

Chapter 4

Introduction

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

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

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

Section 1 takes up the task of further clarifying the nature of phenomenal properties. There are two questions an account of phenomenal properties must answer. The first asks whether phenomenal properties are essentially subjective, while the second asks whether phenomenal properties are representational properties. The phenomenologist returns positive answers to both these questions. If they are right, it will follow that some representational properties are essentially subjective.

I will contrast the phenomenologist's position with two other possible accounts of

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phenomenal properties. The first takes phenomenal properties to be essentially subjective and non-representational. I will label this position, *qualia-realism*. The second position takes phenomenal properties to be representational but denies that they are essentially subjective. I will call this position *intentionalism*.

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

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

1. Phenomenal Properties and Representational Properties

Our perceptual experiences have two faces, one which is directed outwards towards the world and the other which they present to their subjects.¹ Perceptual experiences represent things in the world but at the same time as doing so there is something that the occurrence of a perceptual experience is like for its subjects. I will call the properties of perceptual experiences in virtue of which they represent things in a subject's environment "representational properties". Those properties in virtue of which an experience is like something for its subject I will follow tradition in calling "phenomenal properties". The remainder of this section will sketch three different positions one can

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

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take on the relation between phenomenal and representational properties.

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

Many philosophers have claimed that the way an experience seems or feels to a subject cannot be exhausted by its representational properties.³ One way to argue for this conclusion is by constructing cases in which two experiences share the same representational properties but differ in their respective phenomenal properties. Another would be to look for cases in which two experiences share the same phenomenal properties but differ in their representational properties.

Block's (1990/1997) Inverted Earth is an ingenious version of the latter scenario. A subject is described as undergoing two experiences, one in earth and the other on inverted earth. The two experiences the subject undergoes share the same phenomenal properties

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

³ This question has been raised with some force by Block in various places, most recently in his (2003). Kim (1996: 13); McGinn (1982: 8); Searle (1983: 1) have also voiced concerns about the limits of a representational account of phenomenal properties. Boghossian and Velleman (1989) describe a number of difficult cases for representational theories. Peacocke (1983, ch.1) provides what is perhaps the classic discussion of counterexamples to a pure representational account of phenomenal properties.

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but differ in their representational properties depending on whether the experience is happening on earth or on inverted earth. Block does not deny that there is something representational about phenomenal properties, but he does deny that this exhausts their nature. He thinks that in addition to their representational properties, experiences have intrinsic, introspectively accessible properties. Phenomenal properties he tells us are “experiential properties” distinct from any “cognitive, intentional or functional property”.⁴ Elsewhere he calls phenomenal properties “mental paint”.⁵

When looking at a painting we can attend to what the painting depicts or we can attend to the paint on the canvas in virtue of which the painting depicts what it does. Block claims we can do something similar with respect to our experiences. We can attend to what our experiences represent but we can also turn our attention to what he calls an experience’s mental paint. Our experiences have intrinsic properties just as the surface of the painting does. It is these intrinsic properties of experience that Block calls “mental paint”. Henceforth I shall refer to any philosopher that takes phenomenal properties to be either wholly or partially non-representational as a “qualia-realist”. By “qualia” I shall mean the intrinsic, introspectively accessible, non intentional properties of experience.

Intentionalists deny that our experiences have qualia by denying that our experiences have any non-intentional properties. Intentionalism comes in varying degrees of strength. Strong intentionalists claim that the phenomenal character of our experience is exhausted by the way in which the world seems to us. Weak intentionalism denies this without reintroducing qualia. Strong intentionalists argue that phenomenal properties are wholly determined by an experience’s representational properties.⁶ An experience’s phenomenal character is on this view entirely fixed by the ways in which an experience represents the

⁴ Block (1995/1997:380-1).

⁵ See Block (1996) & (2003).

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

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subject's external environment. Weak intentionalists hold that the way the world appears to us is partially dependent on our sensory constitution. We don't get a full account of phenomenal properties by making reference to the features of a subject's external environment that an experience represents. Weak intentionalists argue that we must also make reference to how those features affect our senses.⁷

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

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

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

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wall.

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

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

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

Philosophers have raised a number of other problem cases for views which attempt to identify phenomenal properties with representational properties. I am going to assume

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

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henceforth that intentionalists can satisfactorily finesse these problems.⁹ I want to consider a related but different issue.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. Intentionality and Phenomenology

Phenomenologists hold that perceptual intentionality is constitutively determined by phenomenology. This is to say that an experience has the representational properties it

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

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does in virtue of the way the experience presents the world as appearing to its subject. This claim gives us a straightforward argument for the conclusion that phenomenal properties are subject-dependent. The argument runs as follows:

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

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

The phenomenologist claims that an experience purports to refer to something in virtue of its phenomenology. An experience can purport to refer to something just by presenting the world as *seeming a certain way*. I can undergo an experience the content of which purports to refer to a lemon say, just by undergoing an experience that presents

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

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

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to me something that seems to be a lemon. If we suppose that to exhibit intentionality is to purport to refer, it is natural to think that an experience could exhibit intentionality just by presenting the world as seeming a certain way.

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

The naturalist will of course admit that a subject can represent an object whether or not this object exists. All parties are agreed that this is definitive of intentionality. However the naturalist will argue that there is always some other relation that the subject stands in to the world which explains why an experience has a particular content. This, I shall claim, is the central difference between their respective accounts of intentionality. Phenomenologists hold that intentional directedness is a nonrelational property of representational states, a property an experience has whether or not a subject enters into any relation with the world. Naturalists have however supposed that there must be *some* relation between the bearer of an intentional state and the world which accounts for intentional directedness.

On the causal covariation theory for instance the relation in question is one of tracking objects and properties under ideal or optimal conditions. If we want to know why an experience has particular correctness conditions, we can appeal to the relation of causal

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covariation under optimal conditions.¹³ How will the causal covariation theory handle cases of reference-failure? The causal covariation theory will say that our senses can represent an object that doesn't exist because sometimes the conditions for reliable tracking are not satisfied. When the conditions for reliable tracking are not satisfied a creature can represent what does not exist. What is it that an experience represents in such cases? The causal covariation theory claims that non-veridical experiences represent whatever they *would* causally covary with under ideal conditions.

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

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

Do teleological theories of content fare any better? By the phenomenologist's

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

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standards we will have to conclude they do not. Teleological theories add to the causal covariation account, an explanation of which conditions are optimal. Consider first Dretske's spin on the causal covariation story. Dretske advances a theory of perceptual intentionality according to which "a system S, represents a property F, if and only if S has the function of indicating (providing information about) the F of a certain domain of objects." (Dretske, 1995: 2) What Dretske calls "indication" is another way of describing the relation of causal covariation: to indicate or carry information about F is to track F. However Dretske points out that indication on its own won't suffice to account for representation. Indication is a relation of lawful dependence which doesn't allow room for misrepresentation.¹⁴ So Dretske is led to invoke a representational system's function. A representational system S has the function of representing F if the detection of F by S enables the organism to meet its needs. Of course this doesn't quite work either because there is always more than one way to specify a representation producing system's function. Thus Dretske's final move is to invoke the learning history of an organism. A representational system S has the function of representing F if representations which indicate the presence of F have been recruited by the organism as the cause of some behaviour M which enables the organism to cope in its environment.

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

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

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Thus Dretske will explain the phenomenologist's property of purporting to refer by reference to the conditions that obtain when a sensory system isn't functioning properly. A sensory system S fails to function properly when the stimulus which causes S to go into state R is a stimulus which normally indicates the presence of F but on this occasion fails to do so. Thus the sensory system is led to malfunction. Notice that like the causal covariation theory, Dretske accounts for the property of purporting to refer in terms of a relation between the sensory system and the world. What he adds to the story is an appeal to learning. It is a creature's having learning to associate its being in a state R with the presence of some feature F relevant to its meeting its needs which explains why R represents the presence of F. Thus Dretske's teleological theory attempts to redescribe the property of purporting to refer in relational terms. From where the phenomenologist stands, this move amounts to denying the phenomenon.

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

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

For Millikan we determine a representation's content by asking what the consumers of representations need in order to do their jobs. Millikan goes on to argue that the consumers of a representation need a certain relation to hold between a representation and what is represented. Just like Dretske a representation's content turns out to be

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individuated by a relation between a bearer of a representation and the world, the relation that must hold if a consumer of representations is to function properly.¹⁵ Once again we have a theory of intentionality which attempts to analyse the non-relational property of purporting to refer in terms of some relational property.

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

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

¹⁵ Matters are not quite as straightforward as I make them seem here. Millikan makes an important distinction between direct and derived proper functions (see for instance Millikan (1986)). She introduces the distinction to get around the problem of how to account for the function of novel, one-off intentional states or intentional states whose job is to bring about states of affairs disadvantageous to the well-being of an organism. A derived proper function is a function which derives from the function of some device which produces some effect. A novel bee dance for instance, a particular waggle that has never been performed in the past, has a derived proper function. The novel dance derives its function from the function of bee dances more generally.

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

3. Phenomenal Intentionality

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

Let us call the thesis that phenomenology fixes intentional content, “the Phenomenal Intentionality Thesis” (or PIT for short). There is a strong and weak reading of PIT. We can formalise the two readings as follows where ‘x’ stands for an intentional state, ‘R’ for a relation to the world, ‘y’ for an object, and ‘P’ for the property of representing y.

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(1) Strong Reading: $\sim\forall x \exists R \exists y \Box(Px \supset Rxy)$ ¹⁶

(2) Weak Reading: $\sim\exists R \exists y \forall x \Box(Px \supset Rxy)$ ¹⁷

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

The strong reading is committed to the following possibility. Imagine a phenomenological duplicate of me such that whenever I undergo an experience with a particular phenomenology so does my duplicate. Now further imagine that this individual is a brain-in-a-vat, his external reality is fundamentally different from the one he experiences, containing only a supercomputer feeding his brain information about a virtual reality. The strong reading must say that my phenomenological duplicate and I enjoy experiences with the very same representational contents because an experience's correctness conditions are determined by phenomenology alone. Since my duplicate and I have phenomenologically identical experiences, my duplicate and I must share

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

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

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

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

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experiences with the very same correctness conditions.²⁰

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

A proponent of the weak reading denies this consequence. He claims that a thought or experience has its intentional content before a subject takes up any relation to the world. It may be true that an experience's phenomenology requires a subject to stand in some relation to the world. It doesn't follow that intentional content is individuated by the relation a subject stands in to the world. An experience's phenomenology – the determinant of its intentional content – might not be individuated by a particular relation a subject stands in to the world, but in some other manner. Indeed I shall argue for precisely that claim in the final sections of this chapter.

The weak reading has one noteworthy implication which I will register before considering how these respective readings of PIT find an articulation in Husserlian and existential phenomenology. I have said that the weak reading of PIT allows that an experience's phenomenology might in some sense "involve" extra-mental items. Suppose a case can be made for what we might call "wide phenomenology". It will follow that it is not possible for there to exist a phenomenological duplicate of me which is a brain-in-a-

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

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vat. If phenomenology is wide, a phenomenological duplicate of you or I must enjoy experiences that involve just the same extra-mental items as our experiences involve. A brain-in-a-vat exists in an environment that contains none of the same extra-mental items that our environment contains. If he experiences anything that can be considered an extra-mental item, it is at best an item that has a virtual existence, and I am presuming this is not true of all, or even many, of the items we experience. It follows that a phenomenological duplicate of me cannot be a brain-in-a-vat. Sceptical arguments are usually mounted by imagining a phenomenological duplicate embedded in a radically different environment from our own. A weak-reading of PIT would provide significant machinery for mounting a response to this variety of sceptical argument.²¹

4. Husserl's Theory of Intentionality

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

I shall argue that if Husserl did hold the strong thesis he faces a problem which is the mirror image of the problem I described for the naturalist in the previous section. The naturalist seeks to explain the property a state has when it purports to refer by appeal to the relation of reference. S/he has the difficulty of explaining how intentional states can

²¹ I will not however pursue this possibility here.

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

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seem to exhibit directedness independent of any particular relation to the world once s/he has taken reference to be metaphysically basic. Husserl gives priority to the property of purporting to refer over that of reference in his account of intentional directedness. This leaves him facing the difficulty of explaining how our perceptual experience can succeed in making contact with objects if the contents of our experiences do not require the existence of anything other than the subject to whom they belong.

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

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

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

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

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

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section.

Husserl made a three-way distinction along the lines of Frege's distinction between idea, sense and reference. What Frege referred to as "ideas" Husserl calls "act of consciousness". He shares with Frege an understanding of acts of consciousness as subjective. They are subjective in the sense that they are temporal events confined to a particular person's stream of consciousness.²⁶

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A signifying intention determines how an object is represented, but not which object is represented. It is only if Husserl can explain how at least sometimes an experience succeeds in singling out a particular object that he will have given us an answer to the problem we raised for him at the beginning of this section. There I attributed to Husserl the opposite problem to that of the naturalist. Husserl must explain how an experience can succeed in referring to an object when an experience has its representational

²⁸ I have borrowed this piece of terminology from Dreyfus (1982).

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

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properties independently of any relation to the world.

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

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

The X-component is being asked to do a lot of work by Husserl, but just how does he think it achieves these tasks? Woodruff-Smith and McIntyre (1982: 200-4) propose that we construe the X-component as functioning like a demonstrative expression. On their proposal a perceptual act is related to a particular object in much the same way as a demonstrative expression is related to its referent. Interpreting the X-component as a demonstrative helps to make sense of Husserl's claim that the X-component presents an object in abstraction from its predicates. It is a feature of demonstratives that they refer directly, which is to say, without the mediation of any descriptions. The X-component represents an object without making reference to any of its properties in just the same

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

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way as a demonstrative expression purports to refer to a particular without the help of any identifying descriptions.

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

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

Husserl is well aware of the context-dependent nature of demonstratives; he tells us in his (1913/1970) that: “‘This’ is an essentially occasional expression which only becomes fully meaningful when we have regard to the circumstances of utterance...” (VI, §5, 682) Instead of appealing to the context in which the perceptual experience takes place to single out an object, he has the subject enter into the relation of direct and immediate perception to an object that he calls “intuition” (*Anschauung*). I take it his proposal is that the X-component singles out the object that the subject is intuiting, where “intuition” is understood as a kind of direct and immediate presentation of the object in its bodily presence.

Does the appeal to intuition really help him avoid introducing a relation to the world

³¹ Dreyfus (1982) and McIntyre (1982) both raise this problem for Husserl.

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

There is an obvious way out of this difficulty for the Husserlian phenomenologist. It could be objected that the whole thrust of the above argument rests upon a false understanding of phenomenological method.³² So far I have been assuming that the phenomenological epoché commits Husserl to a kind of methodological solipsism. It's possible to understand the "epoché" in such a way that the world *isn't* excluded from the phenomenologist's inquiry. On this reading the epoché doesn't require the subject to study his subjective psychological states in abstraction from the world. Rather the epoché simply affects a change of attitude. Instead of relating to objects as we ordinarily do pre-reflectively we are to study the objects of our thoughts and experiences as they are intended or represented by us. The phenomenologist is to study the perceived object as it is perceived, the recollected episode as it is recollected, the imaginary object as it is imagined *etc.*

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

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

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demonstrative, and his theory of intentionality will be rescued.

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

5. The Existential Phenomenologist's Theory of Intentionality

We have seen that a strong reading of PIT encounters insuperable difficulties when it comes to explaining how our thoughts and experiences can secure reference to their objects. Existential phenomenology rejects a conception of intentionality as a relation between a subject's states of mind and their object because they reject a conception of the subject as standing apart from the world. Thus they can avoid the problems Husserl faces in explaining successful cases of reference. McCulloch (2003) finds in Descartes a distinction he tags "the ontological real distinction". According to McCulloch, Descartes didn't just distinguish a person's mind from his body, arguing that mind and body are distinct substances. Descartes went further endorsing a dualism that extended to mind and world.³³ It is this dualism of mind and world that the existential phenomenologist repudiates. It is only if we conceive of subjects as capable of a distinct existence from the world that a view of intentionality as a relation between mind and world makes sense.

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

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If we think of a subject as existing apart from the world, it is natural to think of intentionality as the means by which the distance between mind and world is bridged. Once a dualism of mind and world is rejected it no longer makes sense to think of intentionality as a relation between a subject's states of mind and the world.

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

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

In fact we have already encountered the answer to this question in our discussion of

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We should by now be getting a sense of how Husserl makes sense of the claim that our experiences have their intentional content before we take up any relation to the world. I take the object of my experience to have certain features that are not currently perceived by me. These are features I take the object to have in advance of taking up a relation to them and as it were perceiving them for myself. They are represented in the form of hypotheses about what further exploration of the object would reveal of the object.

The initial interpretation a subject gives the sensory part of its experience together with the anticipations a subject forms about the possible experiences it could have of the

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

³⁸ See Husserl (1913/1982: §85)

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

While Husserl characterises our perceptual experiences as representing features that are hypothesised in their *absence*, Merleau-Ponty (who I shall have speak on behalf of the existential phenomenologists) describes those features as *present* in our perceptual experience but indeterminately.³⁹ It is here that the difference between Husserl's idealism and Merleau-Ponty's realism is at its most pronounced. While for Husserl the object is the sum of the possible points of view we can take on it⁴⁰, this is not the case for Merleau-Ponty. This is why he can speak of the features of the objects that are not sensibly presented to us as nevertheless being there in some positive sense.⁴¹ They are "there" not just as possible points of view we could represent. Rather these are features the object is perceived to have *positively*, albeit in an indeterminate manner. Unlike Husserl, Merleau-Ponty thinks of the parts of an object that are hidden from us as in a real sense perceived. They are not just hypothesised. Merleau-Ponty must explain in what sense a thing's hidden aspects are perceived when they are not sensibly presented to a subject.

Merleau-Ponty claims that anything we perceive is perceived as having a place within a perceptual field. According to Merleau-Ponty the simplest units of experience are not sensations of, for instance, colour or smell, size or shape. Rather what we perceive is a

³⁹ Kelly (forthcoming) discusses this difference at length.

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

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

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fully formed figure appearing against a background. I can at the moment perceive my laptop surrounded by books, papers, pens and other assorted paraphernalia that furnish my desk. The screen of my laptop constitutes the figure in my current experience, while the other items on my desk form the background to this experience. The items that make up the background form a part of what I perceive but I perceive them in a different way to the screen of my laptop. The things that surround my laptop are present in my perceptual experience but not determinately. Merleau-Ponty will say the same about an object's hidden aspects – those features of an object which are not currently sensibly presented to me. An object's hidden aspects form a part of the background – they are present in my experience but not determinately so.

To grasp the difference between a determinate and indeterminate presentation think of the difference between being told the measurement of a room and seeing the size of a room for oneself.⁴² Measurements are of course determinate representations. They are context independent representations in the sense that one does not need to know anything about context in order to know what size a room is when one is given its dimensions. Merleau-Ponty will claim that the same is not true of seeing a room's size. The experience one has in this case is context dependent. One perceives the size of the room in this case not in terms of determinate dimensions but in terms of what one can do within the space. One might perceive for instance the arrangement of the furniture in the space and get a sense of how one could arrange one's own furniture.

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

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

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

For the existential phenomenologist then our intentional states have their contents before we take up a relation to the world through our knowing how to deal with things. Merleau-Ponty has illustrated one way in which this case by describing the way in which when reaching to take hold of an object our body is prepared to deal with a thing of a certain shape, size and so on. These properties are not represented as determinate quantities, but are represented instead in terms of how we *should* direct our movements if we are to succeed in reaching and grasping the thing we are directing our behaviour towards. For the existential phenomenologists then it is a mistake to think of intentionality in terms of a relation between a subject and the world because intentional directedness is made possible by a certain kind of understanding. In the case just

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described it is an understanding of space which is manifested in our knowing how we should direct our movements if we are to succeed in our goal-directed behaviours. We could just as well have spoken of the understanding which Heidegger describes a subject as having when he knows how to deal with things that are ready-to-hand or available to be used as pieces of equipment.

By now the reader might be wondering what all this has to do with consciousness. We started out discussing phenomenal properties, those properties in virtue of which an experience seems or feels a certain way to its subject. We have finished up discussing the understanding a subject has which enables her to direct her behaviour successfully. It will be objected that the existential phenomenologist is describing such a radically different concept of the subject and its place in the world as to leave entirely untouched the problems with which we started. I have a short answer to this objection and a longer answer which I will present in the next chapter.

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

There is however something right about the objection that we seemed to have simply changed the subject. There is a question philosophers ask about consciousness which has been left untouched by my discussion of intentionality in the latter half of this chapter. The question asks why there is something rather than nothing it is like to have experiences. The account of intentionality I have been outlining tells us why our experiences seem or feel the way they do. It has turned out that our experiences seem or

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feel the way they do because of the understanding a person has of himself and the world he inhabits along with other persons. This doesn't tell us why our experiences should present the world as seeming, or should themselves feel like anything at all. Phenomenologists do have an answer to this question. Their answer, as we shall see in the next chapter, depends on the controversial claim that every conscious experience is also self-conscious.

Before I explore how this claim can help explain why our experiences should have any phenomenal character whatsoever, I will briefly return to the intentionalist thesis which claims that phenomenal properties are subject-independent. I have presented the phenomenologist's case for thinking of our experiences as having representational properties that are subject-dependent. I will finish up by assessing the intentionalist claim that our experiences have the phenomenal properties they do by representing entities and properties that are subject-*independent*.

6. The Intentionalist Argument for Subject-Independence

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

Tye (2000, ch.2) for instance has argued that to possess a phenomenal concept C one must have had experiences of a certain type E for oneself. A phenomenal concept is a concept one employs when one introspects on an experience and forms a conception of what it is like to undergo this experience. One can form a conception of what it is like to

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undergo an experience only by having the experience for oneself.⁴³ Thus there are good reasons for thinking that phenomenal concepts must be experience dependent.

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

The second stage in the intentionalist argument purports to show that phenomenal properties are properties belonging to a subject's external environment, which can when all goes well, enter into the contents of our experience. It is this second thesis that carries the weight in the intentionalist argument for subject-independence. The intentionalist claims that experiences get their representational content from the relation a subject stands in to features of his external environment. I can stand in the very same relation as you have stood in and thereby have the same experiences as you. Thus it follows that phenomenal properties are not subject-dependent. There is nothing about phenomenal

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

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

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properties that essentially involves a subject and its point of view.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The intentionalist’s argument doesn’t establish the subject-independence of phenomenal properties. Phenomenologists could agree that we can know what an experience is like just by knowing what it is an experience represents. They can nevertheless hold that what our experiences represent is, in general, something subject-dependent. Both Husserlian and existential phenomenologists take intentionality to derive in some way from a conscious subject. We have seen how Husserl takes intentionality to originate with the conscious subject conceived of as a self-sufficient,

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self-contained entity capable of existence independently, apart from the world. For the existential phenomenologist intentionality has its origins in our existence as persons who know how to find their way about in the world. The phenomenologist can agree that an experience has its phenomenal properties in virtue of what this experience represents. However they also hold that what our experiences represent is something subject-dependent.⁴⁵

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

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

This section has shown the intentionalist argument for subject-independence is at best inconclusive. The remainder of the chapter has made a positive argument for the subject-dependence of phenomenal properties while at the same time agreeing with the

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

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intentionalist that phenomenal properties are representational properties. I have sought to show how representational properties can be subject-dependent. In the next chapter I will explore how this account can be further developed to explain why it is that there is something our experiences seem or feel like to us.