

On the Content of Experience*

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The intentionalist about consciousness holds that the qualitative character of experience, “what it’s like,” is determined by the contents of a select group of special intentional states of the subject. Fred Dretske (1995), Mike Thau (2002), Michael Tye (1995) and many others have embraced intentionalism, but these philosophers have not generally appreciated that, since we are intimately familiar with the qualitative character of experience, we thereby have special access to the nature of these contents. In this paper, we take advantage of this fact to show that intentionalism is incompatible with the idea that these contents are singular or general propositions, and thus that intentionalism is incompatible with one dominant trend in thinking about contents in general. In particular, there appear to be insoluble difficulties in explaining how the phenomenology of place and time can be explained by any intentionalist theory appealing to singular or general propositions.

1. Introduction

Ruth is looking at Jon. She experiences Jon as being about four metres away, as being pale just now, as wearing blue jeans, and so on: all of this is part of the *qualitative character* of her experience. According to many current theorists, Ruth experiences Jon as she does because her experiences are mental states that have particular *contents*. The view that the qualitative character of an experience is to be explained by its content is generally known as ‘representationalism’ or (as we will say) ‘intentionalism’.

According to the strongest form of intentionalism, the qualitative character of an experience just *is* its content. A number of current theorists hold this form of intentionalism:

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perceptual experience has none but representational properties (at least so far as consciousness is concerned). (McGinn, 1989: 75)

the quality of experience, how things seem to us at the sensory level, is constituted by the properties things are represented as having. (Dretske, 1995: 1)

the intentional content of an experience comprises everything one is aware of in having that experience. (Harman, 1999: 260)

phenomenal consciousness consists in a certain sort of intentional content. (Carruthers, 2000; : xiii)¹

Phenomenal character is one and the same as representational content. (Tye, 2003: 166)²

But there are other, weaker theses that one might also hold as an intentionalist. For instance, Mike Thau (2002: 33) holds only that “all subjective differences are explained in terms of representational differences.” Holding this principle seems to require holding the corresponding principle about sameness. (Otherwise, differences in content would sometimes be used to explain sameness of qualitative character and sometimes be used to explain differences in qualitative character.) For our purposes, one will count as an intentionalist so long as one accepts that sameness of qualitative character is to be explained by sameness of the contents of experiences and that differences in qualitative character are to be explained by differences in the contents of experiences.³

Most intentionalists claim that, in addition to being content-bearing mental states, experiences have two important features. First, experiences have some feature that distinguishes them from other content-bearing mental states such as beliefs and desires. Intuitively, the contents of a subject’s beliefs and desires do not make any direct difference to qualitative character; so, if the contents of her experiences do make such a difference, then there must be some feature of her experiences that

¹ See also Carruthers, 2000: 257-9.

² See also Tye, 1995: 137;. Although Bill Lycan is a little more difficult to interpret, he seems to hold a similarly strong view. For example, he says that phenomenal objects “are intentional objects” (Lycan, 1996: 8). Dan Dennett is perhaps hardest to pin down, but our best reading of him is that he is a strong intentionalist in our sense. (See, for example, Dennett, 1991.)

³ It thus follows that John McDowell (1994) is not an intentionalist for our purposes, since McDowell holds that non-human animals have consciousness (sentience) without having content-bearing mental states. (See, for example, McDowell, 1994: 114-15.) Likewise, the very weak form of intentionalism characterized in Byrne, 2001 will not count as intentionalism for our purposes.

distinguishes them from her beliefs and desires. Second, experiences play some appropriate functional role in virtue of which their contents are available to cognitive systems in some way. The idea here is that nothing is an experience unless it is somehow integrated into a larger psychology: an experience is always an experience that some larger psychological entity has. There is disagreement among intentionalists about what exactly these two features amount to, but most intentionalists agree that some account of these features must be given.⁴

We believe that intentionalism has a commitment that has not been adequately noted by its adherents. According to intentionalism, sameness and difference of qualitative character are explained by sameness and difference of content. Since the qualitative character of experience is introspectively accessible, it follows that, if intentionalism is true, then theories of mental content have introspectible consequences, at least insofar as those theories are meant to extend to the contents of experience. It follows that phenomenology can be brought to bear on theories of mental content: if the phenomenological consequences of a theory of mental content are false, then so is that theory, if intentionalism is true. This feature of intentionalism has not been made much of in the literature, yet it strikes us as dramatic: if intentionalism is true, then theories about the contents of experience are beholden to phenomenology.⁵ To put it crudely, the correct theory of content can simply be *read off* one's visual phenomenology, if intentionalism is true.

There are two familiar sorts of theories of content. According to one, contents are structured entities that contain nondescriptive modes of presentation, which present objects, properties, and relations, but not by describing them as having certain properties. According to the other, contents are singular and general propositions, which are structured entities that contain objects, properties, and relations but that do not contain nondescriptive modes of presentation of them. In this paper, we consider whether there is any way of making intentionalism consistent with what we take to be the leading view of content: namely, that the contents of all mental states are singular or general propositions. Some intentionalists—McGinn (1989), Dretske (1995), Thau (2002), and Tye (2003) among them—make clear, directly or indirectly,

⁴ There is far from universal agreement about the second of these features, although the disagreements are not significant for present purposes. For example, Carruthers (2000) allows for unconscious experiences, but he denies that they affect qualitative character; Dennett (1991) is not committed to a sharp distinction between experience and belief; and Thau (2002) has several commitments, especially to the view that experiences are not mental particulars, that make his position more complex.

⁵ Carruthers (2000: 104-113) is an exception, but he makes much less of this feature of intentionalism than we do here.

their commitment to these sorts of propositions.⁶ Others make clear that singular and general propositions are not the sorts of contents responsible for qualitative character.⁷ Still others leave their positions open. We argue that intentionalists face a dilemma: either abandon these propositions as the contents of experience and defend an alternative theory of content, or bite the bullet and accept some surprising phenomenological consequences.

It might be thought obvious that the content of experience is non-conceptual and so nonpropositional. But, if the content of experience is nonpropositional, then it is simply a gross mistake on the part of Dretske and company to hold otherwise, and this paper can be speedily concluded. We follow Dretske and company, however, in holding that whether a content is conceptual or nonconceptual is not, in the first place, a matter of what the content is like but rather a matter of what a mental state that has that content is like. On Dretske's (1995: Chapter 1) view, for instance, a conceptual content is the content of a mental state that derives its function from natural selection over neural populations within a single organism, while a nonconceptual content is the content of a mental state that derives its function from natural selection over organisms within a breeding population, and this is all that distinguishes the mental states: their contents themselves can, in principle, be just the same. Perhaps Dretske is wrong about this latter claim. But, if he is, it does not follow directly from how he picks out nonconceptual contents, so there is a substantial debate here.

The plan of the paper is straightforward. In Section 2, we argue that intentionalists who take the contents of experience to be singular propositions face implausible phenomenological consequences. In Sections 3-6, we argue that intentionalists who take the contents of experience to be general propositions of one kind or another fare no better. Our argument relies on cases that are similar to Ned Block's (1990) well-known Inverted Earth case: all of these cases are ones in which apparent differences in the contents of experience are not matched by differences in qualitative character. But the cases that we rely on are not outlandish: our cases feature no distant planets with inverted spectra, no slow switching of content, no inverting lenses, and hence they make no call upon intuitions regarding these bizarre possibilities. On the contrary, our cases are mundane ones in which a subject experiences a person as having a property in the here and now.

⁶ As a long-arm functionalist, Harman (1999) would also seem to be committed to singular and general propositions as contents.

⁷ See Carruthers, 2002.

Before going on, a brief comment is in order. Our arguments, though negative, are not intended to establish the falsity of intentionalism. Rather, they are intended as a spur to those intentionalists who have complacently accepted that contents are someone else's business, as a challenge to those who have been confident that singular or (more typically) general propositions will see an intentionalist through without any real difficulties, and as a partial vindication of those who have doubted this former view. Intentionalists have often said a little about what the contents of experiences are like, but they have rarely said enough, given the intimate epistemic relation to contents that they attribute to us. Our larger purpose in this paper is to make plain how pressing the need is among intentionalists to have a concerted discussion about *exactly* how to understand the content of experience.

2. Singular Problems

Return to Ruth and Jon. Ruth experiences Jon as being about four metres away and as being pale just now. Intentionalists might say that the contents of her experience include that Jon is about four metres away and that Jon is pale just now. Call this *the singular view* of the contents of experience. On the singular view, these contents are singular propositions, which contain the objects and properties that they are about. The content that Jon is about four metres away, for example, will be a proposition that contains (i) Jon; (ii) the *being located at* relation; and (iii) *l*, a particular location about four metres away from Ruth. Similarly, the content that Jon is pale just now will be a proposition that contains (i) Jon; (ii) the property *being pale*; and (iii) *t*, the time at which Ruth experiences Jon as being pale.⁸ These singular propositions can be represented by the following ordered *n*-tuples:

< Jon, *being located at*, *l* >

and

< Jon, *being pale*, *t* > .

⁸ Alternatively, the first singular proposition might contain only Jon and the relational property *being located at l*, and the second singular proposition might contain only Jon and the "tensed" property *being pale at t*. But nothing hangs on this: since these properties are tied to particular locations and times, our argument in this section would be unaffected.

But there is a problem for intentionalists who take these singular propositions to be among the contents of Ruth's experience. Ruth might have been looking at Jon's qualitatively indistinguishable twin Brian at a different but qualitatively indistinguishable location l^* and at a different but qualitatively indistinguishable time t^* . In that case, the contents of her experience would have included, not the singular proposition that Jon is located at l or that Jon is pale at t , but rather the singular propositions that Brian is located at l^* and that Brian is pale at t^* . These singular propositions can be represented by

< Brian, *being located at, l^** >

and

< Brian, *being pale, t^** > .

Obviously, these singular propositions are distinct from the singular propositions that are among the contents of Ruth's experience when she is looking at Jon at location l and time t . So, on the singular view, the qualitative character of her experience is the same on the two occasions, but the contents of her experiences would be different, thus violating intentionalism.

Of course, intentionalists who say that the contents of mental states, including experiences, are singular *or* general propositions can reject the singular view. Instead, such intentionalists can say that the contents of Ruth's experience are general propositions, ones that contain properties, relations, and logical machinery but that do not contain particular objects such as Jon or t or l : many have made it clear that this is their preferred approach. By opting for general propositions as the contents of experience, intentionalists might hope to avoid the implausible phenomenological consequences of the singular view. But, as we argue in the rest of the paper, intentionalists who opt for general propositions fare no better.

3. Persons and Other Objects

There is no shortage of ways in which intentionalists might eliminate persons and other objects from the contents of experience. Here is one. Jon appears to have certain perceptible properties: paleness, say, or dark-brownness, or smoothness. Intentionalists might say that, when Ruth is looking at Jon, she has multiple experiences, each of which concerns the instantiation of one of Jon's perceptible properties. For every perceptible property that Jon appears to have, Ruth has some

experience that concerns its instantiation. The contents of these experiences can be represented by

< Perceptible property F_1 , *being instantiated* >

< Perceptible property F_2 , *being instantiated* >

...

and

< Perceptible property F_n , *being instantiated* > ,

where *being instantiated* is a (higher-order) property of properties. Call this *the bundle view* of the contents of experience. An immediate problem for the bundle view arises in cases of hallucination. If Ruth is hallucinating and none of the perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n is in fact instantiated in front of her, then we will want to say that the contents of her experiences are *nonveridical*. But, on the bundle view, the contents of Ruth's experiences specify only that some perceptible properties are instantiated, without specifying *where* or *when* those properties are instantiated. And, if each of those properties happens to be instantiated somewhere or other (on the other side of the world, say), then it will turn out that the contents of Ruth's experience are veridical.⁹ Call this *the hallucination problem*.

To deal with the hallucination problem, intentionalists can say that, for every perceptible property that Jon appears to have, Ruth has an experience that concerns its instantiation at a particular location and at a particular time. The contents of these experiences can be represented by

< Perceptible property F_1 , *being instantiated at*, l_1 , t_1 >

< Perceptible property F_2 , *being instantiated at*, l_2 , t_2 >

...

and

< Perceptible property F_n , *being instantiated at*, l_n , t_n > ,

⁹ Indeed, it is not even necessary that all of the perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n be instantiated at the same location or time for the contents of Ruth's experiences to be veridical on the bundle view.

where *being instantiated at* is a three-place relation that holds among properties, locations, and times.¹⁰ Call this *the spatiotemporalized bundle view* of the contents of experience. The spatiotemporalized bundle view solves the hallucination problem: if Ruth is hallucinating and the perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n are not instantiated at the right location and time (in front of her when she is looking, say), then the contents of her experiences will be nonveridical, even if each of those properties is instantiated somewhere or other in space and time. But the spatiotemporalized bundle view conflicts with everyday phenomenology, since we experience certain perceptible properties as being bound together in some manner. When Ruth sees Jon, for example, she does not merely see various perceptible properties instantiated at various locations in close proximity to one another; rather, there is something about her experience that groups these perceptible properties together into a whole, which Ruth experiences as the object (or, in this case, person) that has those properties.¹¹ Call this *the binding problem*.

To deal with the binding problem, intentionalists can say that Ruth has a single experience that concerns the perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n .¹² For example, when Ruth experiences Jon as being about four metres away, she has an experience with the content that the object that has the perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n is about four metres away; and, when she experiences him as being pale just now, she has an experience with the content that the object that has the perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n is pale just now. If these contents are general propositions, then (unlike the singular propositions that Jon is about four metres away and that Jon is pale just now) they will not contain Jon himself. Rather, they will contain the perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n . For example, these general propositions can be represented by

<[THE x : x has the perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n], *being located at, l* >

¹⁰ These propositions contain particular locations and times. In this respect, they are not purely general. We ignore this complication in this section (but we note in passing that whether different propositions concern different locations and times or the same location and time depends on where and when various perceptible properties are experienced as being located). How intentionalists might deal with the representation of space and time in experience is addressed in the next sections.

¹¹ Some autistic subjects report that their experiences of persons and other objects don't group perceptible properties together in this way. See Williams, 1992. Obviously, subjects who aren't autistic don't share this phenomenology.

¹² Tye, 2003 is a much more sophisticated discussion of related issues.

and

<[THE x : x has the perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n], *being pale, t* > ,

where [THE x : x has the perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n] is something that contains the perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n and that picks out the unique object (if there is one) that has those properties. Call this *the definite view* of the contents of experience. The definite view solves the binding problem, since the contents of Ruth's experience entail that a single object has the perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n . But the definite view has problems of its own. Generally, if other things are equal (and Ruth is not hallucinating, say), then the contents of Ruth's experience will be *veridical*. Consider the general proposition that the object that has the perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n is pale just now. For it to be veridical, there must be *exactly* one object that has those properties. But, on the definite view, the contents of Ruth's experience specify only that some perceptible properties are jointly instantiated, without specifying *where* or *when* those properties are instantiated; and it need not be the case that only one object has those properties. For example, Jon and his qualitatively indistinguishable twin Brian might instantiate exactly the same perceptible properties, the difference between them being that Jon instantiates those properties *here*, whereas Brian instantiates those properties *there*. So the contents of Ruth's experience might turn out to be nonveridical, even in ordinary cases. Call this *the uniqueness problem*.

To deal with the uniqueness problem, intentionalists can say that Ruth has a single experience that concerns the instantiation of the perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n at particular locations and at a particular time. For example, when Ruth experiences Jon as being about four metres away, she has an experience with the content that the object that has the perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n *at particular locations and at a particular time* is about four metres away; and, when she experiences him as being pale just now, she has an experience with the content that the object that has the perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n *at particular locations and at a particular time* is pale just now. The general propositions that are these contents can be represented by

<[THE x : at time t x has the perceptible property F_1 at location l_1, \dots , and the perceptible property F_n at location l_n], *being located at, l^** >

and

<[THE x : at time t x has the perceptible property F_1 at location l_1, \dots , and the perceptible property F_n at location l_n], being pale, t^* > ,

where [THE x : at time t x has the perceptible property F_1 at location l_1, \dots , and the perceptible property F_n at location l_n] is something that contains the perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n , that contains (or is otherwise tied to) the time t and the locations l_1, \dots, l_n , and that picks out the unique object (if there is one) that has those properties at those places and at that time. Call this *the spatiotemporalized definite view* of the contents of experience. The spatiotemporalized definite view solves the uniqueness problem. If the contents of Ruth's experience include that the object that at time t has the perceptible property F_1 at location l_1, \dots , and the perceptible property F_n at location l_n is about four metres away and that the object that at time t has the perceptible property F_1 at location l_1, \dots , and the perceptible property F_n at location l_n is pale just now, then the contents of her experience can be veridical even if Jon's qualitatively indistinguishable twin Brian instantiates those perceptible properties somewhere else or at some other time.

It might be objected that the spatiotemporalized definite view does not solve the uniqueness problem after all. It follows from the spatiotemporalized definite view that no experience of two objects with the same perceptible properties at the same spatiotemporal locations could ever have veridical contents. If Jon's and Brian's perceptible properties happen to have the same spatiotemporal locations (perhaps because of quantum mechanical effects or because their brains have been squeezed into the same skull and they now share a body), then on the spatiotemporalized definite view Ruth's experience of Jon and Brian cannot have veridical contents. After all, on the spatiotemporalized definite view the contents of her experience entail that there is a unique object that at time t has the perceptible property F_1 at location l_1, \dots , and the perceptible property F_n at location l_n , yet there is no such unique object, since there are two things—namely, Jon and Brian—that have those perceptible properties at those spatiotemporal locations.

In response, intentionalists could bite the bullet and say that, in the admittedly bizarre coincidence case sketched above, the contents of Ruth's experience are not veridical. Alternatively, intentionalists could say that the contents of Ruth's experience include, not the general proposition that *the* object that at time t has the perceptible property F_1 at location l_1, \dots , and the perceptible property F_n at location l_n is about four metres away, but rather that *an* object that at time t has the

perceptible property F_1 at location l_1 , ..., and the perceptible property F_n at location l_n is about four metres away. Call this *the spatiotemporalized indefinite view* of the contents of experience. The spatiotemporalized indefinite view solves the uniqueness problem even in the coincidence case, since on the spatiotemporalized indefinite view the contents of Ruth's experience entail only that at least one object at time t has the perceptible property F_1 at location l_1 , ..., and the perceptible property F_n at location l_n .

There might thus be some advantage to holding the spatiotemporalized indefinite view over the spatiotemporalized definite view. In this paper, we do not take a stand on this issue. But we do want to take a stand on whether there is any advantage to holding either of these spatiotemporalized views over the view that the contents of Ruth's experience include the general proposition that an object that has the perceptible properties F_1 , ..., F_n *tout court* (and not at some locations or at some time) is about four metres away. Call this *the (unspatiotemporalized) indefinite view* of the contents of experience. Unlike either of its spatiotemporalized rivals, the indefinite view faces the hallucination problem, so it is not as attractive.

So, of the views we have canvassed so far, either the spatiotemporalized definite view or the spatiotemporalized indefinite view seems to fare the best. But, in virtue of their spatiotemporalization, both views face a further problem. On either view, the contents of Ruth's experiences are general propositions that are tied to particular locations and times. As a result, intentionalists who adopt either spatiotemporalized view are still stuck without an explanation of why the qualitative character of Ruth's experience is the same whether she is looking at Jon here and now or at Jon at a distinct location and time. In a way, abandoning singular propositions that contain persons and other objects in favour of general propositions that contain perceptible properties but that are nonetheless tied to particular locations and times is progress: it reduces the problem of how persons and other objects are represented in experience to the problem of how the instantiation of properties in space and time is represented in experience and hence to the problem of how space and time are represented in experience. But, as we argue in the next sections, there is reason to think that intentionalists who opt for singular or general propositions cannot solve the problem of how space and time are represented in experience.

Before going on to address the representation of space and time in experience, however, we digress for a moment to consider a quite different sort of problem with replacing singular propositions that contain persons or other objects with general propositions that contain perceptible properties. The problem is that, at least in some cases, this

strategy threatens to conflict with phenomenology, for it seems that particular persons or objects might not be completely dispensable from the contents of experience after all. It is true that, in general, a bar of soap looks only like a bar of soap of some kind, not like a particular bar of soap somehow distinguished from all other qualitatively indistinguishable bars of soap; and likewise for many other objects. But perhaps there are exceptions. Consider what it is like to look at an excellent caricature compared to what it is like to look at a mediocre caricature. Suppose that the mediocre caricature is less extravagant in its exaggerations and thus looks more like its target in some purely physical sense. Still, the superior caricature will be said to “look like the person,” while the mediocre caricature will not. Perhaps this is an expression of a difference in the qualitative character of experience. Perhaps this difference arises when the superior caricature but not the inferior causes an experience whose content contains the caricatured person. This is weak but genuine phenomenological evidence for the claim that, in certain cases, persons *do* figure in the contents of experience. Similarly, consider what it is like to see a person who looks uncannily like another person you know well (as a result of disguise, or coincidence, or the existence of a previously unknown identical twin). One can feel subject to a sort of optical illusion that cannot be dispelled merely by knowing that it is an illusion, an illusion that it is the person herself, and not her doppelgänger, who is seen. Perhaps the illusion comes from the fact that, in addition to accurately representing the perceptible properties of the impostor, one also misrepresents the impostor as being the person she resembles. (For, otherwise, what would be illusory?) Thus, perhaps there is phenomenological evidence for the claim that, in certain cases, Ruth’s experience tells her that she is seeing Jon, not Brian, even if Jon and Brian are qualitatively indistinguishable.

Even if it is held that persons do sometimes figure in the contents of experience, this need not be a fatal problem for intentionalists, for they can hold that persons figure in the contents of experience sometimes but not always. Only when it is possible for a person to look to Ruth like *Jon* does Jon himself figure in the contents of Ruth’s experience: otherwise, it is only certain perceptible properties that figure in the contents of her experience. To our knowledge, no intentionalist has staked out this position; but there is nothing inimical to intentionalism in it, and it might even be essential to preserving the plausibility of the view.¹³

¹³ This position runs against the explicit principles of some intentionalist views—for example, Tye’s (1995, 2000, 2003)—but these principles could be modified without affecting the rest of the theory.

4. Space and Time

Intentionalists might be able to deal with the representation of persons and other objects in experience, but we now come to a problem that we do not think that intentionalists who opt for singular or general propositions as the contents of experience can solve: namely, the representation of space and time in experience. If Ruth sees Jon twice, once in a house on West Gate on Monday, once in a qualitatively indistinguishable house on East Gate at a qualitatively indistinguishable time on Tuesday, then Ruth's experiences of Jon will have the same qualitative character. So, according to intentionalism, Ruth's experiences will have the same contents. But then what are the contents of Ruth's experience when she experiences him as being about four metres away or when she experiences him as being pale just now?

The contents of Ruth's experience cannot include the singular propositions represented by

$\langle \text{Jon, being located at, } l \rangle$

and

$\langle \text{Jon, being pale, } t \rangle$.

Otherwise, the sameness of the qualitative character of her experiences on West Gate on Monday and East Gate on Tuesday will be unexplained. So the contents of Ruth's experience cannot include singular propositions that contain either l or t . But, for the same reason, the contents of her experience cannot include any propositions that are tied to particular locations or times either. It follows that neither the spatiotemporalized definite view nor the spatiotemporalized indefinite view discussed in the previous section can be extended to the representation of space and time in experience. Suppose that the location l appears to have perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n and that the time t appears to have perceptible properties G_1, \dots, G_m . (It is not entirely clear that particular times appear to have perceptible properties in the way that persons, other objects, and locations do; but never mind that.) On either spatiotemporalized view, the contents of Ruth's experience concern the instantiation of these properties at particular locations and a particular time. For example, on the spatiotemporalized definite view, the contents of her experience might include the general propositions represented by

$\langle [\text{THE } x: x \text{ has } \dots], \text{ being located at, } [\text{THE } y: \text{ at time } t \text{ } y \text{ has the perceptible property } F_1 \text{ at location } l_1, \dots, \text{ and the perceptible property } F_n \text{ at location } l_n] \rangle$

and

<[THE x : x has . . .], *being pale*, [THE y : at time t y has the perceptible property G_1 at location l_1 , ..., and the perceptible property G_m at location l_m]> .¹⁴

But, on the spatiotemporalized definite view, if Ruth had been looking at Jon at a distinct location l^* and at a distinct time t^* , the contents of her experience would have included different general propositions: for example, the ones represented by

<[THE x : x has . . .], *being located at*, [THE y : at time t^* y has the perceptible property F_1 at location l_1^* , ..., and the perceptible property F_n at location l_n^*]>

and

<[THE x : x has . . .], *being pale*, [THE y : at time t^* y has the perceptible property G_1 at location l_1^* , ..., and the perceptible property G_m at location l_m^*]> .

So, once again, intentionalists who adopt either spatiotemporalized view are stuck with the consequence that the sameness of the qualitative character of Ruth's experiences lacks an explanation.

This problem with either spatiotemporalized view might lead intentionalists to reconsider their unspatiotemporalized counterparts: namely, the definite view and the indefinite view. On the definite view, the contents of Ruth's experience include the general propositions represented by

<[THE x : x is . . .], *being located at*, [THE y : y has the perceptible properties F_1 , ..., F_n]>

and

<[THE x : x has . . .], *being pale*, [THE y : y has the perceptible properties G_1 , ..., G_m]> .

¹⁴ For the sake of simplicity, in this section (and sometimes in subsequent sections, too) we ignore the details of the representation of persons in experience. Attending to these details would only reveal that the propositions in question are further tied to particular times and locations.

On the indefinite view, by contrast, the contents of Ruth's experience include the general propositions represented by

<[THE x : x is . . .], *being located at*, [SOME y : y has the perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n]>

and

<[THE x : x has . . .], *being pale*, [SOME y : y has the perceptible properties G_1, \dots, G_m]> .

But the definite view and the indefinite view both face familiar problems. On the one hand, the definite view faces the uniqueness problem: if more than one location has the perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n , or if more than one time has the perceptible properties G_1, \dots, G_m , then the contents of Ruth's experience will turn out to be nonveridical, even in ordinary cases. And, on the other hand, the indefinite view faces the hallucination problem: if some other location somewhere has the perceptible properties F_1, \dots, F_n , or if some other time has the perceptible properties G_1, \dots, G_m , then it might turn out that the contents of Ruth's experience are veridical, even if she is hallucinating and nothing in front of her has the right properties when she is looking.

None of the views that we considered in the case of the representation of persons and other objects in experience helps intentionalists deal with the representation of space and time in experience in a way that avoids the troublesome phenomenological consequence: namely, that, if Ruth had been looking at Jon at a distinct but qualitatively indistinguishable location or at a distinct but qualitatively indistinguishable time, then the sameness of the qualitative character of her experience could not be explained by content.¹⁵ In the face of this, intentionalists might be tempted to deny that Ruth's experience would really be qualitatively indistinguishable. Perhaps the qualitative character of Ruth's experiences really would be different in special cases: perhaps we are capable of experiencing certain locations or times as particulars, as was suggested in the previous section for persons. Perhaps a person strongly familiar with a particular location, such as a childhood neighbourhood, can experience it as being *that* location. We occasionally feel that it is a particular time of day, for instance, and perhaps this involves having

¹⁵ For obvious reasons, neither the bundle view nor the spatiotemporalized bundle view would help here either.

an experience with a particular time in its content.¹⁶ But, for most of the locations and times that we experience, we do not seem to experience them as being particular locations or times: our experience seems to paint a more general picture of where and when objects are located. So this answer hardly seems promising for every case.

We suppose that intentionalists might insist that Ruth's experiences of location and time really would be different at l and l^* , or at t and t^* , despite her protestations to the contrary. But this is not an appealing strategy for intentionalists to take. Holding that the qualitative character of Ruth's experience really would have been different, had she looked at Jon in a different house on a different day, requires intentionalists to hold that different spatial and temporal locations routinely make a difference to the qualitative character of experience that is not introspectively accessible, that is not evidently part of the phenomenology. For example, Ruth cannot make use of the qualitative character of her experience to determine whether she is looking at Jon in one house or in the other, north of the river or south of it, in Canada or in France. Nor can she make use of the qualitative character of her experience to determine whether she is looking at Jon on Monday or on Tuesday, before or after the birth of Jesus, ante or post meridian. She cannot describe the difference, nor can she become aware of it *as* a difference. This postulated difference would be one that is inaccessible to Ruth herself. But intentionalists generally agree that the contents of experience *must be* available for cognitive processing if they are to count as contents of experience (rather than as the contents of some other mental state).¹⁷ So, in addition to more general reasons having to do with the apparent absurdity of such experiences, intentionalists have excellent reasons based on their other theoretical commitments for not holding that Ruth's experiences have a qualitative character that is inaccessible to her.

5. Space

Closer phenomenological inspection suggests a more promising response for intentionalists in the case of space. In experience, objects

¹⁶ Consider the following exchange. J.: "This doesn't seem like a Friday." A.: "It's Thursday." J.: "Oh, are you sure?" A.: "Well, yesterday was Wednesday, so . . ." J.: "Oh, right." A.: "So that's how I know." (This exchange comes from an episode of *My So-Called Life*.)

¹⁷ Generally, but not invariably: Carruthers (2000) and Thau (2002) are exceptions (see note 4). In the case of Carruthers, it will still be true that contents that affect qualitative character, contents such as the ones under discussion, must be available for cognitive processing. And Thau is still stuck with the implausible conclusion that there is a feature of Ruth's phenomenology that she cannot introspect, however hard she tries.

are located in an egocentric space. Roughly, objects that are experienced as being about four metres away are experienced as being about four metres away from *the subject* and at a certain angle relative to the orientation of the subject's gaze or body.¹⁸ So the contents of Ruth's experience when she experiences Jon as being about four metres away need not concern an absolute location *l* or a property that is tied to it; instead, those contents could concern a relative location such as *four metres straight ahead of me*. Call this *the subject-relative view* of the contents of experience.

The promise of the subject-relative view quickly dissipates. What are the contents of Ruth's experience when she experiences Jon as having, as she would put it, the relative location "four metres straight ahead of me"? On the subject-relative view, the contents of her experience might include the general proposition represented by

<[THE *x*: *x* is . . .], *being located at*, [THE *y*: *y* bears the *being four metres straight ahead of* relation to Ruth]>.¹⁹

On the subject-relative view, the contents of Ruth's experience are tied to *her*: had her twin Sarah been standing four metres away from Jon, Sarah's experience would have had different contents than Ruth's experience actually has, since the contents of Sarah's experience would have included the general proposition represented by

<[THE *x*: *x* is . . .], *being located at*, [THE *y*: *y* bears the *being four metres straight ahead of* relation to Sarah]>.

But the qualitative character of Sarah's experience would have been the same as the qualitative character of Ruth's experience; and this sameness cannot be explained by the contents of their experience. If the subject-relative view were accepted, then the only option for intentionalists would be to hold that no two subjects ever have experiences with exactly the same qualitative character. Every experience is an experience of some property being instantiated *somewhere*, and that location will be specified by reference to the subject having the experience. Since this difference in content cannot explain sameness of qualitative character, there must be no such sameness: no two subjects' experiences ever

¹⁸ Peacocke (1992 Chapter 3): makes a similar suggestion. He avoids the difficulties inherent in this approach by not being an intentionalist.

¹⁹ Alternatively, the general proposition might contain the relational property *being four metres straight ahead of Ruth*. But nothing hangs on this, since that property is tied to a particular person: namely, Ruth.

have the same qualitative character. Note just how devastating this result is. Because it turns out that every experience is self-involving on the subject-relative view, *no one else* has ever had or will ever have an experience with the same qualitative character as *any* of your experiences; nor could they. What it is like for you to see blue is different from what it is like for anyone else to see blue; what it is like for you to taste a mango is different from what it is like for anyone else to taste a mango; what it is like for you to hear a choir in unison is different from what it is like for anyone else to hear a choir in unison; and likewise for the other sense modalities.

At this point, intentionalists might appeal to one of the views discussed in Section 3 to eliminate Ruth from the propositions that, on the subject-relative view, are the contents of her experience. Consider a combination of the subject-relative view and the definite view. On this combined view, Ruth experiences objects as being found a certain distance, not from *her*, but rather from the object that has certain perceptible properties, the properties that Ruth experiences herself as having. If Ruth experiences her nose as an itchy pink blob, for instance, then she might experience Jon as being about four metres away from the object that has an itchy pink blob as a part. An immediate problem with the combined view is that, unless the definite part of the combined view is spatiotemporalized, it faces the uniqueness problem (the contents of Ruth's experiences might be veridical even if Sarah experiences herself as having the same perceptible properties as Ruth does); but, if the definite part of the combined view is spatiotemporalized, then the contents of Ruth's experience will be tied to a particular location after all.²⁰ Quite apart from this immediate problem, however, it would still turn out on the combined view that only very rarely do two subjects have experiences with the same qualitative character. Worse, the same subject would only very rarely have two experiences with the same qualitative character, since the perceptible properties a subject experiences herself as having are always changing (she is sometimes warm or cold, tired or energetic, standing or sitting, and so on). Insofar as it is intuitively obvious that subjects often have experiences with

²⁰ A parallel problem besets the combination of the subject-relative view and the indefinite view: unless the indefinite part of the combined view is spatiotemporalized, it faces the hallucination problem (the contents of Ruth's experiences might be nonveridical even if Jon, or someone qualitatively indistinguishable from him, is located at a distinct location *l** that has all of the perceptible properties that Ruth experiences *l* as having); but, again, if the indefinite part of the combined view is spatiotemporalized, then the content of Ruth's experience will be tied to a particular location after all.

the same qualitative character, the combined view is in conflict with the phenomenology.²¹

We do not pretend to have canvassed every possible view that intentionalists who opt for singular or general propositions as the contents of experience might hold about the representation of space in experience. But, having canvassed the singular view, the definite view, the indefinite view, the subject-relative view, and various spatiotemporalizations and combinations thereof, we conclude that it is likely that no view about the representation of space in experience that is compatible with the phenomenology is available.

6. Time

In the case of time, intentionalists' problems are, if anything, worse. Intentionalists who hold that Ruth's experiences at t and t^* have the same content might deny that this content contains or is otherwise tied to any particular time. Call this *the atemporal view* of the contents of experience. On the atemporal view, although Ruth experiences Jon as being pale, she does not experience him as being pale at any particular time. If the contents of Ruth's experience are not tied to any particular times, then no particular time ever makes a difference to the qualitative character of her experience. But introspection seems to suggest that the qualitative character of experience *is* somehow tied to particular times; so, contrary to the atemporal view, contents must be tied to particular times. When experiencing Jon as being pale, Ruth does not merely experience Jon as being pale at some indeterminate point in the past, present, or future. She does not merely experience Jon as having paleness associated with him at some point in his life history or as (timelessly) instantiating paleness. The mind boggles at imagining what such an experience of timeless paleness would be like. Perhaps it would be analogous to experiences of free-floating anxiety, in which one experiences threat without experiencing a source of threat: free-floating paleness, divorced from time but experienced as paleness nonetheless. But, even if it were possible to have such an experience, it is clearly not the sort of experience that people have every day.

Furthermore, the contents of experience appear to have certain entailments that require that those contents be tied to particular times. The question "Is Jon pale now?" is answered for Ruth by her

²¹ What about simply removing Ruth from the content of her experience and replacing her with nothing? This would allow Ruth's and Sarah's experiences to have the same content. But it is phenomenologically implausible, because it fails to capture what it is to experience something as being located relative to oneself. After all, neither Ruth nor Sarah need experience herself as nothing or as an absence to be completed in some ineffable way.

experience of Jon just now.²² She experiences Jon as pale *now*, so she can readily answer the question simply by observation. If she believes that Jon is not pale now, then she denies the evidence of her senses. She may even do so correctly: she may realise that she is subject to a temporal illusion of some sort, so that her visual experiences do not tell her about the current state of the world but rather about some previous state. Perhaps she is observing Jon through a powerful telescope, and he is twenty light-minutes away. Ruth might have to tell herself that Jon is not pale *now*, although that is how things look; rather, he was pale twenty minutes ago. But in doing so she will be rejecting as an illusion what her experience tells her about the temporal location of Jon's paleness.

It might be tempting for intentionalists to try to characterise the moment *now* without making reference to particular times and without adopting the definite view, the indefinite view, or their spatiotemporalizations. If this could be done, then intentionalists could hold that people experience properties as instantiated at times characterised in some general way. Unfortunately, this project is beset with pitfalls. The moment at which Ruth experiences Jon as being pale could, for instance, be characterised as contemporaneous with other experiences such as her experience of Jon as being about four metres away. Call this *the contemporaneous view* of the contents of experience. But, on the contemporaneous view, if Ruth had experienced Jon's paleness contemporaneously with, say, one piece of music rather than another, then the qualitative character of Ruth's experience of Jon's paleness now would have been different, or else there would be an unexplained sameness of qualitative character. Once again, this seems to be either untrue to the phenomenology or not in keeping with intentionalism.

Alternatively, the moment at which Ruth experiences Jon as being pale could be characterised as the moment immediately preceding some experience that Ruth anticipates having or as immediately following some experience that Ruth has had. Call this *the sequential view* of the contents of experience. But, on the sequential view, the qualitative character of Ruth's experience of Jon's paleness now would have been different had she just had a different experience or been anticipating having a different experience (or, again, the qualitative sameness of the experiences would go unexplained). These phenomenological consequences are as implausible as any others we have considered. Is it really true that the qualitative character of two gustatory experiences of chocolate mousse must be different simply because one follows an experience of a high C while the other follows an experience of a high D, or

²² Plus various elements of background knowledge, of course.

simply because one comes before an expected high C while the other does not?²³

We do not pretend to have canvassed every possible view that intentionalists who opt for singular or general propositions as the contents of experience might hold about the representation of time in experience. But, having canvassed the singular view, the definite view, the indefinite view, the atemporal view, the contemporaneous view, the sequential view, and various spatiotemporalizations thereof, we conclude that it is likely that no view about the representation of time in experience that is compatible with the phenomenology is available.

7. Conclusion

If intentionalism is true, then the contents of experience must satisfy three desiderata. First, different subjects at different locations and times can have experiences with the same content. (This follows from intentionalism, the claim that different subjects at different locations and times can have experiences with the same qualitative character, and the claim that this sameness of qualitative character can be explained.) Second, in ordinary cases the contents of experience are veridical. And, third, in hallucinatory cases the contents of experience are nonveridical. The first desideratum rules out singular propositions or general propositions that are tied to particular locations and times; the second desideratum rules out definite general propositions; and the third desideratum rules out indefinite general propositions. So, we conclude, it is hard to see how the contents of experience could satisfy all of these desiderata if they are singular or general propositions.

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²³ Intentionalists might try eliminating particular experiences from the contents of Ruth's experience by combining either the contemporaneous view or the sequential view with either the definite view or the indefinite view. (Cf. the discussion of the subject-relative view in the previous section.) But by now the reader should suspect that this strategy is not likely to be fruitful.

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