

Representationalism, Symmetrical Supervenience and Identity

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Abstract According to some representationalists (M. Tye, *Ten problems of consciousness*, MIT Press, Massachusetts, USA, 1995; W.G. Lycan, *Consciousness and experience*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, 1996; F. Dretske, *Naturalising the mind*, MIT Press, Massachusetts, USA 1995), qualia are identical to external environmental states or features. When one perceives a red rose for instance, one is visually representing the actual redness of the rose. The represented redness of the rose is the actual redness of the rose itself. Thus redness is not a property of one's experience but an externally constituted property of the perceived physical object. In this sense, qualia are out there, in the external world. Here, I argue that the main representationalist arguments to this effect, if successful, establish no more than a symmetrical supervenience relation between representational content and qualia, and that a supervenience relation alone (albeit symmetrical) doesn't suffice for identity. This supervenience thesis between qualia and representational content leaves open the question as to the essential nature of qualia.

Keywords Representationalism · Qualia · Experience · Symmetrical supervenience · Identity · Argument from transparency

Introduction

According to some representationalists (Tye 1995; Lycan 1996; Dretske 1995), qualia are identical to external environmental states or features. According to them, the qualitative aspects of our experiences are environmental properties. So when one perceives a red rose for instance, one is visually representing the actual redness of the rose. The represented redness of the rose is the actual redness of the rose itself. Thus redness is not a property of one's experience but an externally constituted property of the perceived physical object. In this sense, qualia are out there, in the external world. Here, I shall argue that the main representationalist arguments to this

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effect, if successful, establish no more than a symmetrical supervenience relation between represented content and qualia, and that a supervenience relation alone (albeit symmetrical) doesn't suffice for identity. What we are at best told by the strong versions of representationalism is that there holds a symmetrical supervenience relation between qualia and represented content, not identity. And this supervenience thesis leaves open the question as to the essential nature of qualia.

Following Nagel (1974), 'qualia' refers to those properties in virtue of which there is something it is like for one to be in a mental state. They are the qualities in terms of which we characterise what it is like to have various experiences. I take mental qualitative properties or qualia to be roughly, sensory or affective properties. As it is typically suggested, there are mental states that possess qualitative properties. Mental states that possess those properties are perceptual experiences such as those involved in seeing red or tasting liquor, bodily sensations such as feeling an itch and felt moods or emotions such as feeling elation, grief, love or jealousy. In a preliminary way then we can define mental qualitative properties/states by means of examples as follows. One is in a mental qualitative state if and only if one is in a sensory or perceptual state (including proprioception) that has such a qualitative property or one recalls or imagines such a property¹.

What is the ontological extent of qualia? As one might expect there is a wide range of views extending from David Chalmers' (1996) panprotopsychism (roughly the view that an experiential element is present in everything that exists)² to Daniel Dennett's denial of the existence of qualia. Qualia have been paradigmatically seen as properties that are mental in the sense of being non-physical and non-physical in the sense of being essentially the objects of consciousness. In this sense, only non-physical properties can exemplify qualia. According to Chalmers (1996) for instance, a quale is an experiential/proto-conscious item and it is constituted out of the intrinsic natures of the fundamental physical entities. The intrinsic properties of the physical world include experiential or proto-experiential properties. Chalmers postulates experience as a fundamental property of physics alongside mass and charge and space-time. By contrast, according to Dennett (1991a), 'despite what seems obvious at first blush, there simply are no qualia at all' (p. 520)³.

¹ This refers to sensory modality-based imaginations or mental representations

² Notably, there is a difference between panprotopsychism and panpsychism. According to the latter, everything is conscious down to sub-atomic level. On this view, there is something that it feels like to be an electron or a proton. On Chalmers' panprotopsychism, electrons or protons are proto-conscious, they do not possess consciousness. Proto-conscious properties collectively constitute consciousness in the right kind of system.

³ In more detail, the approach to qualia that Dennett rejects is the approach in which qualia are ineffable, private, subjective and intrinsically conscious. He does not reject the view that pains for instance, exist. The view he rejects is that pains are private, ineffable and essentially conscious. He writes 'don't our internal discriminative states also have some special "intrinsic" properties, the subjective, private, ineffable properties that constitute the *way things look to us* (sound to us, smell to us, etc.)? No. The dispositional properties of those discriminative states already suffice to explain all the effects: the effects on peripheral behaviour (saying "Red!", stepping the brake, etc.) and "internal" behaviour (judging "Red!", seeing something as red, reacting with uneasiness or displeasure if, say, red things upset one). Any additional "qualitative" properties or qualia would thus have no positive role to play in any explanations, nor are they vouchsafed to us "directly" in our intuition. Qualitative properties that are intrinsically conscious are a myth, an artifact of misguided theorizing, not anything given pretheoretically' (1991b, p. 40).

Now, relocation views, the views of the representationalists we are considering, are seen as middle ground attempts to naturalise qualia or to oppose the long-standing traditional association of their qualitative and the experiential character with the non-physical. With respect to qualia, relocationists attempt to move qualia out of the mind. According to one strain of this view, qualitative properties are properties of external physical objects. Colour qualitative properties for example, are moved all the way out onto the surface of the perceived physical objects (Tye 1995; Lycan 1996; Dretske 1995). The other strain moves qualia into the brain. This strain also has it that qualitative properties are not properties of the mind. A yellow or a red patch in one's visual field for instance, is just a neurophysiological state in one's brain (Block and Stalnaker 1999). In what follows, I shall be concerned exclusively with the (representationalist) relocationist attempt to identify qualia with properties of external objects. I shall argue that the relocationist attempt to identify qualia with properties of external objects fails. I will not question whether the arguments in favour of such a view are cogent or not. What I will attempt to show is that the standard arguments for such view, if they are successful, establish no more than a symmetrical supervenience relation between represented external content and qualia, and a supervenience relation alone (albeit symmetrical) doesn't suffice for identity.

Supervenience and Identity

A key notion in what follows is supervenience. Generally, physicalists find the supervenience relation useful. The key idea of supervenience is, crudely put, that there is no mental difference without a physical difference. One of the advantages of this relation of dependency between the mental and the physical is its clear implication that the mental domain is anchored in the physical domain without at the same time implying ontological reduction. To say that A supervenes on B is to say that if the properties of B (subvenient ones) are the same the properties of A (supervenient ones) cannot differ. Yet the supervenient properties need not be reduced to the subvenient ones (in the sense of them being nothing but the subvenient ones). In other words, the supervenience relation can safeguard the ontological autonomy of A relative to B. Supervenience as opposed to the identity relation is generally an asymmetrical relation: the mental is determined by or dependent on the physical, not the other way round. However, one of the problems of supervenience is that the supervenience relation states only a pattern of covariance between experience and physical properties and does not explain those correlations. The experience of pain may supervene on C-fibre stimulation for instance, but this by itself provides no insight to the issue of why such a correlation holds. There is a danger then that the supervenience theorists postulate empty necessities where we do not understand how the connections are necessary. And this can certainly mislead.

Here's what Michael Tye says about supervenience

The realization relation [supervenience] is not easy to analyze, but it is at least in part one of upward determination or generation: any object that has the higher-level property, or is an instance of the higher-level type, does so in virtue

of simultaneously having one of the lower-level properties or types that realizes it...if P realizes Q (in objects of kind K), then in all possible worlds sharing our microphysical laws and our microphysical facts, every token of P (in a member of K) is also a token of Q. A second aspect to realization in my view, is that the determination of the higher-level type by the lower-level one is always mediated by an implementing mechanism (1995, pp.41–42)

Tye here says two things. First, as Levine puts the point, ‘only non-mental properties are instantiated in a basic way; all mental properties are instantiated by being realised by the instantiation of other, non-mental properties’ (Levine 2001, p.21). Tye says that if we are to give a fully naturalistic account of the higher-level phenomena, the lowest level microphysical laws must fix these phenomena. Second, the account of the mechanism must make it intelligible how the lower-level phenomena could realise the higher-level phenomena. Thus, if the supervenience relation were to explain experiences it must explain how experiences could be realised by the physical. Thus it appears that a number of different reasons or explanations could obtain for why one set of properties supervenes on another. For this reason, supervenience is compatible with numerous doctrines in the philosophy of mind that are themselves incompatible, such as epiphenomenalism and type-physicalism. If one wishes to provide a fully naturalistic account of the mental by holding that a supervenience relation obtains, one will have to spell out the nature of the supervenience relation if the position is to be naturalistic⁴. But a naturalistic account of the mental need not be physicalist. It all depends on how to construe the way in which experiences supervene on the physical or other non-problematic entities or relations. Therefore, supervenience alone is not sufficient for physicalism (Robinson 2004; Kim 1998, 2005).

Concluding this section, we must also say that supervenience relation can also be symmetrical. Yet, symmetrical supervenience does not imply identity. From no ‘A-difference without a B-difference and no B-difference without an A-difference’ it doesn’t follow that A is the same as B. This is the main reason that representationalist views like Tye’s and Dretske’s fail to show that mental qualitative properties are one and the same as external properties of the environment. Representationalist arguments show at best that there holds a symmetrical supervenience relation between mental qualitative properties and external properties of the environment and this falls short from establishing identity. My monthly bank statement for instance, symmetrically supervenes on my payings in and takings out but it is not identical to those transactions⁵.

⁴ There are several different variants of supervenience that one may adhere to. It all depends on how we are to take the ‘cannot’ as it occurs in ‘there cannot be an A-difference without a B-difference’. We might take for instance, ‘cannot’ to mean ‘cannot as a matter of logic’ or ‘cannot consistently with the laws of nature. The weakest form of supervenience (weak supervenience) is the claim that physical identicals within one world must be mentally identical. The strongest supervenience claim (strong or logical/metaphysical supervenience) is the claim that any two physically indistinguishable organisms in any worlds must be identical with respect to their mental properties.

⁵ We must note that the point is that they share some but not all their properties. It may be that we can speak as if they are identical in some contexts but not in others. By Leibniz Law of identity, x is identical to y if and only if everything true of x is true of y.

However, it might be objected that the symmetrical supervenience of my finances and my bank statement is only contingent. What is needed for identity, the objection continues, is that the symmetrical supervenience holds as a matter of necessity; holds that is, in all possible worlds. But to see that even logically necessary symmetrical supervenience is not sufficient for identity consider the following formula:

$$\Box \forall x \forall y (\Phi x \equiv \Psi y) \rightarrow \Phi = \Psi \quad (1)$$

This formula reads: if necessarily, for all x and for all y , the property Φ of x is equivalent to the property Ψ of y , then that property of x is the same as that property of y . Thus if (1) is true it follows that symmetrical supervenience does entail identity. However, we cannot determine whether Φ is the same as Ψ from the mere fact that they are logically equivalent. Take the case of an equilateral triangle. In such a triangle, all three sides are the same length. Further, necessarily a triangle is equilateral if and only if it is equiangular i.e. all three angles are equal. Now, let Φ =equilateral and Ψ =equiangular. We can construct the following formula:

$$\Box \forall x \forall y (\Phi x \equiv \Psi y) \text{ (or } \Box \forall x \forall y (\Phi x \leftrightarrow \Psi y)) \quad (2)$$

But clearly from (2) doesn't follow that $\Phi=\Psi$: equilateral is not the same as equiangular. Similarly, if the strong representationalist wants to establish identity then he must provide something more than merely offering (1). Here's another example. There is necessary symmetrical supervenience between propositions of kind K (true) and the facts they represent. There is for instance, symmetrical supervenience (logical) between the (true) proposition that the cat is on the mat and the fact that the cat is on the mat. But clearly the proposition (an abstract entity) is not the same as the cat being on the mat. In the following sections, I shall argue that the representationalist arguments at best establish a symmetrical supervenience relation between the qualitative properties of our mental states and external properties of the environment which therefore fails to establish the representationalist identity claim, namely that the qualitative properties of our mental states just are external properties of the environment.

Strong Representationalism and the Location of Qualia

Now, a few words about representationalism/representational content. Some mental states (representational) have contents. In the case of a propositional attitude for instance, one expresses an attitude (a belief/hope/fear) towards a proposition. One may believe/know etc. that p . The propositional content is expressed by the sentence which complements the verb. A representational state involves then a relation between a subject and a 'content' (what is meant) via an attitude borne to the proposition that the sentence expresses. Representational states have correctness conditions partly determined by the correctness conditions of their contents⁶. A belief for example is correct, just in case its content is, and a proposition is correct

⁶ There are representational states which do not have correctness conditions. Wishing for example, that p cannot be said to have truth conditions but arguably it is a representational state. Of course, the contents of such representational states still have correctness conditions but the attitude borne to that meaning cannot be said to be true or false.

just in case it is true. In the discussion that follows, ‘representational content’ will be used as a convenient term of standing for what is represented. A representational property is a property instantiated by a particular as having it in virtue of its having representational content. A representational property of a representational state may thus be described as a pair composed of an attitude and a content.

Generally, the notion of representation entails one thing’s standing for something else or itself (self-representation). Representing is not instantiating. Universals or objective properties (e.g. colours) are instantiated by particulars (or in the environment) as bodily sensations are instantiated in individuals. In general, the mind does not instantiate the properties it represents⁷. An object’s shape, for example, is instantiated in the environment and it is represented in one’s perceptual experience. For a better illustration of this point we must contrast the ‘representational’ with the ‘instantiation’ view of qualitative character. According to the former (Dretske 1995; Tye 1995; Lycan 1996), the qualitative character of our sensory experiences, that is, the apparent objects and properties of those experiences are merely representational, namely they comprise or contain the content of those experiences without thereby being actually instantiated in the mind. Contrariwise, according to the qualia realists (Chalmers 1996; Russell 1998), when I experience a red tomato for example, the content of that experience involves the instantiation of an oval red object or the properties of this object in the mind. On this view, the object or the property of looking red is not representational: they are intrinsic properties of the mind⁸.

Let us now draw a distinction between weak and strong representationalism:

1. Qualitative character supervenes on a certain kind of representational content (weak representationalism).
2. Qualitative character is one and the same as a certain kind of representational content. (strong representationalism)⁹.

The strong representationalist is typically a qualitative externalist. Fred Dretske for example, explicitly claims that representationalism is ‘an externalist theory of the mind. It identifies mental facts with representational facts, and though representations are in the head, the facts that make them representations – and therefore the facts that make them mental – are outside the head’ (1995, p.124). But aren’t qualia in the head? One of the reasons that most philosophers now think that the answer to the problem of qualia does not lie somewhere in the neurosciences is precisely the great difficulty of locating qualia ontologically. Neurophysiologically speaking, one

⁷ Except, of course, if one is a Russelian representationalist.

⁸ I should also note that most commentators in the field use interchangeably the notions of ‘intentional’ and ‘representational’. Although I think that this needs further discussion I will assume that they can be used interchangeably and that they both bear the notion of ‘directedness’: of re-presenting that which is presented.

⁹ To avoid potential confusion between ‘representational’ and ‘represented’ content, I should again remind the reader that ‘representational content’ stands for *what is represented* on the representationalist view i.e. the external properties of the environment and not for the properties of the experience which represents the external properties of the environment (i.e. what does the representing). As we shall see in a moment, the strong representationalist (e.g. Tye) holds that we are aware only of *what is represented* not of what *does the representing*. However, even if the representationalist were to identify qualia with the property of representing those properties (given the possibility of hallucination and illusion, it seems the latter is the more reasonable) same considerations would apply.

of the main problems is that it appears that there is nothing intrinsic in the brain that constitutes the difference between a red and a green quale. It appears so to speak that there is no neurophysiological difference between these two states; to the best of our neurophysiological knowledge, that is, there are no anatomical differences in cells in the visual cortices that correlate with colour differences¹⁰.

But then where are qualia located? The representationalist reply is typically that qualia are not located in the brain; they are environmental properties. Hence here's a way to resolve this predicament: Qualia are features of the subject's environment and the subject merely represents what is presented. Avoiding the whole host of problems generated by Russellian sense data¹¹, the representationalist answer is that qualia are representational contents

If the greenness is (indeed) not a first-order property of an immaterial sense-datum, then of what is it a property, and/or, what kind of property is it? We must relocate it ontologically. And I maintain...that this is a very difficult metaphysical problem...Suppose Ludwig is seeing a real tomato in good light, and naturally it looks red to him. He is visually representing the actual redness of the tomato, and veridically so....On pain of circularity, the Representational theory requires color realism, for it explicates color qualia in terms of the real- (and unreal-) world colors of physical objects; "yellow" means the objective, public property inhering in physical objects. One could not then turn around and explicate the ostensible colors of physical objects in terms of color qualia (e.g., as the disposition to produce yellow qualia in normal human percipients). Of course, color realism has been a minority position in the history of philosophy, so this must be counted as a liability of the Representational theory. What physical property of a lemon is it yellowness supposed to be? For the record, I buy into D.M. Armstrong's Disjunctive Realism, the view that a color is a wildly disjunctive but perfectly real physical property (Lycan 2001, pp.18–19).

So when one perceives a red rose one is visually representing the actual redness of the rose. The represented redness of the rose is the actual redness of the rose itself. But what if the subject is hallucinating? Suppose that one is hallucinating a red rose and that there is actually no red rose in his visual field. In this case redness is an intentional nonexistent: it is a property of the non-actual material thing (rose). The object does not exist but it is still an intentional object¹². If these considerations are

¹⁰ According to V.G. Hardcastle (1995) for instance, the best neurophysiological theory might not be able to rule out a case of inverted spectra, namely a case where molecular/functional duplicates might nonetheless have inverted colour qualia.

¹¹ Many philosophers have claimed that such a theory gives rise to an unacceptable "veil of perception" between the mind and the world. Most sense-data theorists are committed to the claim that sense-data are mind-dependent: objects whose existence depends on the existence of states of mind. These entities do not happily fit with a naturalistic world picture according to which the world is entirely physical in its nature, everything there supervenes on the physical, and is governed by physical law. Moreover, the postulation of private mental objects faces further problems such as Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1953) private language argument.

¹² A century ago, Franz Brentano claimed that intentionality is the distinctive characteristic of mental phenomena and that every mental state is intentional. Ordinary relations cannot hold between existent and non-existent objects but the mind can contemplate non-existent objects and states of affairs. The non-existent objects needn't be immaterial substances (Russellian sense data for instance), they can be non actual or non-existent physical things.

on the right track then we learn something about the nature of qualia. And indeed the strong representationalist claims to have solved the big problem of locating qualia ontologically¹³.

Does Michael Tye share Lycan's view of qualia? Both Dretske (1995) and Tye (1995, 2000) have used the terms 'what-it-is-likeness', 'experience' and 'qualitative character' to mean the qualitative property (or the quale) itself. This is partly why it's not entirely clear whether or not they share Lycan's view of qualia. It might be objected for instance, that Tye claims that qualitative character is one and the same as representational content that meets certain further conditions and not that qualitative character is one and the same as the particular quality that is the object of the representational content that meets certain further conditions. But it's not at all clear to me that Tye doesn't share Lycan's view of qualia. In fact, it does seem that Tye thinks that the qualities in terms of which we characterize what it is like to have various experiences are the qualities of the things in the world which such experiences present to us¹⁴. Tye writes

One's visual experience, as one views the leg, nonconceptually represents such features as color, shape, orientation of surface, presence of an edge... If I see the moon, I am not aware of a subjective visual field that represents the moon. I am aware of the moon and perhaps some stars located in distant regions of space before my eyes. Likewise, if I have a pain in my leg, I am not aware of an image that represents my leg. I'm aware of my leg and its condition. To suppose that it is the representation itself – the subjective visual field or the body image – of which I am really (directly) aware in these cases is like supposing that if I desire eternal life, what I really (directly) desire is the idea of eternal life. That, however, is not what I desire. The idea of eternal life I already have... It seems to me, then, that the right thing to say is that when I attend to a pain in my finger, I am directly aware of a certain quality or qualities as instantiated in my finger. Moreover, and relatedly, the only particulars of which I am then aware are my finger and things going on in it (for example, its bleeding)... My experience of pain is thus transparent to me (or so I continue to

¹³ Lycan writes 'The great difficulty about qualia was in locating them ontologically. (Of what, exactly, is the greenness inhering in Bertie's after-imaging experience a property?) And that is what is accomplished by the specifically representationalist part of strong representationalism, not by the functionalist part. The functionalism accounts for the visualness and perhaps other broadly-speaking-phenomenal properties of the experience, which is important, but locating the greenness was the crucial work' (2006, accessed on 15/11/06, my emphasis). This of course, is by no means uncontroversial. Prima facie, positing a non-existent intentional object to solve the problem of locating qualia ontologically will certainly raise eyebrows. Lycan (1996) for instance, argues that intentional inexistents are best thought of as denizens of other possible worlds. They exist, just not here in the actual world. It appears though, that this response does not help. Take for example the case of the phantom pain in one's missing limb. The painfulness of one's phantom pain is actual, existing in the here and now. Likewise, when one has a hallucination of redness, there is a certain actually existing property that one is aware of, in virtue of which his experience has the qualitative character that it has. (Cases of illusion and hallucination pose serious problems to the representationalist *argument from transparency of experience* – see section V for discussion). I will not however, develop this point any further and nor will I explore the range of the possible representationalist maneuvers here. My aim is to show that the strong representationalist has not managed to locate qualia ontologically on different grounds.

¹⁴ Notably, Lycan (2006) takes Tye to be one of the proponents of his view.

hold). When I try to focus upon it, I ‘see’ right through it, as it were, to the entities it represents... Colors, in my view, are just as perceiver-independent as shapes....They are real, external, objective properties even though they are of no interest to creatures lacking our visual systems...Indeed, on my view, colors are not presented to us in sensory experience under any mode of presentation at all. Our awareness is direct (2003a, pp. 282–284)¹⁵.

Does Tye then not share Lycan’s view of qualia? I think he does. At any rate, Tye admits unconscious representation. Do unconscious representations represent features such as colours and shapes? Well, according to Tye, these representations lack a subjective feel because they haven’t met certain specified conditions. There’s no associated feel because the manner of representation is not the right one. But what kind of properties are the represented properties in the cases of unconscious representation? I think Tye’s reply should be that these properties are qualitative properties (or qualia) though not experiential i.e. there’s nothing it’s like for one to have them because the manner of representation is not the right one. In the discussion that follows then I will take it that Tye shares Lycan’s view of qualia, namely that qualitative character is one and the same as the property of an external object (externally constituted) that appears as the content of a representational state which in case it meets certain specifiable conditions brings about a certain subjective feel (it is experienced)¹⁶.

Shape of the Representationalist/Non-Representationalist Debate

The nub of the representationalist/non-representationalist debate is the following two (supervenience) theses:

- α) No difference in qualitative character without any difference in representational content.
- β) No difference in representational content without any difference in qualitative character.

In other words, two experiences with the same representational content necessarily have the same qualitative character and vice versa. If both α) and β) hold then this is case of a symmetrical supervenience relation. Many philosophers

¹⁵ And elsewhere: ‘the qualities of which we are aware are not qualities of experiences at all, but rather qualities that, if they are qualities of anything, are qualities of things in the world (as in the case of perceptual experiences) or of regions of our bodies (as in the case of bodily sensations) (2003b, accessed on 19/09/06). According to Tye, ‘in the case of perceptual experiences, the items sensorily represented are external environmental states or features’ (1995, p. 137)

¹⁶ Note that there’s a difference between Lycan’s and Tye’s account of experience: According to Tye, first-order mental states are experiences (such that there’s something it’s like for one to be in them) in virtue of being disposed or poised to bring about higher-order states (beliefs) about them, whereas according to Lycan, first-order mental states are experiences in virtue of being the target of a higher-order state/perception via the operations of a faculty of ‘inner sense’ (higher-order perception theory). But the fact that Lycan’s account of experience is higher-order as opposed to Tye’s first-order is not important here. What matters is that on both accounts, qualitative properties can be represented both consciously and unconsciously and a certain functional role (however construed) accounts for the fact that in some cases (conscious representations) we experience those properties i.e. there’s something it’s like to have them.

have tried their best to think cases of experiences which are identical in their representational contents but which differ qualitatively (Block and Stalnaker 1996; Peacocke 1983; Searle 1983). According to strong representationalists like Tye (2008) no one as yet has managed to show that the proposition ‘where there is a qualitative difference there is a representational difference too’ is false. Let’s have a quick look at Peacocke’s case (1983). Suppose images of two trees at different distances represent them as having the same height while taking up differently sized portions of the visual field. This case is thought to have suggested that there can be experiences alike in their representational content which differ qualitatively. But the representationalist reply is that these images actually differ in certain representational properties such as their representation of distance or of visual angle. Thus thesis α) is unrefuted (or so I will assume).

Alternatively, let us appeal to inverted spectrum scenarios. One of the main advocates of such scenarios against representationalist accounts of qualitative character is Ned Block. The case of the “Inverted Earth” is such a scenario which amounts to the rejection of β). Let’s have a quick look at this case. According to Block (1990), “Inverted Earth” differs from Earth in two respects: firstly, everything has the complementary colour of the colour on Earth, the sky is yellow, the grass is red and so forth. Secondly, the colour vocabulary of the residents of Inverted Earth is also inverted; they call their yellow sky “blue”, their red grass “green” etc. Suppose now that mad scientists render you unconscious, they implant colour-inverting lenses in your eyes and change your body pigment so that it looks normal to you upon awakening. They transport you to Inverted Earth and when you wake you notice no difference.

What it’s like for you to interact with the world and with other people does not change at all. For example, the yellow sky looks blue to you, and all the people around you describe yellow objects such as the sky as “blue”... So once 50 years have passed [during which time the “causal groundings” – the reference – of your colour terms shift to those standard on inverted earth], you and your earlier state at home would exemplify...a case of functional and representational inversion together with same qualitative contents – the converse of the inverted spectrum case. This is enough to refute the functionalist theory of qualitative content and at the same time to establish the representational/qualitative distinction (1990, pp. 63–64).

According to Block (1998) the key features of the example are these:

- I. The qualitative character of your colour experience stays the same as suggested by (though not entailed by) the fact that you don’t notice any difference.
- II. But the representational content of your experience, being externally determined, shifts with external conditions in the environment and the language community. (p. 667).

I’m not going to assess this argument here, for my present purposes the following suffices. Block here attempts to reject β). If the key features of his example are true then β) is refuted. But suppose that the representationalist has a plausible reply here to the effect that Block’s argument cannot refute β). It might be urged for instance, that Block’s example simply begs the question: no such inversion is possible and hence, the description of the example is incoherent. Thus let’s accept that β) is unrefuted. Suppose further that α) and β) are both true and therefore that there holds

a symmetrical supervenience relation between the qualitative character of our experiences and representational content. Does this mean that they are identical? No. Symmetrical supervenience doesn't entail identity.

There are (other) strong representationalist arguments to be sure, but they all follow the same pattern. For instance, with reference to 'the appeal to phenomenal indeterminacy' argument as Tye calls it, Tye writes: 'recall the example of the visual image of the speckled hen. How many speckles are there?..[in this case as] in the latter case [where] one sees blurrily...one undergoes a visual experience that represents fewer surface details than are represented when one sees clearly. By contrast, one sees clearly something blurry (e.g. a water colour picture with blurry edges) just in case one's visual experience represents that the boundaries of the blurry thing lie between precisely located spatial regions A and B without representing exactly where they lie. There is a phenomenal [qualitative] difference between the two cases, the representationalist will say, precisely because there is representational difference' (forthcoming, p.15, my emphasis). This claim is of type 'no qualitative difference without a representational difference' and it amounts to establishing a supervenience relation, not identity. And it appears that there is no argument to the effect that the qualitative character of our experiential states is identical with their representational contents¹⁷.

The Argument from Transparency of Experience

The strong representationalist move here is to appeal to the argument from the transparency of experience, namely to the idea that our experiences are transparent or diaphanous. The argument from the transparency of experience is formulated to show that represented content is one and the same as qualitative character. However, it is not easy to find in the literature a straightforward argument from the transparency of experience to the truth of strong representationalism. So let us first see what the transparency thesis is commonly taken to be and I will then attempt to sketch the transparency argument. In the remainder of this paper, I will show that this argument does not establish an identity relation between qualitative character or qualia and external properties of the environment.

According to strong representationalists (Tye 1995, 1998; Harman 1990) we normally see through perceptual states to external objects and we do not actually notice that we are in perceptual states. Visual experiences for example, are transparent to their subjects. Tye writes

Suppose you are facing a white wall, on which you see a bright red disk. Suppose you are attending closely to the colour and shape of the disk as well as the background. Now turn your attention from what you see out there in the world before you to your visual experience. Focus upon your awareness of the

¹⁷ However, I couldn't possibly state here all possible representationalist arguments and their variations to prove this point. See Tye (2008) for an overview and discussion of the main arguments for strong representationalism. In addition, I will not question how states like that of elation, depression, pleasure and orgasm can be features of presented objects and not of ourselves. My point here holds even if one holds that α) and β) are true across the board so that even the aforementioned states are representational.

disk as opposed to the disk of which you are aware. Do you find yourself acquainted with new qualities, qualities that are intrinsic to your visual experience in the way that redness and roundness are intrinsic to the disk? Surely the answer to this question is ‘No’ (Tye, 1998, p.660, emphasis in the original).

The point is that when one turns one’s attention inwards to one’s experience of the certain features of the world, one is aware of the very same features. According to Tye, no new features over and above those in terms of which we characterize what it is like to have an experience are revealed. We can of course, be aware of the fact that our mental state is representing them but our experiences are like transparent sheets of glass and therefore we are not introspectively aware of our visual experiences any more than we are perceptually aware of transparent sheets of glass. Now, since introspection reveals no new properties at all, all experiential properties (including qualitative properties) are external

If we try to focus on our experiences, we ‘see’ right through them to the world outside. By being aware of the qualities apparently possessed by surfaces, volumes, etc, we become aware that we are undergoing visual experiences. But we are not aware of the experiences themselves (Tye 2008, p.8).

And elsewhere

Focus your attention on a square that has been painted blue. Intuitively, you are directly aware of blueness and squareness as out there in the world away from you. Now shift your gaze inward and try to become aware of your experience itself, inside you, apart from its objects. Try to focus your attention on some intrinsic feature that distinguishes it from other experiences, something other than what it is an experience of. The task seems impossible: one’s awareness seems always to slip through the experience to blueness and squareness, as instantiated together in an external object. In turning one’s mind inward to attend to the experience, one seems to end up concentrating on what is outside again, on external features or properties.” (Tye 1995, p. 30).

As it turns out the main idea of the transparency thesis is that we have direct access (we are directly aware) of properties of external objects. We are not directly aware of any experiential properties. We are directly aware of intentional features of our experience, namely the objects and properties our experience is about and these are properties of external objects, not properties of our experiences. Introspection reveals no new properties (i.e. intrinsic to our experiences) in addition to those possessed by external objects. Thus because introspection reveals no qualities or properties of experience of which we are directly aware, we have direct access to (we are directly aware of) only the external objects and properties that are represented in perceptual experience.

The transparency thesis then is the claim that when one has a conscious experience one is only conscious or directly aware of what the experience is an experience of; one is directly aware of only the external objects and properties that are represented in perception. We may stipulate then that the first premise of the transparency argument is this (P1): we are directly aware of only the properties of

external objects and these properties are represented in perceptual experience. The conclusion of this argument is that the qualitative properties in virtue of which there is something that it is like to be in a perceptual state (qualia) are properties of external objects that are represented in perceptual experience (C). What's the missing premise? A plausible premise is that we are directly aware of the qualitative properties in virtue of which there is something that it is like to be in a perceptual state¹⁸. Here's then one way to formulate the argument from transparency of experience (ATE1):

P1. We are directly aware of only the properties of external objects (that are represented) in perceptual experience.

P2. We are directly aware of the qualitative properties in virtue of which there is something that it is like to be in a perceptual state.

C. The qualitative properties we are directly aware of are not properties of perceptual states but rather are properties of external objects that are represented in perceptual experience.

Now, *prima facie* there's a problem with P1, namely with the transparency thesis¹⁹. The problem involves cases of illusion and hallucination. It may be objected that what one is directly aware of is not the properties of external objects in front of one; one may be unaware of what an experience is actually of (due to illusion, hallucination, etc.). Relatedly, it is not at all clear that qualitative content does not outstrip representational content or that introspection does not reveal any qualitative properties which are intrinsic to our experiences. Indeed, Tye's claim that we cannot be directly aware of qualities of experience seems to be false (see Block 2003). Tim Crane (2006) gives an illustrative example. He writes

I remove my glasses and things seem blurry. Introspecting this experience, blurriness does certainly seem to be instantiated somewhere...blurriness does seem to be a property of some kind, which does seem to be instantiated somewhere. Unlike when things are seen as blurry, it doesn't seem to be instantiated by the objects of experience. So what is wrong with saying that it is instantiated (in some way) in the experience itself? Moreover, since I do not

¹⁸ Recall the exchanges between Russell/Ayer and Austin. Traditionally, one of the main problems of perception is whether these properties are properties of physical objects or some sort of mental entities – sense-data. See Howard Robinson (1994) for an excellent discussion.

¹⁹ I will leave out of the discussion Tye's much stronger claim that 'we attend to the external surfaces and qualities and thereby we are aware of something else, the 'feel' of our experience' (2000, pp. 51–52). The point is that even if one accepts that the qualitative character of the experience is wholly representational this does not explain by itself (or in effect) what it is like to undergo a certain state with a certain qualitative character. It appears that some further argument is necessary. What's more, Tye claims that one *is* aware of the fact that her mental state is representing certain qualities but she *is not* aware of the experiences themselves. But if one is aware that her mental state is representing such and such qualities or that she undergoes a mental state with such and such qualities why not say that there is something in addition to the representational properties, namely *introspective awareness*? What explanation is given for the fact that in this case one is *consciously* undergoing a certain mental state (supposing that we accept that all its properties are representational)? In other words, the awareness of undergoing a certain mental state is left unexplained. However, for my present purposes, I will ignore these complications.

have to make myself aware of blurriness by first making myself aware of other things – the awareness of blurriness comes along all together with the awareness of everything else – introspection of seeing blurrily does seem to reveal a case of being ‘directly aware of qualities of experience’ in an uncontroversial sense of that phrase (pp. 130–131)

It does seem then that there are cases which show that we can be directly aware of qualities of experience. I’m not going to pursue this objection further. I will argue that the transparency thesis shouldn’t be accepted on different grounds. Let us then remain neutral as to how damaging the objections from illusion/hallucination to the transparency thesis are and restrict its application to only veridical perceptions. Let us also allow Tye to maintain that introspection cannot reveal any new properties in addition or beyond the way something looks (sounds, etc). Hence, P1 now becomes: we are directly aware of only the properties of external objects in veridical perception. Here’s a way to re-formulate the argument from transparency of experience (ATE2):

P3. We are directly aware of only the properties of external objects (that are represented) in veridical perception.

P4. We are directly aware of the qualitative properties in virtue of which there is something that it is like to be in a veridical perceptual state.

C2. The qualitative properties we are directly aware of are properties of external objects that are represented in veridical perception.

The problem with ATE2 is that P3 clearly begs the question. What exactly is the evidence of introspection to tell us that introspectible properties (qualitative properties) are nothing over and above the (externally constituted) properties of external objects? Does introspection tell us that an object’s looking bluish to us is one and the same thing as the surface property of blue that the object instantiates? No. Introspection tells us that perceptual experience only appears transparent or diaphanous. This means that objects don’t necessarily have the properties we seem to perceive them to have independently of our experience of them. Thus, it doesn’t follow that the external world has exactly those properties. What does follow is that the external world as we experience it has those properties. There is nothing in perception or introspection per se to show that what we are directly aware of are properties of the external world. I cannot rule out (via introspection) the view that an object’s looking bluish to me is a quality of my experience that I have in addition to my awareness of blueness as being the surface property of blue that the object instantiates. In other words, I might be aware of the blueness of external objects in virtue of being aware of that property of my experience.

If we are to think thus (I do not see any reason that we shouldn’t) then it seems to me that the only way that the strong representationalist can sustain the purported claim of the transparency thesis is to add to the evidence from introspection the assumption that there holds an identity relation between qualitative character and external properties or content. And maybe this is not merely an assumption but it’s a mistaken claim that depends on the conjunction of α) and β). Be that as it may, one doesn’t use the transparency thesis to establish the identity relation, one uses

identity to establish the transparency thesis. The transparency thesis presupposes the very identity that purports to establish. Hence the transparency thesis is not independent evidence for identity and one cannot use the transparency thesis to establish identity.

As a concluding remark, we might agree with Rosenthal (2006) that our distinct sensory qualities resemble and differ one from another in ways that parallel the similarities and differences among perceptible properties of the physical objects of the environment. Sensory states are states of organisms that possess sensory qualities, which in turn are families of properties that ‘bear certain systematic relations to families of properties of physical objects and processes to which the organism can respond’ (2006, p.142). Rosenthal notices correctly that the red sensory quality of visual sensations resembles the orange sensory quality more than resembles the sensory blue say of such sensations and that the same point holds also in the case of bodily sensations. Consider a pain sensation says Rosenthal. The distinctive qualities of being dull, stabbing, burning or sharp resemble and differ in ways that reflect the similarities and differences among the corresponding physical objects.

Sensory qualities not only bear certain systematic relations to families of properties of physical objects and processes but they are also those properties by virtue of which the organism can respond to the properties of environmental objects and processes. Rosenthal suggests that we should fix the family of mental qualities characteristic of each sensory modality by reference to the family of perceptual properties to which the modality in question enables us to have perceptual access. So the idea is that our sensory states must themselves resemble and differ from one another in ways that are homomorphic to the similarities and differences among the physical colours that the organism can discriminate. On this view, physical red for instance, is determined by the characteristic way it resembles and differs from other discriminable properties in the quality space of perceptible colours. So if homomorphism is correct it enables us to fix each mental property partly by reference to the relevant family of perceptible properties and in comparative terms.

Hence, we might wish to establish something like this: No change in how we experience the world with no change in the world and no change in the world with no change in how we experience the world. But this again is a supervenience thesis which however strong and albeit symmetrical fails to show that there holds an identity relation between external properties of the environment and qualitative properties. My conclusion then is that the most that the representationalist arguments can establish is the truth of α) and β). However, what follows from [α) and β)] is that qualia supervene symmetrically upon external properties of the environment and this fails to establish the identity relation that the strong representationalist must establish in order to locate qualia ontologically.

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