

In Defense of Cognitive Phenomenology: Meeting the Matching Content Challenge

Preston Lennon
The Ohio State University lennon.76@osu.edu

(This is the penultimate version; please cite the final version forthcoming in *Erkenntnis* when available.)

Abstract. Bayne and McClelland (2016) raise the *matching content challenge* for proponents of cognitive phenomenology: if the phenomenal character of thought is determined by its intentional content, why is it that my conscious thought that there is a blue wall before me and my visual perception of a blue wall before me don't share any phenomenology, despite their matching content? In this paper, I first show that the matching content challenge is not limited to proponents of cognitive phenomenology but extends to cases of cross-modal perception, threatening representationalism about consciousness in general. I then give two responses to the challenge, both of which appeal to *intentional modes*. The difference in intentional mode between a thought and a visual perception can either explain why we should not expect any phenomenal overlap between the two experiences, or it can make it clear why the phenomenal overlap is easy to overlook. I show that these responses are available to the representationalist about perceptual consciousness, as well as the proponent of cognitive phenomenology. The upshot is that, when it comes to the matching content challenge, both perceptual representationalism and cognitive representationalism stand on equal dialectical footing.

Surprised at how much time had passed, I opened up a browser, called up the New York Times, and clicked on the giant headline. The article described the helicopters I could hear above me.

Ben Lerner, *Leaving the Atocha Station*

In recent philosophy of mind, the *cognitive phenomenology* debate has been waged on a variety of fronts. Some have focused on whether or not there exists a proprietary phenomenology of cognition, a kind of phenomenal character that only cognitive states have. Others have focused on the relationship between the phenomenal character of cognition and its intentional properties. Tim Bayne and Tom McClelland (2016) purport to identify a challenge to proponents of cognitive phenomenology on this latter front. In particular, their target is a claim endorsed in the cognitive phenomenology literature:

Cognitive Representationalism (CR): the phenomenal character of thought supervenes on its intentional content.ⁱ

Proponents of CR argue that occurrent thoughts have phenomenal character, and that this phenomenal character is determined by (i.e., supervenes on) the intentional content of thought.

Bayne and McClelland raise a puzzle for proponents of CR which they call *the matching content challenge*. The challenge is as follows. Suppose CR is true, and the phenomenal character of thought is determined by its intentional content. Suppose also that *perceptual representationalism* (PR) is true, and the phenomenal character of perceptual experience is determined by the intentional content of that experience. Now, consider two different experiences: call the experience of visually perceiving that there is a blue wall before me V , and call the experience of thinking that there is a blue wall before me T . Intuitively, these experiences have the same contents. If, however, both CR and PR are true, then there is some *overlap* in phenomenology between V and T , since their phenomenal character supervenes on their intentional content, and their intentional content is the same. But, Bayne and McClelland hold, there is no discernable phenomenological overlap between V and T : seeing a blue wall before me seems *utterly different*, phenomenologically, than thinking that there is a blue wall before me. Therefore, Bayne and McClelland conclude, CR should be rejected.

My goal in this paper is to defend CR against the matching content challenge. As we'll see, a structurally analogous challenge arises for a version of PR: the same intentional content can occur across different sensory modalities with seemingly different phenomenal properties. I explain how proponents of PR can parry this challenge and argue that the same strategies are open to the proponent of CR as well. CR and PR are species of a more general form of representationalism about consciousness; as such, their fates stand and fall together.

Here is the plan. In §1, I lay out the matching content challenge to CR, explaining that the challenge is best formulated when positing an identity relation between phenomenal character and intentional content. In §2, I explain how the matching content challenge can be extended to pose a challenge to PR. I then explore two responses to the challenge, both of which appeal to the notion of

intentional mode. §3 gives a concessive response, arguing that the representationalist can explain why there is no overlap in phenomenal character between T and V by appealing to the difference in intentional mode. §4 gives a more steadfast response, arguing that the representationalist can insist that there *is* some phenomenal overlap between T and V . Because they represent the same content under different modes, T and V are determinates of the same phenomenal determinable.

1. The Matching Content Challenge

Our first order of business is to get clear on what the target of the matching content challenge is and how the challenge ought to be formulated. Recall our statement of CR: it says that the phenomenal character of thought supervenes on its intentional content. That is, there can be no change in thought's phenomenal character without there being some change in its content. CR can thus be seen as the cognitive analogue to a popular claim about the relationship between *perceptual* phenomenology and its intentional content:

Perceptual Representationalism (PR): the phenomenal character of perception supervenes on its intentional content.ⁱⁱ

Notice the parallel structure between CR and PR: they both say that a certain kind of phenomenal character supervenes on a certain kind of intentional content. Both CR and PR are species of a more general representationalist thesis:

General Representationalism (GR): for any experience e , the phenomenal character of e supervenes on the intentional content of e .

GR says that for any experience whatsoever, its phenomenal character supervenes on its intentional content. Note that this thesis extends to experiences that are arguably neither cognitive nor perceptual, e.g., experiences of attention, agency, desire, and so on.

Representationalism is defined here as a supervenience thesis: it says that there can be no difference in the phenomenal character of experience without some difference in its content. What explains the truth of this supervenience thesis? To explain the supervenience thesis, proponents of intentionalism typically *identify* the phenomenal character of experience with the property of representing a certain kind of intentional content. To see how this identity claim explains supervenience, notice that if a state's phenomenal properties are identical to some of its intentional properties, and we vary the phenomenal properties, we thereby vary some of its intentional properties. On the identity view, to have a phenomenal experience of some kind *just is* to represent the world as being a certain way.ⁱⁱⁱ We can state this as the following claim:

Phenomenal Intentional Identity (PII): every phenomenal property is identical to some representational property.

The reason why there can't be any change in phenomenal properties without a change in content is that phenomenal properties are *identical* with representational properties, i.e., properties of representing a content.^{iv} Hence, PII entails GR.

Some hold that there are phenomenal properties that are not identical to a representational properties (i.e., there are non-intentional "qualia")(Block 1996). It is difficult, however, to see how one could on this view explain the supervenience of the phenomenal on the intentional: if phenomenal properties are non-intentional, then surely it is possible to vary these phenomenal properties without thereby varying representational properties. One holding that some or all phenomenal properties are

not identical to representational properties would have to posit unattractive brute necessary connections between phenomenal properties and representational properties in order to explain supervenience.

Given that identity is symmetric, PII entails a restricted supervenience relationship in the opposite direction of CR: some of a state's intentional properties supervene on its phenomenal properties. We might call these its phenomenal-intentional properties. The supervenience relationship in this direction is restricted because the logical form of PII is "all Xs are Ys", which does not entail that "all Ys are Xs (in this case, PII does not entail that all representational properties are phenomenal properties). If there are good theoretical reasons to think that there exist unconscious intentional states, or "wide" intentional contents determined by factors extrinsic to phenomenal character, then PII allows for these. If one denies that there is unconscious or wide intentionality (Pitt 2004, Farkas 2008, Mendelovici 2018) then one would not need the supervenience thesis in this direction to be restricted. But, PII is not committed to denying this. What PII is committed to is that a state's phenomenal-intentional properties are determined by (i.e., supervene on) its phenomenology.

Some proponents of PII go on to endorse a further thesis about phenomenal-intentional properties being reducible. For instance, Michael Tye holds that phenomenal properties are intentional properties, and that these phenomenal-intentional properties are reducible to further functional properties (Tye 1995, 2000). But one can accept the identity claim that all phenomenal properties are intentional properties without being a reductivist about phenomenal-intentional properties (see, for example, Pautz 2013, Mendelovici 2018, Smithies 2019). In explaining GR by adopting PII, one need not commit to a further claim about reduction.

Turning now to the matching content challenge, I formulate the challenge as targeting these species of phenomenal-intentional identifications entailed by PII:

Cognitive Phenomenal Intentional Identity (CPII): every cognitive phenomenal property is identical with some representational property.

Perceptual Phenomenal Intentional Identity (PPII): every perceptual phenomenal property is identical with some representational property.

I focus on formulating the challenge against CPII, as it is plausibly the standard intentionalist explanation of CR—the reason why there can't be a change in cognitive phenomenal properties without a change in intentional content is because every cognitive phenomenal property is identical with representing some intentional content. By formulating the challenge as targeting CPII, we capture Bayne and McClelland's target claim while getting to the heart of the matter. Further, targeting CPII brings out the parallels between CPII and PPII. Indeed, this parallel structure is crucial for generating the matching content challenge, and for extending the challenge to cases of cross-modal perception in §2.

Following Bayne and McClelland, let T be the conscious thought that there is a blue wall before me, and let V be the visual experience of there being a blue wall before me. We can now formulate the matching content challenge against CPII as a *reductio ad absurdum*:

CPII, for reductio (1) Every cognitive phenomenal property is identical with some representational property.

PPII (2) Every perceptual phenomenal property is identical with some representational property.

- Stipulation* (3) T and V have the same intentional content, i.e., the property of representing that there is a blue wall before me.
- from (1)* (4) T has some phenomenal property that is identical with the property of representing that there is a blue wall before me.
- from (2)* (5) V has some phenomenal property that is identical with the property of representing that there is a blue wall before me.
- from (3)-(5)* (6) There is some phenomenal property shared in common between V and T .
- Introspective datum* (7) There is no phenomenal property shared in common between V and T .
- Conclusion* (8) Therefore, it's not the case that every cognitive phenomenal property is identical with some representational property.

I now comment briefly on each of the premises.

(1) is a statement of cognitive phenomenal intentional identity, assumed for reductio. This is the identity relationship between cognitive phenomenal properties and representational properties that explains why the former supervenes on the latter. (2) is a statement of PPII. This is the perceptual analogue of CPII; more on perceptual representationalism in §2.

(3) is the stipulation that T and V have representational properties that are identical to one another. This claim, like the claim that T and V have “matching content,” is ambiguous between two interpretations. One might read (3) as making the universal claim that for *every* representational property, T has this property if and only if V has it; or, one might read it as making the existential claim that there exists some representational property such that T and V both have it. Following Bayne and McClelland (2016, p. 30), I adopt the universal interpretation, but note that the weaker,

existential reading would also allow the argument to go through when combined with the assumption that the representational property T and V share is identical to a phenomenal property of each experience.

(4) and (5) follow from (1) and (2), respectively. If every cognitive phenomenal property is identical with some representational property, then the cognitive phenomenal property of T will be identical with T 's representational property, the property of representing that there is a blue wall before me. The same will hold *mutatis mutandis* for V and its perceptual phenomenal property.

(6) follows from (3)-(5) in virtue of the transitivity of identity: if T has some phenomenal property identical to the property of representing that there is a blue wall before me, and this same representational property is identical to a phenomenal property of V , then T and V will have phenomenal properties identical to one another. In other words, T will have some phenomenal property identical with a phenomenal property of V in virtue of the experiences' representational properties being identical.

(7) is claimed to be an introspective datum: introspection does not seem to reveal *any* shared phenomenal quality between an experience of thinking that there is a blue wall before you and a visual experience of there being a blue wall before you. Bayne and McClelland maintain that there is no common phenomenal property contributed by the identical representational property between T and V .

The conclusion follows from the contradiction derived in (6) and (7). In order to avoid this result, the representationalist who seeks to explain CR in terms of CPII will have to deny one of the other premises of the matching content challenge. Bayne and McClelland survey the prospects for denying (2), the stipulation that T and V have identical representational properties. In particular, they focus on different ways of interpreting the claim that conscious thoughts like T have *conceptual content*, where this difference in content kind is responsible for there being no phenomenal overlap between

T and V . I will not challenge this premise, since it's plausible that T and V have a representational property in common. Instead, I will explore responses that appeal to the fact that this representational property is represented in different ways—that is, by means of different intentional modes.

2. Extending the Challenge to Perceptual Representationalism

Before responding to the matching content challenge, however, I show in this section that the challenge is not limited cognitive representationalism. The challenge can be extended to perceptual representationalism, and representationalism about phenomenal consciousness generally.

To remind ourselves, recall that cognitive phenomenal intentional identity (CPII) and perceptual phenomenal intentional identity (PPII) are both species of phenomenal intentional identity (PII). As such, both CPII and PPII are subject to counterexamples if we can find two states with the same representational property but without any phenomenal property in common. This is the thrust of the matching content challenge to CPII. PPII, however, is also subject to the matching content challenge if we can find two perceptual experiences in different sensory modalities that have identical representational properties without any shared phenomenal property. Ned Block illustrates this in the following case:

Suppose I have an auditory experience as of something overhead, and a simultaneous visual experience as of something overhead . . . The phenomenal contents of both experiences represent something as being overhead, but there is no common phenomenal quality of the experiences in virtue of which they have this representational commonality. (Block 1995, pp. 234-5)

When having an auditory experience as of something overhead and a visual experience as of something overhead, one has two experiences with the same representational property, the property of representing something overhead. But, according to Block, there is no common phenomenal property in virtue of this shared representational property. Other examples in the literature include visual experience of seeing something round versus the haptic experience of feeling something round (Tye 2000, Speaks 2015).

We can thus run a structurally similar version of the matching content challenge for PPII. Let A be an auditory experience as of something overhead, and let B be a visual experience as of something overhead. The matching content challenge for PPII then goes like this:

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| <i>PPII, for reductio</i> | (1') Every perceptual phenomenal property is identical with some representational property. |
| <i>Stipulation</i> | (2') A and B have the same intentional content, i.e., the property of representing something overhead. |
| <i>from (1)</i> | (3') A has some phenomenal property that is identical with the property of representing something overhead. |
| <i>from (1)</i> | (4') B has some phenomenal property that is identical with the property of representing something overhead. |
| (2)-(4) | (5') There is some phenomenal property shared in common between A and B . |
| <i>Introspective datum</i> | (6') There is no phenomenal property shared in common between A and B . |
| <i>Conclusion</i> | (7') Therefore, it's not the case that every phenomenal property is identical with some representational property. |

If PPII is true, then your visual experience and your auditory experience alike will have some phenomenal property that is identical to the same representational property: the property of representing something overhead. If both perceptual experiences have this representational property, and PPII is true, then we expect there to be to some common phenomenal property in virtue of this representational property. But introspection apparently reveals no such common phenomenology. On this version of the matching content challenge, PPII is false.

Notice that the structure of the matching content challenge for PPII mirrors the structure of the matching content challenge to CPII. Taken together, both threaten the general thesis of PII, that every experience has some phenomenal property identical with its representational property. Must those representationalists seeking to explain the apparent supervenience of the phenomenal on the intentional abandon this position in light of the matching content challenge?

In the rest of the paper, I argue that the identity form of representationalism can answer the matching content challenge in one of two ways. While both responses appeal to the notion of *intentional modes*, the responses differ as to whether they grant the alleged introspective datum that T and V (and A and B) have a phenomenal property in common. §3 gives a concessive response. If the representationalist grants the alleged datum, then they can explain *why* these experiences have no common phenomenal property: the same representational property is present under different intentional modes. I show that this response is available to the cognitive representationalist as well as the perceptual representationalist. §4 gives a steadfast response, arguing that there *is* a common phenomenal property between thoughts and perceptions with the same content. When two experiences represent the same content under distinct intentional modes, these experiences are two determinates of the same phenomenal determinable. The upshot of these responses is that, as far as

the matching content challenge is concerned, perceptual representationalism and cognitive representationalism stand or fall together.

3. Concessive Response: Holistic Impure Representationalism

The first response to the matching content challenge concedes the alleged introspective datum in both versions of the challenge. That is, it grants that there is no phenomenal property shared in common between my thought and my perception, nor between my visual perception and my auditory perception. The response, however, denies the form of representationalism assumed in the statement of PII, and so denies each of its species of (1) and (1'). As we'll see, the representationalist can retreat to a position that holds two experiences with the same representational property can have this property under different intentional modes, such that the phenomenal contribution of the content is transfigured by the mode under which it is represented. According to the concessive response, a thought and a perception with the same representational property need not have any phenomenal property in common.

Let's first recall our statement of PII: every phenomenal property is identical with some representational property. At the outset, the representationalist can distinguish between *pure* and *impure* representational properties (Chalmers 2004). As stated, PII assumes that every phenomenal property is identical with some pure representational property. A pure representational property is the property of representing an intentional content. In contrast, an impure representational property is the property of representing a content *under an intentional mode* (Crane 2003). We can then state impure PII as follows:

Impure Phenomenal Intentional Identity: Every phenomenal property is identical to
some impure representational property.

According to impure PII, every phenomenal property is identical to some property of representing a content under an intentional mode. What is the intentional mode of a mental state? It is the *way in which* an intentional content is represented; it is what Chalmers (2004) calls the “manner of representation.” For example, when one sees something overhead, one is representing the content that there is a plane overhead in the mode of vision. When one hears something overhead, one represents the same content in the mode of audition. Appealing to the intentional mode captures the way in which the *attitude* a subject takes toward a content can contribute to the subject’s phenomenal character.

Impure PII says that every phenomenal property is identical with some impure representational property, where an impure representational property is the property of representing a content under a certain mode. Now, impure PII is not yet enough to block the challenge: impure PII concedes that a representational property is an element that determines a phenomenal property. Phenomenal properties are identical to impure representational properties, which are themselves representational properties under intentional modes, so a representational property is on the right-hand side of the equals sign in the identity relation. Despite having different intentional modes, *A* and *B* have the same content figuring into the determination of their phenomenal properties. Because of this shared content, shouldn’t we still expect *some* overlap in phenomenology, some common phenomenal property between *A* and *B*, where none is apparently found?

To block the challenge, we must reject the atomistic model of how the phenomenal character of a mental state is determined. On the atomistic model, a mental state’s phenomenal character is determined by adding the phenomenal atoms of the state: the phenomenal character of the representational property and the phenomenal character of the state’s intentional mode. If this were the case, then there would be *some* phenomenal property identical to a pure representational property—some discernable aspect of the mental state’s phenomenal character has in virtue of its

content. If the atomistic model were correct, then the representationalist could not adopt impurism to reject (1'). For it would follow, then, that *A* and *B* having a common pure representational property entails a common phenomenal property. Indeed, our statement of impure PII says that *every* phenomenal property is identical to some impure phenomenal property. This should be understood as entailing that *no* phenomenal property is identical to some pure representational property. The atomistic model cannot block the challenge because it entails there would be some phenomenal property identical to a pure representational property: the intentional mode contributes to the phenomenal character of the state, but the representational property makes an isolable contribution as well. We therefore must reject the atomistic model of impure PII.

How then must the representationalist understand the way in which impure representational properties determine phenomenal properties? They must adopt impurism on the *holistic model*. On the holistic model, the phenomenal contribution of the intentional content is *transfigured* by the intentional mode of the attitude, such that the state's overall phenomenal character cannot be decomposed into isolable parts.^v We can think of the state's overall phenomenal character as determined by a function, and the representational property—the property of having an intentional content—is an argument in the function. The representational property contributes to the state's phenomenal character, but not in a way that this contribution can be isolated from the state's overall phenomenology. On this model, the phenomenal character of the whole is not determined compositionally by merely adding up the phenomenal character of the parts. The holistic model of impure PII avoids the problems of the atomistic model because no pure phenomenal property survives the process of transfiguration by the state's intentional mode.

To see how adopting impure PII on the holistic model works as a response to the matching content challenge against PPII, let's consider an example. When I visually perceive something overhead and when I auditorily perceive something overhead, these two mental states share a

representational property: the property of having the content “there is something overhead.” The representationalist is committed to this property figuring in the determination of the states’ phenomenal character. On impure PII, however, the intentional mode transfigures the contribution of the phenomenal character made by the representational property. So, seeing something overhead and hearing something overhead is sufficient for the states to lack *any* phenomenal property in common despite their shared representational property. Indeed, holistic impure PII can *explain why*: the difference in intentional modes transfigures the content such that there isn’t *any* common phenomenal property between the two states. The representationalist insistent on the alleged introspective datum thus has phenomenological reasons for adopting the holistic model. They should thus reject the form of PPII presupposed by the challenge: instead of saying that every perceptual phenomenal property is identical with some pure representational property, they can say that every perceptual phenomenal property is identical with some impure representational property. Because *A* and *B* have different impure representational properties in virtue of their different modes, on the holistic model they need not have any phenomenal property in common.

Impure PII is a familiar view (Lycan 1996, Chalmers 2004, Crane 2007). We’ve shown, however, how adopting it on the holistic model can be used to answer the matching content challenge. What’s more, it is available to the cognitive representationalist who endorses CPII just as well as the perceptual representationalist endorsing PPII. In the matching content challenge against CPII, (1) says that every cognitive phenomenal property is identical to some representational property. Because my visually perceiving a blue wall and my thought that there is a blue wall have an identical pure representational property, and the phenomenal character of the perception and the thought are identical to this representational property, we would expect some common phenomenal property between my perception and my thought. The cognitive representationalist can retreat from (1) by adopting impure CPII: every cognitive phenomenal property is identical to some *impure*

representational property. The difference in intentional mode between T and V entails that these experiences have different impure representational properties, and on the holistic model, their shared pure representational property does not determine any common phenomenal property in either state. The key point is that shared content will not make a common, isolable contribution to the phenomenal character. It's not just perceptual modes, such as vision and audition, that are unable to be decomposed from the content when it comes to the contribution they make to the states' phenomenal character. Cognitive modes, such as judging, wondering, or entertaining, also intertwine with the content of the state such that the phenomenal contribution of the content can't be isolated across different modes.

So, the representationalist can adopt impure phenomenal intentional identity on the holistic model to block the matching content challenge. For a representationalist who accepts the alleged introspective datum, this move is especially attractive, because it explains the alleged introspective datum in a way friendly to representationalism. The holistic model explains why there is no common phenomenal property between the two experiences, despite their shared intentional content. The contribution to the phenomenal character by the intentional content is transfigured by the states' intentional mode. The result is that overlap in pure representational property need not entail any overlap in phenomenal character. What's more, while this move is available for the perceptual representationalist, it is just as available for the cognitive representationalist.

4. Steadfast Response: Phenomenal Determinables

The previous section assumed for the sake of the argument the introspective datum that there is no shared phenomenal property between two mental states with identical representational properties but different intentional modes. By appealing to holistic impure PII, the representationalist can explain this alleged introspective datum. But we can now take a step back and ask: is this really an introspective datum? This section develops a steadfast response to the matching content challenge on behalf of the

representationalist, one that *denies* the introspective datum that *T* and *V* (and *A* and *B*) lack any phenomenal overlap. I argue that although these experiences differ in phenomenally determinate respects, they also overlap phenomenally in determinable respects, thus denying (7) in the matching content challenge against CPII (and (6') in the challenge against PPII).^{vi}

Is there any phenomenal property shared in common between my visual experience of seeing that there is a blue wall before me and my cognitive experience of thinking that there is a blue wall before me? One reason to think that that these experiences share at least one phenomenal property is that, as experiences, they both share the phenomenal property of “being phenomenally conscious.” This is the most general determinable that all and only phenomenally conscious experiences share. If they didn’t share this highly determinable phenomenal property, then there would be nothing in virtue of which they all count as phenomenally conscious. There would be no common subject matter we would be picking out in describing my visual experience and my cognitive experience as “experiences.”^{vii}

The existence of phenomenal determinables can be made vivid by considering one’s experiences of different color shades. Compare one’s visual experience of seeing scarlet and one’s visual experience of seeing crimson. These experiences are phenomenally different, and yet there is something phenomenally in common between the two: the determinable property of *seeing red*. The experience of scarlet and the experience of crimson are more like one another than either is to the experience of seeing blue. What explains this similarity? These are two different determinates of a shared determinable phenomenal property—namely, what it’s like to see red.

Other phenomenal determinables corresponding to different sensory modalities are manifest. Consider the difference between visually experiencing color and visually experiencing shape. Seeing red is more similar to seeing blue than seeing square—these experiences have the property of being a visual experience of color. Seeing red and seeing square are more similar to one another, however,

than either is to hearing noise. This is because both experiences are determinates of a phenomenal determinable—namely, the property of *being a visual experience*. Seeing red and seeing square differ phenomenally in virtue of the different ways this phenomenal determinable property is instantiated. Nevertheless, it seems very natural to group these two experiences together in virtue of their both having the phenomenology of vision.

Seeing color and hearing a Chopin nocturne are phenomenally quite different, yet they are more similar to each other than either is to an experience of thinking about philosophy. Experiences in different sensory modalities share the determinable phenomenal property *being sensory*. Further, the experience of thinking about philosophy and judging that a claim is true are more similar to each other than either are to seeing color. These experience both share the phenomenal determinable of *being cognitive*. We can begin to discern a structure of determinates and determinables (see Figure 1).

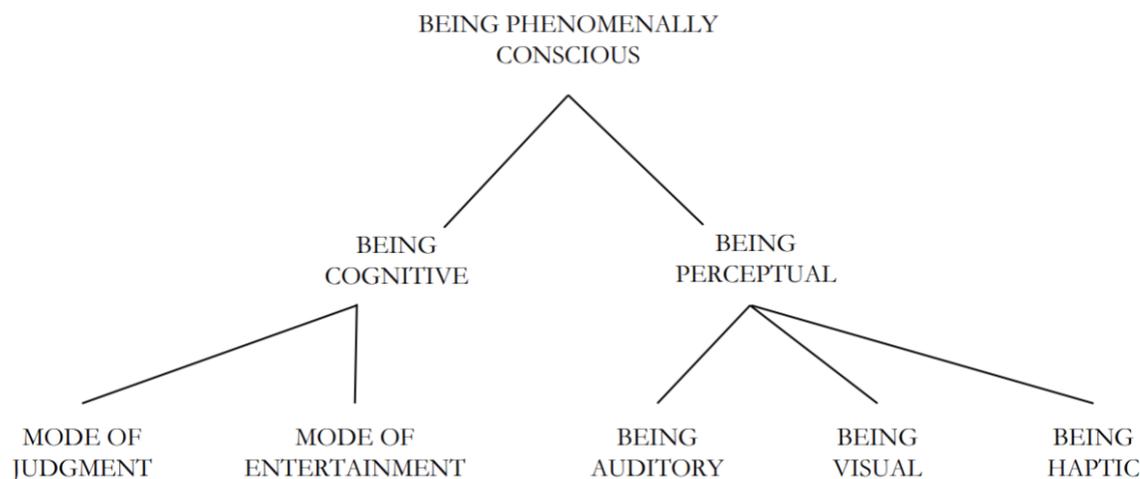


Figure 1

These groupings suggest the existence of a hierarchy of increasingly determinable phenomenal properties. The phenomenal determinable properties in the figure above are determined by a state's intentional mode. When I have the auditory experience of hearing my wife from down the hall, I

experience some content, e.g., my wife speaking down the hall, in the mode of *audition*. Representationalists, however, are committed to the claim that a mental state's representational property determines its phenomenal character. Are there phenomenal determinables on the content side, such that two mental states with the same content might have the same determinable phenomenal property?

Consider one's tactile experience of feeling a round-shaped object and one's visual experience of seeing a round-shaped object. It is plausible that both experiences have the same representational property, being round-shaped. This representational property is itself a determinable property, as one can represent roundness in determinate ways. One can visually represent roundness and one can tactually represent roundness. What's more, this determinable representational property is a *phenomenal* determinable property: there is something distinctive it's like to represent roundness. We tend to focus on the determinate properties of visually representing roundness and tactually representing roundness. But these are two different determinates of the same phenomenal determinable.^{viii}

One might object: the phenomenology of my tactile experiences and the phenomenology of my visual experience feel *very different* from one another. In reply, we can explain *why* they feel so different: the differences in intentional mode make a drastic phenomenal difference. This is consistent, however, with there being a common determinable phenomenal property: the property of consciously representing roundness that they share in virtue of sharing a representational property. The introspective datum here, that there are drastic phenomenal differences between the experiences in question, shows that these experiences are not exactly the same in phenomenal respects. But it doesn't mean that there are *no* respects of phenomenal similarity between them. It's a mistake—though perhaps a natural one—to focus exclusively on the phenomenal differences at the expense of overlooking the phenomenal similarities. It may be difficult to notice the phenomenal similarities because of the striking phenomenal difference made by the difference in intentional mode. This is

why seeing a round-shaped object is phenomenally more like seeing something overhead than seeing a round-shaped object is like feeling a round-shaped object. But this doesn't entail that there is nothing phenomenally in common between two experiences when they share a representational property (though the phenomenal similarities may be hard to notice). There are phenomenal differences determined by intentional mode, and as well as differences in intentional content, and these differences crosscut one another.

There is no commitment to the claim that one can instantiate the determinable property of representing that *p* without instantiating it in some or other determinate way, under some or other intentional mode. This seems true of determinates and determinables generally. One cannot have a mass without having some or other particular mass. But, what explains what two objects with two particular masses have in common is that they share the determinable property of having a mass. Likewise, what explains what my tactile experience of roundness and my visual experience of roundness have in common is that they both have the phenomenal determinable property of representing roundness. This determinable property is a distinct property from its determinate properties, despite the fact that instantiating the determinable entails instantiating a determinate.^{ix}

The representationalist can thus respond to the matching content challenge against PPII by denying the introspective datum, (6'). It's not the case that my visual experience of something overhead and my auditory experience of something overhead have *no* identical phenomenal property. They both have the determinable phenomenal property of representing something overhead. Of course, these two experiences do feel very different, phenomenologically. But the representationalist can explain this: the difference in intentional mode makes for a striking phenomenal difference.

This response to the matching content challenge against PPII shows that two state with the same representational property but different *perceptual* attitudes (vision and audition) can have a common phenomenal property in virtue of sharing this representational property despite differing

phenomenally in virtue of their difference in attitude. Notice, however, that this move is available when it comes to *cognitive* attitudes as well.

Suppose I'm wondering whether or not Biden will win the election at time *T1*. After much deliberation, I judge that Biden will win the election at time *T2*. Then I start thinking about something else—that the electoral college is problematic—at time *T3*. Plausibly, there is a phenomenal similarity between *T1* and *T2* that doesn't exist between *T1* and *T3*. The mental states at *T1* and *T2* have different cognitive attitudes but the same intentional contents, and it is highly plausible that there is an identical phenomenal determinable between the two states in virtue of this content.^x One's wondering and one's judgment are about the same thing; there will thus be a felt similarity between the two cognitive experiences insofar as they share the same topic. To see this, note the phenomenal contrast one undergoes when one understands the phrase "visiting relatives can be boring" first as a statement about relatives that are visiting and later as a phrase about the act of visiting relatives. This phenomenal contrast is one of interpretative switch. Cases of interpretive switch have been used to argue that a difference in content makes a phenomenal difference (Siewert 1998, Horgan and Tienson 2002). But cases of interpretive switch also seem to show that an overlap in representational properties makes for an overlap in phenomenal properties. In light of these points, a general one can be made: a state's representational property, i.e., the property of representing a content, makes a phenomenal contribution. When one entertains some content, and later judges that same content, there are phenomenal groupings between one's entertainment and one's judgment in virtue of their shared content.

When we compare the phenomenology of consciously entertaining that Biden will win the election and the phenomenology of consciously judging that Biden will win the election, the phenomenal contribution of this content is relatively easy to discern. This is because the intentional

modes are relatively phenomenally similar. Entertaining and judging both instantiate the determinable phenomenal property *being cognitive*.

Notice, however, that the same is true of V and T . Both experiences have different determinates of the same determinable property. We can now explain how the representationalist can respond to the matching content challenge against CPlI. As before, the representationalist can deny the introspective datum (7). It's not the case that my visual perception of a blue wall before me and my thought that there is a blue wall before me have *no* identical phenomenal property. They both have the determinable phenomenal property of representing the content "blue wall before me." This phenomenal property will be difficult to notice. But we can explain why this is the case: the difference between a cognitive and perceptual intentional mode makes for a *much more striking* phenomenal difference than the difference between two different cognitive intentional modes, or two different perceptual intentional modes.

So, by appealing to phenomenal determinables, not only can the representationalist resist the matching content's challenge insistence that there is no shared phenomenal character between T and V , but they can *explain why* we might be tempted to grant the introspective datum: there is a greater phenomenal difference between perceiving and judging than there is between judging and entertaining. This drastic difference in intentional mode makes it such that the shared phenomenal determinable, "being a blue wall before me", is easy to overlook in introspection.

5. Conclusion

Here are the main conclusions of the paper:

First, the matching content challenge is not unique to cognitive experience: it extends from cognitive representationalism to perceptual representationalism, thereby threatening representationalist theories of experience in general.

Second, just as the challenge is general, so too are the solutions. If the perceptual representationalist can respond to the challenge in the ways I've argued for, then the cognitive representationalist can too. Perceptual representationalism and cognitive representationalism should thus be seen on equal dialectical footing.

Third, the representationalist can give a concessive response to the matching content challenge by appealing to the holistic model of impure phenomenal intentional identity. This response concedes the alleged introspective datum that T and V share no phenomenal character but explains why we should expect this: the difference in intentional mode between T and V transfigures the phenomenal contribution of their shared representational property such that we ought not expect a common phenomenal property between the two. If the representationalist adopts the alleged introspective datum, then they must adopt the holistic model of impure PII.

Fourth, the representationalist can give a steadfast response to the challenge, denying the alleged introspective datum and insisting that T and V share the phenomenal determinable property "blue wall before me." This phenomenal property might be easy to overlook, but the representationalist can again explain why this is the case: the difference in perceptual mode of vision and the cognitive mode of thought makes for a very striking phenomenal difference.

Fifth, the concessive and steadfast responses offer ways of responding to the matching content challenge that do not require denying the plausible claim that T and V share some representational property in common. They thus avoid any problematic consequences involved in taking on the claim that T has, while V lacks, "conceptual content."

Sixth, the general lesson of the two responses is that, while phenomenal character may outrun intentional content, it does not outrun intentionality. When theorizing about the relationship between phenomenology and intentionality, one ought not neglect the role of intentional modes.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Andre Curtis-Trudel, Rick Lamb, Farid Masrouf, Tristram McPherson, Takuya Niikawa, David Pitt, and Richard Samuels for comments and discussion. Thanks also to audiences at the 2018 San Diego State Philosophy and Representation Conference and the 2020 American Philosophical Association Central Division in Chicago, and to participants in the dissertation seminar at Ohio State in the spring of 2020. Special thanks to Declan Smithies, who gave extensive feedback on this project from inception to completion. I also wish to thank an anonymous referee at *Erkenntnis* whose comments greatly improved the paper. Finally, thanks to Tim Bayne and Tom McClelland for getting me thinking.

References

- Bayne, T. and T. McClelland. (2016). “Finding the Feel”: The Matching Content Challenge to Cognitive Phenomenology. *Phenomenology and Mind* 10: 26-43.
- Block, N. (1995). On a confusion about a function of consciousness. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 18: 227-247.
- Block, N. (1996). Mental Paint and Mental Latex. *Philosophical Issues* 7: 19-49.
- Bourget, D. (2019). Implications of Intensional Perceptual Ascriptions for Relationalism, Disjunctivism, and Representationalism About Perceptual Experience. *Erkenntnis* 84(2): 381-408.
- Brogaard, B. (2018). *Seeing and Saying: The Language of Perception and the Representational View of Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Byrne, A. (2001). Intentionalism defended. *Philosophical Review* 110: 199–240.
- Chalmers, D. (2004). The Representational Character of Experience. In B. Leiter (ed.), *The Future for Philosophy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 153-181.

- Chudnoff, E. (2013). Intellectual Gestalts. In U. Kriegel (ed.), *Phenomenal Intentionality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 174-192.
- Crane, T. (2003). The Intentional Structure of Consciousness. In Q. Smith and A. Jokic (eds.), *Consciousness: New Philosophical Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 33-56.
- Crane, T. (2009). Intentionalism. In A. Beckermann & B. McLaughlin (eds.), *Oxford Handbook to the Philosophy of Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 474-493.
- Crisp, R. (2006). *Reasons and the Good*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dretske, F. (1995). *Naturalizing the Mind*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Farkas, K. (2008). Phenomenal Intentionality Without Compromise. *The Monist* 91(2): 273-293.
- Horgan, T. and Graham, G. (2012). Phenomenal Intentionality and Content Determinacy. In R. Schanz (ed.), *Prospects for Meaning*. De Gruyter, 321-344.
- Horgan, T. and Tienson, J. (2002). The Intentionality of Phenomenology and the Phenomenology of Intentionality. In D. Chalmers (ed.), *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*. New York: Oxford University Press, 520-533.
- Kagan, S. (1992). The Limits of Well-Being. *Social Philosophy & Policy* 9: 169-189.
- Kriegel, U. (2007). Intentional inexistence and phenomenal intentionality. *Philosophical Perspectives* 21(1): 307-340.
- Labukt, I. (2012). Hedonic Tone and the Heterogeneity of Pleasure. *Utilitas* 24: 179-99.
- Lycan, W. (1996). *Consciousness and Experience*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Mendelovici, A. (2018). *The Phenomenal Basis of Intentionality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. *the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 254-309.
- Pautz, A. (2013). Does Phenomenology Ground Mental Content? In U. Kriegel (ed.), *Phenomenal Intentionality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 194-234.
- Pitt, D. (2004). The Phenomenology of Cognition, Or: What Is It Like to Think that P? *Philosophy and*

Phenomenological Research 69(1): 1-36.

Siewert, C. (1998). *The Significance of Consciousness*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

Smithies, D. (2014). The Phenomenal Basis of Epistemic Justification. In J. Kallestrup and M. Sprevak (eds.), *New Waves in Philosophy of Mind*. Palgrave MacMillan, 98-124.

Smithies, D. (2019). *The Epistemic Role of Consciousness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Smuts, A. (2011). The Feels Good Theory of Pleasure. *Philosophical Studies* 155: 241-265.

Speaks, J. (2015). *The Phenomenal and the Representational*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tye, M. (1995). *Ten Problems of Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Tye, M. (2000). *Consciousness, Color, and Content*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Tye, M. (2002). Representationalism and the Transparency of Experience. *Noûs* 36: 137-151.

ⁱ Bayne and McClelland cite Horgan and Graham (2012), Horgan and Tienson (2002), Siewert (1998), Pitt (2004), and Smithies (2014) as endorsing CR. Bayne and McClelland's statement of CR, which they label "the phenomenal content thesis," also includes the claim that the kind of phenomenal character that thoughts have is *distinctive* of thought. While many proponents of CR endorse this distinctiveness claim—in particular, that the kind of phenomenal character that thoughts have is *non-sensory*—it isn't compulsory.

ⁱⁱ Perceptual representationalist views can be found in Tye (1995), Dretske (1995), Lycan (1996), Byrne (2001), Crane (2003), and Chalmers (2004), Speaks (2015), Brogaard (2018), and Mendelovici (2018).

ⁱⁱⁱ See Lycan (1996), Tye (2002), Chalmers (2004), Pautz (2013), Speaks (2015), Mendelovici (2018) and Smithies (2019) for identity views.

^{iv} I am assuming a *relational* view of phenomenal intentionality, according to which contents are abstract objects to which phenomenal properties stand in intentional relations (Pautz 2013, Bourget 2019). On a *non-relational* view, in contrast, phenomenal properties instantiate contents (Kriegel 2007, Mendelovici 2018). I assume the relational view for simplicity, but one could replace it with a non-relational view without substantially changing the overall dialectic. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for urging me to make this assumption explicit.

^v A similar view is developed in Chudnoff (2013).

^{vi} Some phenomenological accounts of pleasure hold that pleasure is a phenomenal determinable. See Kagan (1992), Crisp (2006), Smuts (2011), and Labukt (2012). This point has been made in response to the heterogeneity problem for hedonism, the objection that there is nothing that all pleasures have in common.

^{vii} One might protest: “being phenomenally conscious” is not itself a phenomenal property. In response, my view is that having a phenomenal property is just to be phenomenally conscious in some more or less specific way, and having the phenomenal property “being phenomenally conscious” is the most general way of being phenomenally conscious.

^{viii} The phenomenal determinable of representing that roundness is not a higher-order representation of its determinates; visually representing roundness and tactually representing roundness are simply different determinates of a determinable first-order property.

^{ix} Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this issue.

^x It seems that I can know by introspection when I am occurrently wondering that *p* or when I am occurrently judging that *p*. It has been argued that I could only have this introspective knowledge—that I am wondering and judging about *p* rather than about *q*, and that these attitudes are directed toward the *same* content—if there was something it was like to wonder and judge that *p* as opposed to wondering and judging that *q*. See Pitt (2004).