1. Two kinds of mental properties

- Qualitative Character: e.g., the bluish quality of a visual sensation.
- Intentional Content: e.g., the content that it's raining of a belief.

2. What is their relationship?

- Separatism: They are distinct. E.g., Kant, Levine, Nagel, Reid, and myself.
- Intentionalism: Qualitative character is identical with, or supervenes on, intentional content. E.g., Byrne, Dretske, Harman, Lycan and Tye.

3. The argument from seeming for intentionalism


1. Suppose someone enjoys two qualitatively distinct mental states.

2. How things seem for the person during the first experience differs from how things seem during the second.

3. How things seem is a matter of how one is representing things, so the states differ representationally.

4. If two states differ representationally, then they differ in intentional content.

5. Two experiences cannot differ in qualitative character without differing in intentional content.

6. Therefore, qualitative character supervenes on intentional content.

4. My proposal: qualitative character is nonintentional representation

Many assume that all representation is intentional. E.g., Evans: “we may regard a perceptual experience [having] a certain content--the world is represented a certain way,” (1982, p. 226).

I argue there are two distinct kinds of representation:

- Intentional Representation ≠ Qualitative Representation

Things may seem a certain way because a state has representational mental qualities, and not because of intentional content. Thus, premise 4 of the argument from seeming is false.
Why distinguish qualitative from intentional representation?

Folk psychology holds that:

(1) Intentional content can be true or false, whereas qualitative character cannot be.

(2) Intentional states exhibit both intentional content and mental attitude, whereas qualitative states do not exhibit attitude.

(3) Intentional content is sentence-sized, whereas qualitative character is term-sized.

(4) Intentional content is amodal, whereas qualitative character is modality specific.

These observations are compatible with qualitative character's being representational, but in a nonintentional way.

Why qualitative character is representational

Quality-space theory (e.g., Sellars 1956/1997; Rosenthal 2005) identifies and individuates mental qualities by their relative positions within quality spaces that are homomorphic to the quality spaces of corresponding perceptible properties.

Mental Color Quality Space

Perceptible Color Quality Space

Objection: undetectable quality inversion

Some claim we can imagine two people who perceive the same colored object, and yet enjoy qualitatively distinct experiences.

If so, qualitatively distinct states can be representationally identical. Thus, quality-space theory fails.

But what one can conceive of depends on one's beliefs (cf. Quine, 1960). In order to conceive of undetectable quality inversion, one must assume (groundlessly) that qualitative character is known only from the first-person perspective.

Bibliography