

PAPER ABSTRACTS

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Most of my papers fall into four related areas. Below I provide a brief description of my work in each area, followed by abstracts of some of my main papers in that area. (Some papers fall into two areas.) The abstracts explain how the papers interrelate, and how together they develop a cohesive argument for a unique non-reductive view of conscious experience.

Papers on Intentionalism about Experience

At the foundation of my work is a commitment to an intentionalist approach to experience. In the papers below, I criticize standard arguments for intentionalism, such as the argument from “transparency”. And I develop an alternative argument for intentionalism and against rivals such as “naïve realism” (Martin, Campbell) and the “inner state view” (Papineau, Prinz). My argument is that the intentional view provides the best explanation of a host of otherwise puzzling empirical and phenomenological facts about experience.

“Intentionalism and Perceptual Presence” I criticize the transparency argument for intentionalism. I argue that some versions of the “transparency thesis” are shown to be false by the possibility of hallucination. Others are too weak to provide a case for intentionalism.

“Why Explain Experience in terms of Content?” I develop an alternative argument for the intentional view, which takes the form of an inference to the best explanation. I advance some *a priori* arguments against one of its main rivals, naïve realism.

“Can Disjunctivists Explain Our Access to the Sensible World?” I develop an additional, *empirical* argument against naïve realism, which adds to the *a priori* arguments in my earlier paper. Naïve realists hold that the function of the brain is just to reveal the world to us. But I suggest argue that naïve realism cannot adequately accommodate the role of the brain in shaping experience. By contrast, some forms of the intentionalism can do so. Intentionalism therefore fits better with science. In this paper, I also raise some new epistemological puzzles about our perceptual access to *properties* that any view must confront (one involves the Benacerraf-Field problem, and another involves the *graded character* of perceptual justification).

“Do the Benefits of Naïve Realism Outweigh the Costs?” I raise the question of what the best argument for “naïve realism” might be, and suggest an answer. I then criticize the argument. Finally I provide

my empirical argument against naïve realism. I also raise some problems specific to Bill Fish's version of it.

“The Content View vs The Content View” I answer Bill Brewer's objections to the intentional view and criticize his alternative.

“How Can Brain in Vats Experience Space?” Besides naïve realism, the main rival to the intentional view is what I call the “inner state view” (Block, McLaughlin, Papineau). Unlike naïve realism, this view nicely accommodates the role of the brain. But I suggest that proponents have missed a problem. The problem is that the internal state view cannot easily accommodate another fact: that *experiences are essentially externally-directed*. Some inner state theorists (e. g. Papineau) just reject the datum. I argue that this is not acceptable. Other inner state theorists (e. g. Block) appear to accept the datum. But I argue that they can only accommodate it by accepting what I call the “internal-grounding view” of experiential intentionality. This view is complex. Further, it is not very different from an “internalist” form of intentionalism. So the only defensible form of the inner state view is not very different from a form of intentionalism.

“Why Accept the Representational View of Experience?” I summarize my case for the intentional view. The intentional view simply provides a better explanation of the facts of experience than rivals such as naïve realism and the inner state view. Unlike naïve realism, it fits with the scientific fact that the brain plays a major role in shaping our experience of the world. It also provides better accounts of illusion and hallucination. Unlike the inner state view (Papineau, Prinz), it fits with the phenomenal fact that experience is essentially externally directed. At the end, I address an overlooked problem for the intentional view involving what I call the “laws of appearance”. I consider it to be the most serious problem for the intentional view, even if it hasn't been discussed. I offer no solution, but I suggest it may be a problem for everyone.

“What Are The Contents of Experiences?” Debates about “the contents of experience” themselves have no clear content, because the disputants do not adequately explain what they mean “the content of an experience”. I employ the Ramsey-Lewis method to give a clear meaning to this piece of technical vocabulary. In this way, I make the issues of whether experiences have content, and what they are, tractable. Having explained what I mean by “the content of experiences”, I argue that experiences do have contents, and I devise a new method (the “grounding method”) for determining what they are. On this basis, I defend a “thin” view of the contents of experiences.

Papers on the Reduction of Experiential Representation

Once intentionalism is accepted, a big question arises: how does the brain enable us to “experientially represent” (or “perceptually predicate”) sensible properties, such as colors and shapes? This adds an element to the mind-body problem. In the papers below, I

argue on empirical grounds for a form of internalism. Then I argue on a priori grounds from internalism to the conclusion that the experiential representation relation is irreducible. My non-reductive view is consistent with a form of materialism (I call it “brute grounding materialism”), but it considerably weakens the case for accepting materialism.

“The Real Trouble with Armchair Arguments against Phenomenal Externalism” Many philosophers (for instance followers of the “phenomenal intentionality program”) put forward *a priori* arguments against externalism about experience (inverted spectrum, inverted earth) and for internalism. I develop new objections to such armchair arguments. I suggest we need an empirical argument instead.

“Sensory Awareness is not a Wide Physical Relation” Focusing on color vision, I advance an empirical argument for a kind of internalism about experience (“internal-dependence”). I also argue that, since experience is internally-determined, our standard externalist (“tracking”) models do not apply in the special case of the experiential representation relation. Phenomenal intentionality is unique.

“The Real Trouble for Phenomenal Externalism” I broaden and reinforce my empirical argument against externalist accounts of experiential representation. Whereas in other papers I focus on the experience of color, in this paper I invoke new research on the experience of pain, taste, smell and sound.

“A Simple View of Consciousness” I take my argument a step further. I argue that, given internal-dependence, the experiential representation relation cannot be identified with *any* physical-functional relation. It is irreducible. (Compare Russell on acquaintance.) I propose a kind of “supervenient without reduction” model for understanding experiential representation. This view solves a puzzle: it explains how experience is at once externally directed and internally dependent.

“How Can Brains in Vats Experience Space?” In previous papers, I had focused on internalist theories of the experience of “*secondary qualities*”. In this paper, I turn to a puzzle for internalists about the experience of “*primary qualities*”, especially spatial-temporal properties. At the end I suggest a solution: what I call the “internal-grounding view” of the experiential representation of space. I raise a problem for this view: despite the recent enthusiasm for grounding (Schaffer, Rosen, Fine), unexplained grounding claims are objectionable in somewhat the way unexplained psychophysical laws are. Still, I suggest that internalists about experience who want to hold onto materialism have no choice but to accept such a view.

Papers defending a Neo-Galilean View of the Sensible Properties

Once intentionalism is accepted, we must not only explain how we experientially represent sensible properties, like color, shape, and smell. We must also give some account of these properties and how they fit into the physical world. There are two views that place such properties “in the world”: response-independent views, and response-dependent views. I argue that neither is right. But I also argue that sensible properties are not “in the mind” either. They are neither instantiated in the world nor in the mind. Both sides of the traditional debate are wrong.

“The Real Trouble for Phenomenal Externalists” Focusing on taste, smell, and sound, I develop a new version of the “structure argument” against *response-independent* accounts of the sensible properties. I call it the *representational structure argument*. The point is that any good view of the structural relations among sensible properties must be compatible with our ability to represent (and represent reliably) those relations in thought and experience. But I suggest that response-independent accounts are bound to violate this constraint.

“Can Color Structure be Explained in terms of Color Experience?” I develop a series of objections to a response to the structure argument suggested by Shoemaker, Lewis and McLaughlin. On this response, colors themselves are response-independent physical properties, but their structural features are response-dependent.

“Byrne and Hilbert on the Unitary-Binary Structure” Alex Byrne and David Hilbert attempt to provide a purely response-independent account of color structure. I criticize their account. (I criticize it further in “Can Disjunctivists Explain...?” and “The Real Trouble...”.)

“Do Theories of Consciousness Rest on a Mistake?” In the first part of this paper, I raise a few additional problems for response-independent realist accounts of the structure of the sensible properties (e. g. Tye). In particular, I suggest that they have the paradoxical consequence our structure judgments aren’t explain by the character of our experiences. (Relatedly, they also make radical introspective error very easy.) And, in the case of some sensible properties (e. g. those involved in pain), they face what I call the *percipi puzzle*. In the second part of this paper, I turn to *response-dependent* (“relational”) accounts of sensible properties (Shoemaker, Cohen). Many object to such accounts on the grounds that “sensible properties don’t look like relations”. I raise a new problem, which I call the *representational problem*: there is no good account of how we represent such properties in experience. So these properties are simply not *perceptually accessible*. (I develop this problem further in my review of Cohen’s *The Red and the Real*, and in my “Real Trouble . . .” paper.)

“Review of Cohen’s *The Red and The Real*”. I raise a number of problems for Cohen’s response-dependent, or “relational” view of colors.

“How Does Color Experience Represent the World?” In the papers above, I argued against both response-independent and response-dependent versions of realism of the sensible properties. In this paper, I summarize those arguments. Then I construct an argument for my own view. On this view, the sensible properties are not properties of anything at all. They are “virtual properties”. So experience habitually misrepresents the environment. But, I suggest, this is not objectionable. In the first instance, the point of the sensory systems is to enhance adaptive fitness. There is no reason not to expect that this should involve embellishment or error.

Papers Developing a “Consciousness First” Program

Traditionally, conscious experiences are supposed to play a crucial role in grounding justification and thought. For instance, Bertrand Russell believed that there is an irreducible acquaintance relation that is the source of justification and thought. Like Russell, I hold that experience involves an irreducible relation, namely the “experiential representation relation”. In the papers below, I argue that this relation plays a foundational role similar to that Russell assigned to acquaintance. This view helps solve traditional problems about the sources of justification and the foundations of intentionality. So, once we give up on the task of reductively explaining consciousness, we can see it as a starting point that helps us to solve longstanding problems about the mind.

The Interdependence of Phenomenology and Intentionality. Some have suggested that intentionality of experience is “prior to” the phenomenology of experience. Still others (e. g. friends of the “phenomenal intentionality program”) suggest the opposite. I argue that both sides are wrong. I advance a *non-priority* view concerning the relationship between the phenomenal character of experience and the intentional character of experience. Then I suggest that there may yet be a sense in which the phenomenology of experience is prior to the intentionality of *thought*.

Does Phenomenology Ground Content? Traditionally, many have supposed that experience plays a foundational role in grounding thought. I discuss different versions of this idea. Most recently, some have suggested that we have special “cognitive experiences” which play a role in grounding the contents of our thoughts. I develop a new modal argument that we do not have rich cognitive experiences. (Chudnoff has recently dubbed it “the missing explanation argument”.) Then, using holistic rationality constraints on thought, I argue that, even if we do have cognitive experiences, they cannot determine thought-content. At the end of the paper, I briefly defend my own version of the idea that conscious experience grounds thought. My version invokes ideas from

David Lewis's theory of content. I suggest that outstanding problems with that theory (e. g. indeterminacy problems, and problems about the source of reasons) may be solved if we assign a foundational role to experience in grounding the content of our beliefs and desires.

Review of Langsam's *The Wonder of Consciousness*. I discuss Langsam's "consciousness first" approach to the mind.

Other Papers

"What Is My Evidence that Here is a Cup?" I critically discuss Schellenberg's view of evidence. I raise an overlooked problem about the graded character of immediate perceptual justification.

"An Argument Against Armstrong's Analysis of Resemblance Between Universals" Noting a coincidence between the formal properties of resemblance and those of partial identity (overlap), David Armstrong has devised a fascinating account of resemblance in terms of partial identity. I construct a deductive argument against Armstrong's analysis of resemblance between universals. On my view, in some cases, resemblance among universals is unanalyzable.

"An Argument Against Fregean That-Clause Semantics" I develop an argument against Fregean that-clause semantics. The argument may be blocked with a Kaplan-style account of quantifying in. But I point out that the Kaplan account requires giving up basic semanticological principles of the kind which it was the point of Frege's theory to retain.