

Phenomenal relations

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On the view being developed, when one has a perceptual experience one stands in a certain relation to a content. Our focus so far has been on the nature of the contents: we've defended the view that these are Russellian; that they sometimes have, among other things, objects and natural kinds as constituents; and that they are a kind of property. Let's now turn our attention to the relations in which, in perceptual experience, we stand to those contents.

It seems plausible that some propositional attitude relations do, and some do not, satisfy the following condition:

R is a *phenomenal relation* iff possibly, two subjects are mental duplicates but for differences in the contents to which they are R-related and those subjects are instantiating distinct phenomenal properties.

Belief is a good example of a relation to a content which does not seem to satisfy this condition.

The relation to contents in which I stand when I have typical visual experiences, however, does. It seems that there could be a subject who was a mental duplicate of me but for the fact that that subject is visually representing the wall before him as blue rather than green; such a subject would differ phenomenally from me.

Two notes on this pair of claims:

1. Visually representing will trivially fail to satisfy this definition if, e.g., it is impossible to visually represent x as blue without believing that you are having a visual experience, since then it will be impossible for there to be a pair of subjects who only differ mentally in the propositions which are the contents of their visual experiences. Possible fix: change to: mental duplicates but for ... (and any other mental differences which are entailed by this difference in the propositions to which they are R-related). A resultant problem is posed by factive mental states about phenomenal properties; perhaps get around this by adding non-factive condition to definition.
2. Here I'm assuming that a global intramodal intentionalism is true. If it weren't, then by this definition it would follow trivially that every mental state type, including belief, would be a phenomenal state type. For suppose that intentionalism was false of, say, pains. Then two subjects could differ phenomenally with respect to their sensations of pain without any difference in the contents of their pain sensations. The two subjects might also be mental duplicates but for a difference in the contents of one of their beliefs. Then they would be a pair of subjects which differed

phenomenally but were mental duplicates but for a difference in the contents of one of their beliefs, which would make belief a phenomenal state type. Parallel arguments could be constructed for any mental state type.

I argued (in Ch. 9 above) that the purest intermodal intentionalism is false, because perceptual experiences can share their contents with states, like beliefs, which lack a phenomenal character. In the present terms, this was to claim that subjects can stand in phenomenal and non-phenomenal propositional attitude relations to the same content. The importance of this claim is that it follows from it that phenomenal properties don't supervene simply on facts about what the contents of a subject's mental states are; rather, they supervene only on these facts plus facts about the phenomenal relations in which subjects stand to those contents. This has obvious consequences for any attempt to identify phenomenal and representational properties; the relevant identity will not be of the form

phenomenal property F = the property of standing in some propositional attitude relation or other to P

but rather of the form

phenomenal property F = the property of being R-related to P

for some phenomenal relation R.

This way of thinking about things leads to a question: how many phenomenal relations are there?

One might wonder whether this question is verbal. (The related question of how many senses there are seems to be, in some cases, a partly verbal question.)

The best way to see that it is not a verbal question is to remember the role played by phenomenal relations in any attempt to identify phenomenal and representational properties. If phenomenal properties are identical to relations to certain contents, it can't be a mere matter of convention whether we count relations as the same or different — any more than it can be a mere matter of convention which phenomenal property I'm instantiating now.

This question of the number of phenomenal relations is also important for strategic reasons. One of the aims of at least many intentionalists is to give a naturalistically explanation of the nature of phenomenal character in terms of representation. The example of belief shows that one can't explain phenomenal character in terms of content alone; but if the version of intentionalism sketched above is true, one can explain phenomenal character given a satisfactory account of content plus an account of the general propositional attitude of sensing that such-and-such. This is no trivial task, but it certainly seems easier than packaging an account of mental representation with independent accounts of each of several distinct sensory modes of being related to a content.