

My research interests centre on phenomenal consciousness and intentionality. The guiding question of my research to date is this: What is the relation between the phenomenal character of an experience (i.e. what it is like for the subject) and its intentional content (i.e. what it is about)? I am especially interested in alleged types of phenomenal consciousness outside the uncontroversial sensory-perceptual cases: e.g. agentive, emotional, and cognitive experiences. The study of perceptual consciousness has dominated treatment of these issues in recent philosophy of mind, and I believe it is time for the relationship between phenomenal consciousness and other areas of mental life—such as thought; memory; agency; the emotions; and aesthetic, religious, and moral experiences—to receive commensurate attention.

Many philosophers hold that phenomenology is essentially and intrinsically intentional (Chalmers 2004; Kriegel 2013; Crane 2014). I think such “non-reductive intentionalist” or “phenomenal intentionality” views are promising, but they raise several unanswered and interrelated questions. Currently, I am beginning to explore some of these questions, which I organize into two main areas below (in a third area I list additional fertile topics for future research).

**1. How might we explain phenomenal intentionality? Will this explanation apply equally well to all kinds of phenomenal states?**

First, though many philosophers have endorsed phenomenal intentionality in one form or another, I believe we still must strive for an *explanation* of this phenomenon, rather than merely positing it. Might the phenomenology of conscious states explanatorily ground their intentionality, and if so, how? And what are the broader explanatory pay-offs of positing intrinsically intentional phenomenal states?

I think it is questionable whether the standard motivations for accepting the phenomenal intentionality view generalize from sensory-perceptual experience (for which they have typically been given) to other kinds of conscious experience. So we should ask a further question: does the same basic account of how the phenomenology of a state grounds its intentionality apply to all phenomenal-intentional states; or must our explanation differ significantly depending on the kind of conscious state (e.g. perceptual, cognitive, motor, affective) at issue?

My current view regarding cognitive states, which I articulate in work in progress, is that the contents of sensory and cognitive states relate to phenomenal consciousness in two fundamentally different ways. While both rely on phenomenal consciousness to be conscious, only sensory contents are directly fixed and presented by phenomenal character. Cognitive contents, by contrast, are determined by (largely) non-phenomenal factors, but only become conscious through the subject’s using them to “interpret” what is phenomenally presented to

her. A task for future research is to determine whether, e.g., emotions and other affective states are more like sensory states or more like cognitive states in this regard.

## **2. What are the distinguishing “marks” of the phenomenal?**

Attempts to answer the above questions for the full variety of cases currently face a serious problem: it is unclear, beyond perception, how to characterize phenomenology, or what it takes for something to be part of the phenomenal character of an experience. E.g., the apparent intractability of the recent debate about the existence of *sui generis* cognitive phenomenology strongly suggests that the parties to that debate are not working with a single, unified understanding of phenomenal consciousness (see Bayne and Montague 2011a, b). Indeed, to the extent that philosophers of mind even *attempt* to clarify their notion of phenomenology, the attempts typically do not reach beyond appealing to the phrase “what it is like,” introducing technical terms such as ‘qualia’ and ‘phenomenal character’, and perhaps suggesting that phenomenology is whatever gives rise to the “explanatory gap” or “hard problem of consciousness.” The first two moves are uninformative, and it is highly questionable whether the third move adequately captures all instances of the phenomenon in question. Yet without first settling what belongs to the phenomenology of experience and what does not, we cannot settle the relationship between phenomenal character and intentional content.

This challenge sets the context for my second main research area, concerning the nature of phenomenal character. I currently am focused on three ideas about the phenomenology of perceptual experience that can be found in the literature: perceptual phenomenology is held to be *qualitative*; it is held to be *presentational*; and it is held to be *imagistic*. My aim, in the short-to-medium term, is to consider each of these ways of characterizing the phenomenology of perceptual experience in turn and to answer the following question: how far do they generalize to experiences of other kinds? Answers to this question would not only give us crucial guidance on the question of whether and how all phenomenal character is essentially and intrinsically intentional, but also provide the foundations for a more accurate, illuminating, and durable understanding of what we mean when we talk about phenomenology in the first place, which would be of considerable value in a number of other ongoing debates in contemporary philosophy of mind. I spell out each of the three characteristics below.

### ***i. Is all phenomenology qualitative?***

The phenomenology of perceptual experience is often held to be essentially *qualitative*. It is this intuitively qualitative dimension that gives rise to an “explanatory gap” between physical, functional, and structural properties, on the one hand, and phenomenal properties, on the other. But is *all* phenomenology essentially qualitative; or is there conscious phenomenology that is not qualitative in character? I suspect there is no consensus on that point in current philosophy of mind.

The challenge for the view that all phenomenology is qualitative is that even many sensory phenomenal properties—e.g. shape and motion—do not seem to be qualitative in any intuitive sense. The challenge for the view that phenomenology is not essentially qualitative is to articulate what distinguishes phenomenal consciousness from a merely functionally specifiable type of cognitive awareness such as “access consciousness” (Block 1995).

I intend to develop a hybrid view: all phenomenal experience involves the presentation of qualitative properties to the subject; but not every phenomenally conscious feature of experience is a qualitative feature. One implication of this view is that some phenomenal features of experience (the non-qualitative ones) do not on their own give rise to any explanatory gap.

### ***ii. Is all phenomenology presentational?***

Many philosophers claim that the phenomenology of perceptual experience is essentially presentational: i.e. that perceptual experience involves the presentation (or apparent presentation) of objects and properties to the conscious subject. (That view sits very naturally with the idea that perceptual phenomenology is essentially intentional.) But it is less clear whether the phenomenology of non-sensory experience can plausibly be taken to be presentational. It is also unclear whether intentionality is essentially presentational; or whether, rather, an experience might be intrinsically intentional without having a presentational nature.

In addressing these questions, I first must distinguish between potential senses of ‘presentational’ that are relevant to the discussion. Then I explore the prospects for a non-presentational account of the phenomenology of non-sensory experience: an account on which non-sensory experiences do not involve the direct presentation (or apparent presentation) of objects and properties to awareness (but might nonetheless have a form of intrinsic intentional content). My tentative preliminary conclusion is that something like this account is viable, but it raises the question of whether such non-presentational non-sensory experience, though undoubtedly closely related to phenomenal consciousness, should really be considered to have a distinctive phenomenal character at all, or whether, instead, the phenomenal features of experience should be identified with the presentational features (this may be simply a matter of how best to use our terms/concepts).

### ***iii. Is all phenomenology imagistic?***

There is an intuitive distinction between pictorial and imagistic representation, on the one hand, and language-like or symbolic representation, on the other. (See e.g. Greenberg 2011 and Kulvicki 2014.) A traditional and very natural view is that perceptual experiences represent

in a pictorial fashion, while thoughts, by contrast, are more like symbolic representations than like pictures. Can this distinction tell us anything about the respective phenomenal characters of perceptual and non-perceptual experiences, and about their relationships to intentional contents?

I plan to develop and defend the claim that sensory-perceptual phenomenology has an imagistic structure that plays a crucial role in the way it fixes intentional content (this relates back to the first area of research, above). This will raise the important question of whether experiences outside of sense perception exhibit the imagistic structural characteristics of perceptual experiences, and if not, whether they might succeed in having intrinsic intentionality with a different kind of structural format altogether.

### **3. Further Questions: the scope and organization of phenomenal consciousness**

I see further research questions following on from this project in at least two broad directions. The first direction involves attempting to get clearer on some of the *basic organizing mental categories* that are presupposed in the above research (and in much of the contemporary study of mind), in particular the distinction between perception and cognition, and the distinction within perception between the sensory and non-sensory. Further along these lines, if the best characterization of phenomenology at least leaves open the possibility of there being phenomenology beyond the sensory (as I have assumed above), then it would be helpful to say what distinguishes the sensory phenomenal properties from the rest as a unified phenomenal kind. (This may involve adverting to a more fundamental difference between sensory and non-sensory states in general, or it may appeal to something unique about the sensory *phenomenology*.) One possible position to defend, which I take seriously but am not committed to at present, is that all and only the presented phenomenal properties—in a proprietary sense of “presentation” I articulate in work in progress—are sensory.

A second direction for further research involves getting clearer on *the overall scope of phenomenal consciousness*: which kinds of mental states are phenomenally conscious? How many different sorts of phenomenal properties exist for the normal human mind and how should we categorize them?

One way into the scope question, which I have explored, is the phenomena that I call, following William James (1890), the Fringe of consciousness (e.g. the phenomenology of recognizing a face in a crowd as familiar, or sensing a word “on the tip of your tongue”). I believe there are compelling reasons to think that what Fringe experiences are like is not entirely reducible to sensory phenomenology, though they play a key role in our cognitive economy (Mangan 2001, Epstein 2000, 2004). If so, then we have good reason to suppose that phenomenal character at least extends beyond sensory perceptual cases. Further, I am

attracted to the view that Fringe experiences are qualitatively similar to at least many types of emotional, moral, religious, and aesthetic experiences, in which case, one might think of these as exhibiting qualities that all fall under an umbrella category of *affective phenomenology*, distinct from the sensory-perceptual domain.

(Whether or not—according to my most recent views discussed in the first section above—phenomenal character extends to thoughts and full-blown cognitive states with conceptual content, will depend on how we understand the relationship between sensory phenomenal contents and the conscious cognitive contents that “interpret” them. I suggest that while cognitive contents and states are conscious via their relation to phenomenal character (and so in a sense count as phenomenally conscious), conscious cognitive contents are not identical to, or metaphysically determined by, any phenomenal character. Thus, in at least one sense the scope of phenomenal consciousness does *not* include thought and cognition: cognitive states do not possess a proprietary phenomenal character, phenomenal properties whose instantiation suffices for the obtaining of a cognitive state and thus are inseparable from such states.)

Additionally, I have an ongoing interest in exploring whether Fringe phenomenology might be invoked in accounts of the mental lives of subjects with psychiatric illnesses, particularly schizophrenia (see Hemsley 2005 and Carr 2010).

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