantiate mentality – call them *airheads*

– are able to conceive something that those with this view of the relationship between experience, embodiment, and embeddedness cannot.

Loar himself considers a version of the objection that phenomenology is a product of theory rather than a reflection of the underlying mental reality (of intentional qualia). He says:

Theory does have a bearing, it is true. But theory does not create the phenomenology. From a neutral position there is a certain phenomenology of perceptual experience. What is missing from the neutral position is a conception of the nature of what is thereby presented. (2002, p. 92).

The bearing that theory has, on Loar's view, concerns how the phenomenology is interpreted, but not whether there is a phenomenology there to be interpreted. Yet it is precisely this latter issue that the version of this objection I am pressing raises.

Second, the modally strongest version of the inseparability thesis is vulnerable to the conceivability of *momentary zombies*, individuals who nearly always have a phenomenology that accompanies their intentionality, but who sometimes (perhaps due to hardware noise) fail to have a phenomenology. Momentary zombies have a phenomenology just like ours, except occasionally there is a gap in it, and they are momentarily zombies. Momentary zombiehood is much easier to concede than full-blooded zombiehood, and surely it is plausible with respect to at least some intentional states (consider, again, the propositional attitudes). If momentary zombies *are* possible, then it is possible for there to be particular intentional states without an accompanying phenomenology. But I also think it is plausible that *we* are momentary zombies, perhaps due to information-processing bottlenecks and other limitations of our consciousness, with respect to at least some of the intentional states that Horgan and Tienson appeal to. I find this particularly plausible with regard to the example of what Strawson (1994, p. 5) has called “understanding-experience”, being the experience of hearing “someone speaking non-technically in a language one understands” (*loc.cit.*), and which I sometimes find I have, and sometimes not (cf. Horgan and Tienson, 2002, p. 523). In any case, the general point is that modally strong versions of the inseparability thesis are particularly vulnerable to relatively tame versions of some standard thought experiments.

**(a) Quantificational range.** If one concedes that there are dispositional intentional states, such as belief and desire, then the scope of the inseparability thesis needs to be restricted at least to *occurrent* intentional states, or to dispositional states when they are occurrent. But does the thesis need to be restricted further, not just to occurrent states but to those occurrent states of which one is conscious? One reason to think so is that if we think of occurrent states at a given time as those that govern our

behavior at that time, those of which we are conscious at that time will be a proper subset of our occurrent states. But it is not clear that occurrent states of which we are not conscious at a given time have any more of a phenomenology than do non-occurrent states. I noticed a short while ago that the room was getting dark and that I should turn on a desk lamp; I noticed more recently that I have been squinting at the papers scattered on my desk in the enveloping dark. It is plausible to think that my wanting to continue reading guided my squinting behavior although there was no phenomenology of that occurrent state prior to my reflecting on my behavior. (How could there be?; I was not aware of this aspect of my behavior, and it came as a surprise to me to realize just what I was doing.) This suggests that there are at least two “levels” of intentional states for which there is no phenomenology, the purely disposition and the merely occurrent.

Horgan and Tienson explicitly restrict their thesis of the phenomenology of intentionality to intentional states *when they are conscious* (2002, p. 520). But one wonders what this amounts to in light of the following passage:

The full-fledged phenomenal character of sensory experience is an extraordinarily rich synthetic unity that involves complex, richly intentional, total phenomenal characters of visual-mode phenomenology, tactile-mode phenomenology, kinesthetic body-control phenomenology, auditory and olfactory phenomenology, and so forth – each of which can be abstracted more or less from the total experience to be the focus of attention. (2002, p. 522).

On this conception, phenomenology outstrips attention. On one reading, one that equates attention with consciousness, there is phenomenology of which one is not conscious. (But how then do you tell what *its* content is?)

Alternatively, if Horgan and Tienson are equating consciousness with phenomenology, they are saying that we only attend to a portion of our conscious experience. But what is the status of the phenomenal content of that unattended portion of our conscious experience? Does it exist, and if so, how do we know its nature (since, by hypothesis, we do not attend to it?) If we do not know the phenomenal content, then it is plausible to think that such states have no more specific phenomenal content than do dispositional states.

The point here is that the phenomenology of intentionality begins to look more restricted in the range of states it applies to at any given time than one might initially think: the dispositional, the merely occurrent, and the unattended all seem to be precluded. If the inseparability thesis is true, then it seems that it is true of a much more restricted set of states than simply all intentional and all phenomenological states. In light of that, the thesis loses a lot of the punch that it packs vis-à-vis traditional views of the mind that operate on the assumption that there is no necessary or deep connection between the intentional and the phenomenal.

A different sort of problem in the scope of the thesis arises in Loar’s discussion of phenomenal intentionality and intentional qualia. Loar (2003)



builds up a case for phenomenal intentionality by considering perceptually based concepts, then generalizes to recognitional concepts, spatial concepts, and socially deferential concepts (2003, pp. 186–189). But apart from the special case where we reflect on such concepts and their instances we do not, in our everyday experience, have any phenomenology of these concepts, any more than we have any phenomenology of the individual phonemes or distinctive features that make up the stream of speech we have auditory experience of. The stream of consciousness is not, without special prodding, segmented into constituents such as concepts. It seems primarily in the hands of philosophers that our experience can become segmented and particularized, in much the way that it was atomized in the hands of that master introspectionist, Wilhelm Wundt.

This reference to Wundt may remind us that neither introspection nor phenomenology is simply a matter of turning one's mind inwards and reporting what one finds. What one finds in one's own experience will depend in part on what one is looking for, the background perspective that one brings to this first-person task.

#### 4. *Phenomenal intentionality*

So far I have not argued that the inseparability thesis is false, but that there are three dimensions of strength – scope, modality, and determinateness – on which it rates lowly. The point here is to deflate (not refute) the inseparability thesis, for surely only a skeptic about the phenomenal would refuse to concede that versions of the thesis weakened on each of the forgoing dimensions are true. Along the way I have raised, in passing, some doubts about the suitability of the methodology on which Horgan, Tienson and Loar rely in gesturing at what the phenomenology of intentionality is. Rather than develop these doubts here directly I shall turn to consider phenomenal intentionality itself and what its proponents claim about it. Again, the chief point will not be to show that such a property does not exist, but that the most plausible way of understanding it makes it unlikely that what its proponents claim about it is true.

Horgan and Tienson characterize phenomenal intentionality as a “kind of intentional content, pervasive in human life, such that any two possible phenomenal duplicates have exactly similar intentional states vis-à-vis such content” (2002, p. 524). Although this sounds stipulative, it is not, since Horgan and Tienson continue (pp. 524–526) by arguing for the thesis through imaginative evocation. As I noted in the previous section, this style of argument does not seem well suited to the modally-strong conclusion they seek, except insofar as it shifts the burden of proof to those who deny phenomenal intentionality. Yet it remains open to skeptics here to concede that there can be a sort of phenomenal intentionality that is

non-conceptual but balk at the claim that the same is true of the *conceptual* realm. For although *ex hypothesi* phenomenal duplicates share all their phenomenal states, we are to show, not assume, that they share cognitive structures that are genuinely intentional, such as concepts or beliefs.

As part of their bridge from phenomenology to intentionality, Horgan and Tienson distinguish between “two ways of thinking about truth conditions: as determined wholly by phenomenology, and as determined in part by items in the experiencer’s environment that satisfy the experiencer’s phenomenology” (p. 525). The former of these, they argue, are narrow and more fundamental than the latter (pp. 528–529). In their discussion, through imaginative evocation, they invite each reader to compare him or herself to both a Twin Earth doppelgänger and a “Cartesian duplicate”. The latter of these has thoughts purporting to refer to someone named “Bill Clinton”, but these lack reference altogether since there is no thing at all that satisfies that putative reference for a Cartesian duplicate. Here it seems that Horgan and Tienson allow that some phenomenal duplicates (e.g., those in *no* environment) may have mental states that have *no* wide truth conditions and so no wide intentionality at all. But if at least some phenomenal duplicates differ in that one has concepts with ordinary (wide) satisfaction conditions, while the other does not, then the defender of phenomenal intentionality must have available a way of articulating the intentionality that such duplicates share that is *independent* of their wide intentionality. Whether phenomenology alone suffices for intentionality given the complete severance to wide intentionality, as in the case of Cartesian duplicates or brains-in-a-vat, might reasonable be questioned. A more developed account of something like “phenomenal intentionality” could silence doubts here.

Loar (2003) has provided an account that purports to do the trick. To bridge from phenomenal identity to intentional identity he appeals to (i) brains in vats that (ii) share perceptually-based concepts and (iii) share all other concepts in virtue of their sharing their conceptual roles. As Loar notes, in effect, (i) is required to ensure that any shared intentionality does not hold in virtue of shared (or similar) environments, and so is narrow; (ii) provides a base case that Loar takes externalists to be committed to in virtue of the phenomenon of failed perceptual demonstratives (and the inadequacy of representationalist accounts of it); and the extension in (iii) appeals primarily to another resource, conceptual roles, that Loar takes externalists to view as shared across contexts, no matter how radically different those contexts may be. I want to put aside concerns about (i) for now and concentrate on (ii) and (iii).

Loar’s view here is programmatic and sketches a large-scale view of phenomenal intentionality, rather than presenting detailed analyses for any concept that putatively has phenomenal intentionality. My comments are correspondingly cast. The idea of starting with individual concepts, rather

than phenomenal experience in its fullness, is a good one *prima facie*, for part of the problem with sensory experience as a whole is that it must be articulated ultimately in terms of a range of concepts, and many of these are conceded by nearly everyone as being externalist, as having wide content. This seems true even when the articulation we are interested in is done from the first-person perspective, something that has given rise to the problem of self-knowledge for externalism (Ludlow and Martin, 1998) and that also motivates the notion of *nonconceptual* content (Peacocke, 1983; McDowell, 1994.) Begin, then, with concepts whose phenomenal intentionality (and its nature) is not in serious dispute, and then constructively build a full account of experience as having phenomenal intentionality.

I have already flagged one problem with this approach, however: it seems to fragment the actual phenomenology we have, and so to be at best an analysis rather than a description of it. Suppose that we put this aside, and suppose that we simply grant, for now, that there are perceptually-based concepts that are individualistic. How do we constructively build from here? After discussing perceptually-based concepts, including “recognitional concepts” that “purport to pick out, perceptually, kinds and properties rather than individuals” (2003, p. 186), Loar considers concepts that seem neither paradigmatically narrow nor wide, including the general concepts of physical objects and spatial relations. Here he argues that these contain a recognitional component or aspect, and so can be assimilated to recognitional concepts, which he has argued to have phenomenal intentionality. While Loar concedes that this is not true of socially deferential concepts – which have paradigmatically wide content – he argues that their phenomenal intentionality derives from the conceptual roles that they play in the systematic internal economy of the individual.

There are thus two distinct paths to phenomenal intentionality: via assimilation to perceptually-based concepts (paradigms of the recognitional), and via assimilation to the logical connectives (paradigms of the “conceptual-role”). These paths are very different from one another. One concern is whether they in fact converge. That is, what grounds are there for thinking that they determine the very same kind of property, *phenomenal intentionality*? This question seems to me to need a non-stipulative answer for Loar’s program to be successful. Unlike Horgan and Tienson, Loar explicitly rules out the possibility that this unifying feature is the availability of phenomenal intentionality to introspection, for he wants conceptual roles to determine phenomenal intentionality independent of its relationship to “an introspective glance” (Loar, 2003, p. 190). Indeed, in light of this concession, and independently, one wonders what makes intentionality determined solely by conceptual roles *phenomenological*. What is the *phenomenology* of the concept “and”, one wonders?

There is a parallel here with wide content that might be drawn. Why think that “environmentally-determined” content (e.g., that of water; Putnam,

1975) and “socially-determined” content (e.g., that of arthritis; Burge, 1979) are examples of a single kind of content, wide content? There are, however, two important dissimilarities between this pair of factors, the physical and social environments, and those determining phenomenal intentionality. First, one might plausibly (even if not definitively) make the case that environmentally-determined content is really an instance of socially-determined content, in that the key feature of Putnam’s externalism is the pattern of social deference that it identifies in the use of language. Second, and short of this, these “paths to externalism”, while distinct, are not independent in that they share key elements, such as the idea of a social division of labour between regular folk and experts and that of individual knowledge as being incomplete or partial.

A final general question: if phenomenology determines a kind of intentionality (albeit via two distinct paths), what is phenomenology’s relationship to wide content? Given the diaphanous character of much of our introspective experience, a point (as we have seen) upon which representationalists have seized, it seems implausible to think that our everyday phenomenology is *never* of, or never leads us to, intentionality that is wide. I suspect that Loar, Horgan and Tienson would concur. If that is so, then there is nothing special about the path from phenomenology to individualism, for there is also a path from phenomenology to at least some kind of externalism. We should consider this issue more fully by turning explicitly to the focus on twin cases, and to Loar’s appeal to the brain in a vat.

### 5. *Individualism and phenomenal intentionality*

Loar’s view, like that of Horgan and Tienson, moves from claims about the phenomenology of perceptual experience to a conclusion about its (phenomenal) intentionality. Fred Dretske (1995, 1996) has argued that even conscious perceptual experience is externalist, and a reminder of the dilemma that he poses is useful in understanding a challenge facing those, such as Horgan, Tienson, and Loar, who deny this. What are perceptual experiences? If they are or involve conceptual or thought-like entities, then those experiences inherit their width from that of the concepts or thoughts they involve. In this respect, perceptual experiences are like metarepresentational or higher-order mental states. If, on the other hand, perceptual experiences are completely divorced from conceptual or thought-like entities, such that (for example) it is possible for two individuals to have distinct perceptual experiences despite their sharing all their intentional states (including beliefs about those experiences), then perceptual states are unknowable – even by their bearers (see Dretske, 1995, esp. p. 141).

In terms of this “wide or unknowable” dilemma posed by Dretske, defenders of phenomenal intentionality attempt to grasp the first horn by

articulating concepts that are not externalist. This is a strategy that McGinn (1989, pp. 58–99) has also pursued in demarcating the limits of externalism, arguing that perceptual content in general is not what he calls strongly externalist, i.e., dependent on non-mental features of a subject's environment. Central to McGinn's argument is the imagined case of Percy and his doppelgänger. Percy is behaviorally disposed to respond to round things in round-thing appropriate ways, and so is said unproblematically to have an internal state that corresponds to the concept *round*; Percy's duplicate, by contrast, is behaviorally disposed to respond to square things in round-thing appropriate ways. The question is whether Percy's duplicate has the concept *round* or the concept *square*.

McGinn thinks that an externalist is committed to the latter, since square things are the distal causes of the relevant internal state, and externalists individuate mental states by such external causes rather than by internal features of an organism. Yet the intuition that Percy's duplicate is a creature that misperceives square things *as round* is strong, and so, according to McGinn, only an individualistic view of the case will do. Here is a case where perceptual content is individualistic. It seems to both Percy and his duplicate that they are both seeing a round thing, and this shared seeming is what explains their shared behavioral dispositions. Hence, there is a need for an account of the constituents of perceptual contents that is individualistic. The argument here is similar to Loar's chief reason for appealing to phenomenal intentionality: cases of failed perceptual demonstrative reference (see also Segal, 2000).

Such pair-wise twin comparisons may be a first step in articulating a conception of phenomenal intentionality via the claim that there are at least some narrow concepts. Yet one needs to be able to generalize from them to reach a conclusion about *any* pair of physical twins, which is required to show that the corresponding concepts, and thus phenomenal intentionality, are individualistic. In the remainder of this section I shall argue for a contestability to what we can imagine in twin cases that poses a problem for this generalization, and so for this putative link between individualism and phenomenal intentionality.

In discussing a variant of McGinn's example, Martin Davies (1995) implicitly defends the view that a generalization from particular twin cases to arbitrary twins will fail, since it is relatively easy to find examples where it seems more plausible to characterize the twin's concepts in terms of our ordinary notion of (wide) content. More telling, in my view, is Davies' suggestion, following Fricker (1991) that it may be *most* plausible to refrain from ascriptions of content at all. Suppose, for example, that Percy's twin is a brain in a vat, in an internal state identical to the one that Percy has when he sees round objects, but which is caused by square objects, and that Percy's twin (not ever having been embodied at all) has *no* behavior at all. In such a case, we have no basis to ascribe even behavioral

*dispositions* to Percy's twin. It seems to me *very hard* to ascribe a specific content to Percy's twin in such a case without already supposing that only what's "in the head" determines content. Thus, what ascriptions one is prepared to make turn largely on one's prior theoretical commitments regarding the individualism-externalism debate.

If this is true, then defenders of phenomenal intentionality have seriously underestimated the task before them, for they have been content to find relatively few cases in which perceptual content is (plausibly) shared by doppelgangers, and then simply supposed that the generalization from such case is unproblematic. But consider the range of possible duplicates there are for any given individual. There is Rex and there is his doppelganger T-Rex on Twin Earth. But there is also brain-in-a-vat Rex, entirely virtual Rex, Rex the happy android, Rex the purely immaterial substance, and multi-person Rex, whose phenomenal life is the fusion of two half-lives of two other individuals. In each case, we can imagine Rex's phenomenal mental life being present in some radically (or not so radically) different circumstance.

Or can we? Can we really imagine a purely immaterial substance having exactly the same phenomenal life as regular embodied and embedded Rex here on Earth? As I intimated in section 3, if we conceptualize phenomenology not simply as the result of passive experience together with active introspection, but as the active exploration of one's environment through one's body, as others have suggested (Hurley, 1998; O'Regan and Noë, 2001a, 2001b), then whatever it is we're imagining in these cases, it is not a scenario in which *the phenomenology* remains constant across the two scenarios. In fact, if one adopts such a view of at least the phenomenology of perceptual experience, as I think is plausible, then it is difficult to imagine disembodied minds having the corresponding phenomenology at all. In this respect, to draw on a Wittgensteinian example, comparing Rex and disembodied Rex is like comparing the time on Earth with that on the sun; worse, comparing disembodied Rex and *his* differently situated but equally disembodied duplicate is like comparing the time it is on two places on the sun's surface.

This is to flip around a response that physicalists have made to an objection based on the conceivability of zombies: that in fact they are *not* conceivable, or their conceivability (if it implies possibility) presupposes, rather than indicates, the falsity of physicalism. Here I am suggesting that the conceivability of phenomenal duplicates itself presupposes, rather than indicates, the narrowness of phenomenal intentionality, by assuming that embodiment does not go to the heart of phenomenal experience. Loar, Horgan and Tienson seem to me to adopt a misleading view of what phenomenology is, of how it is merely contingently or extraneously both embodied and embedded, and so make the task of imagining the phenomenal experience of radically different individuals appear easier than

it in fact is. But the more basic point is that phenomenology itself is a contestable phenomenon, and what one can and can't imagine about it inherits that contestability.

Thus, the claim that phenomenal duplicates share *all* phenomenal states is more problematic than it initially appears. We can come at this point in another way that brings us back to my initial discussion of the three dimensions to the inseparability thesis in sections 2 and 3. If we allow that at least *some* phenomenal experience is the active exploration by an embodied agent of its environment, then there are far fewer possible *phenomenal* duplicates of any given individual than one might initially suppose, since such duplicates are constrained by having to have suitably similar bodies and environments. Given that, the focus on brains in a vat is misplaced, and will tell us little about phenomenal intentionality.

But should the proponent of phenomenal intentionality adopt this concessive view of phenomenal experience, whereby at least some such experience is that of an essentially embodied agent? Neither Loar nor Horgan and Tienson are as explicit as one might like about this issue, and different things that they say suggest different answers here. Consider what Horgan and Tienson say about the thesis of phenomenal intentionality. In arguing for the narrowness of phenomenal intentionality through imaginative evocation, they seem to reject the concession, suggesting that *all* phenomenal intentionality is narrow. Yet the inseparability thesis itself posits a necessary connection (of some type) between phenomenology and ordinary *wide* intentional states, suggesting that they may be happy with the concession. This would mean, in turn, that the quantifier in the thesis of phenomenal intentionality ("there is a kind of intentionality . . .") should be understood at face value as an existential quantifier. In either case, there is a problem that can be expressed as a (somewhat complicated) dilemma.

Consider whether ordinary wide intentional states have a phenomenology. If they do *not*, then while the claim that phenomenal intentionality is narrow remains general in scope, the inseparability thesis loses its quantificational range, since Loar, Horgan and Tienson all concede that wide intentional states exist. By contrast, if they *do* have a phenomenology (as the inseparability thesis *prima facie* suggests), then either that phenomenology is narrow or it is wide. Given that the first half of the inseparability thesis has been endorsed by proponents of representational accounts of phenomenology as part of their phenomenal externalism, as Horgan and Tienson recognize, and that both halves of the thesis are concerned with intentional states *as they are ordinarily conceived*, such phenomenology would seem to be wide. Certainly, when I describe *my* current visual phenomenology – in terms of the books, paper, walls, and computer screen I am currently looking at – it seems *to me* that my experience is not merely "as of" a world beyond my body but it is *in fact* so. The intuition

that drives both Horgan and Tienson's "intentionality of phenomenology" thesis and phenomenal externalism – that at least much of our experience seems to be experience of the actual world – together with respect for the link between phenomenology and first-person reports of its content, suggests that there is such a thing as wide phenomenology. But then, clearly, the claim that phenomenal intentionality is individualistic implies that the thesis of phenomenal intentionality does not apply to *all* phenomenology. And so the inseparability thesis has a more restricted quantificational range and a weaker modality than one might initially think.

The remaining option, that ordinary wide intentional states have a *narrow* phenomenology might seem *obviously* the right thing to say dialectically, but it is also fraught with problems. Not only does it sever the relationship between the first-person perspective and phenomenology, but it makes little sense of those aspects of phenomenology that at least seem – from both first- and third-person perspectives – to be bodily in nature. For example, both haptic perception and proprioception are difficult to make sense of for the case of immaterial entities, and I think they are almost as problematic for material entities, such as brains in vats or Cartesian duplicates, that have no body at all. As I sit in my chair I feel a pressure exerted on my lower back by the back of the chair, and there is a certain feel to my body when I flex the muscles in my leg. But how would these feel to a being without a body, even a being that was molecule-for-molecule to me from the neck up? And, picking up on the grain of determinateness dimension to the inseparability thesis, what reason is there to think that these would have the *same feeling* that they have in me? Try as I may, I find these questions *very hard* to answer without simply assuming that they *must* feel just as they feel in my own case. I suspect that I am burdened by my externalist commitments, and proponents of the individualistic view of phenomenology may find it easier to make sense of these cases than do those hampered by externalism. But if so, this reinforces my more general concern that the method of imaginative evocation generates views of phenomenology that are subject to philosophical contamination.

To sum up this part of the argument: there may be aspects to phenomenology that are individualistic, but, more importantly, there are aspects that likely are *not* individualistic. Critically, some cases of perceptual experience, a general category that plays a central role in both the arguments of Loar and of Horgan and Tienson, appear to fall into the latter category. Again, this is not to say that there is *no* truth to the claim that phenomenal intentionality is narrow, but to suggest that it is a claim true in a significantly more restricted range of cases than its proponents have thought.

To have come this far, however, is to be in a position to comment on the further claim that phenomenal intentionality is more fundamental in at least certain respects than wide content. Minimally, this claim will have to



be hedged in ways that correspond to the restricted domain in which phenomenal intentionality is narrow. But if externalism is true of the phenomenology of at least some perceptual content, as I have suggested, then given the centrality of this case to the conception of phenomenal intentionality more generally, we may wonder what content remains to this claim of “basic-ness”.

## 6. *How to be a good phenomenologist*

The fruitfulness of applying a divide and conquer strategy to the intentional and the phenomenal can be, and has been, reasonably questioned. In this paper I have been concerned primarily with recent views that go further than such questioning and make specific proposals about the relationship between the intentionality and phenomenology of particular mental states. In particular, I have focussed on the inseparability thesis that Horgan and Tienson have articulated, and the general conception of phenomenal intentionality that they share with Loar, as well as Loar's own way of further articulating that conception. There are certainly other possible ways to articulate the relationship between intentionality and phenomenology, and since I have not tried to show that the views of Horgan and Tienson and Loar suffer from some deep, general, flaw, I do not take the argument of this paper to express any overarching skepticism about such work on these two pillars of the mental. However, there are several general problem areas that can be marked “fragile” for now for those making alternative proposals.

Past attempts to defend or chalk out an individualistic perspective on the mental have typically focussed on intentionality. The main concern about such positions is with the notion of narrow content itself. Since the chief proposals for articulating that notion – the narrow function theory of White (1982) and Fodor (1987) and the narrow conceptual role semantics of Block (1986) and Loar (1981, 1988) – are generally acknowledged as failures (see Wilson, 1995: ch.9), one hope has been that the renewed attention to the phenomenal would provide the basis for a reinvigorated expression of the narrow content program (cf. also White, 1994). But it seems that the notion of phenomenology itself is as contestable between individualists and externalists as is that of intentionality. If this is true, then the idea of reviving narrow intentionality via an appeal to phenomenology inherits that contestability.

Perhaps the initial surprise here is that phenomenology itself should remain somewhat mysterious. In the good old days, when the phenomenal was neglected for the intentional, intentionality was thought to be more theoretically-loaded, subject more to the grinding of particular axes, than phenomenology, in part because of the immediacy, directness, and first-person

intimacy of the phenomenal. Horgan and Tienson's claim that "[i]f you pay attention to your own experience, we think you will come to appreciate" (2002, p. 521) the truth of their claims about the intentional and the phenomenal expresses a hope. Yet "attention to your own experience" itself and what it reveals are more contestable than one might initially think.

In mentioning Wundt in passing at the end of section 3, and so alluding to the introspectionist tradition in early experimental psychology to which Wundt was central, I have implicitly suggested that some of the problems in thinking about phenomenology parallel those that Wundt faced in thinking about the nature of introspection. If the advice on how to be a good introspectionist early in the twentieth-century was "Don't listen to the psychologists", then the corresponding advice on how to be a good phenomenologist early in the twenty-first-century might be "Don't listen to the philosophers". And while not all the advice one could hope for, it might be advice enough for now.

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#### NOTE

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