

On Behalf of Cognitive *Qualia*

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1 Introductory phenomena and some problems pursuant to them

Some cognitive states seem to seem some way. When I am curious about whether p is true, I am in an experiential state rather unlike the experiential state I am in when I doubt that p is true. What is it like to be curious? I might say that it is like being intrigued or that it is like having a mental itch; but already, then, I am characterizing the quality of curiosity, and assuming, as I do, that there is something which is *what it is like to be curious*, or, less clumsily, that *curiosity is a certain way*. I am assuming, that is, that curiosity has a qualitative feel. Further, since it is one of the propositional attitudes, curiosity is a cognitive state.¹ Hence, when I ask what it is like to be curious, I am equally assuming that some cognitive states are qualitative, and so that there are cognitive no less than perceptual *qualia*.

More tendentially, suppose I suspect that some of my fellow patrons in the Bodleian Library in Oxford are zombies. I wonder about them. Suppose, further, that I decide that yes, they really are zombies. What will happen, I wonder, when they

¹ There seems to be no non-tendentious way of characterizing cognitive states positively. Some philosophers are content with the negative characterization that cognitive states are those mental states which are both non-perceptual and non-emotive. If, by contrast, we want to say more positively that all of the propositional attitudes qualify, then in addition to beliefs, we may also have to add, depending upon our theoretical inclinations, desires and even, for an increasing number of theorists, the emotions. If we restrict the domain somewhat by limiting cognitive states to those propositional attitudes which are themselves truth-evaluable, then we seem to miss *inter alia* doubt and curiosity (my doubt may be well motivated or not, but it is not itself true or false; it is the thing doubted which is true or false). Since such states are neither perceptual nor emotional, then if they fail to be cognitive in the relevant sense, we need some further category in our taxonomy, and some further question as to whether states in that category are qualitative. Two observations: (i) if it is impossible to provide a defensible positive taxonomy of an exclusive class of mental states as cognitive, then still less will it be possible to deny that cognitive states are qualitative; and (ii) it will be serviceable and appropriate for the purposes of this paper to accept as cognitive the very states which cognitive psychologists introduce as paradigmatically such, including, e.g., belief and memory. For if these prove to be qualitative, then the question of a crisp taxonomy recedes. Mainly, I limit myself to a consideration of those propositional attitudes which are plainly non-emotive and non-perceptual. In this I follow most detractors of cognitive *qualia* in relying on an essentially negative characterization.

hear a joke? What will happen, that is, to them? As I can see, when they hear the punch line, they smirk and give a chuckle, just like any ordinary non-zombie. I wonder, though: do they find this joke humorous? Does anything tickle their funny bone? I am not sure, because I am not sure whether finding a joke funny is something a zombie could do, even though it can evince suitable finding-funny behaviour at expected finding-funny moments. When I wonder about this, I am curious about whether zombies can find humorous the same states of affairs I find humorous, and then I find myself drawn by that familiar mental itch to investigate the truth of a certain proposition or to answer a certain question: can a zombie have a genuine sense of humour, or is a sense of humour incompatible with zombiedom? The experiential state I am in at this moment of wondering seems to me to be the same experiential state I am in when I am drawn to investigate altogether distinct propositions whose truth values I do not know, for example, whether the national debt in America in the 1990s rose at a pace faster than did the national debt of Germany during the Weimar Republic, or whether triangles, if they exist, can differ *solo numero*.

I do not know the answers to these questions, but I am drawn to investigate them. Although ranging over different contents, there seems a familiar and more or less constant phenomenology across them all, and this is the feeling of curiosity. Sometimes I am curious when nothing important to me turns upon the question of whether a given proposition is true, is false, or is neither true nor false; at other times the eventual determination matters to me a great deal. In either case, however, when I find a proposition somehow intriguing, I am drawn to investigate it. My own sense of the phenomena, as a matter of report rather than argument, is that the mental state I am in when I am curious would not be the state that it is had it lacked the qualitative character I have just indicated. That is to say, however, that the mental state of being curious is essentially qualitative. Or at any rate, it *seems* to me to be qualitative, and essentially so. So, it seems to me that there are cognitive *qualia*.

For a variety of reasons, philosophers have displayed a surprising reluctance to countenance cognitive *qualia*. In this paper, I investigate this reluctance and argue that reasons given for doubting the existence of cognitive *qualia* are unconvincing. Because most hesitation in this regard derives from an optimism about the prospects of handling the propositional attitudes within a broadly cognitive psychology, I also consider the upshot of the existence of cognitive *qualia* for the so-called hard problem of consciousness,² namely, the problem of capturing the nature of experience, or, more precisely, of characterizing phenomenal consciousness, in some suitably neutral third-person way. I show that although the existence of cognitive *qualia* does not make the hard problem any harder, it does show that the hard problem has a more expansive sweep than has been hoped by the proponents of cognitive psychology.

² Following Strawson (1994) and Chalmers (1995).

I proceed in five stages. I begin with a series of contrasts intended to sharpen current debates about the existence of cognitive *qualia*. It turns out that the debates are more or less tractable depending upon where one stands with respect to these contrasts (§ I). As partial proof of this point, I next turn to an argument routinely advanced for doubting the existence of cognitive *qualia*: the variability argument. Although, as I contend, this argument fails in all its objectives, it may prove more or less seductive depending on how we characterize its intended target, and this is best ascertained by reference to our initial sets of contrasts (§§ II and III). Further, although I am partly sympathetic to those who maintain that we cannot argue for the existence of *qualia* of any kind but must rely instead on naked ostension,³ I do think we can offer three kinds of parity argument for the existence of cognitive *qualia*. Each of these parity arguments takes the same general form: any reason we have for supposing that various non-cognitive states are qualitative counts equally as a reason for supposing that cognitive states are qualitative (§ IV). I conclude with a brief consideration of the ramifications of our admission of cognitive *qualia* for cognitive psychology (§ V). Although it is not my main interest here to chart these ramifications, whether deleterious or beneficial, it is worth at least appreciating that the hard problems of consciousness have not been winnowed from the easy problems of consciousness in the ways that some detractors of cognitive *qualia* have supposed—if, indeed, there are any easy problems of consciousness.

2 Cognitive *qualia*: Contrasts and contentions

We began with the suggestion that there is something which it is like to be curious. When I am curious as to whether there is non-carbon-based life somewhere in our vast universe, or again, more abstractly, whether non-carbon-based life is even a possibility in any imaginable universe, then the state I am in has a perfectly familiar phenomenology. Being curious as to whether there is non-carbon-based life in the universe is unlike hoping that this is so, or fearing that this is so, or dreading that this is so. Being curious as to whether *p* is also more like wondering whether *p* than it is like believing that *p*, since being curious carries no feeling of conviction; and it is also more like being intrigued whether *p* than it is like merely entertaining that *p* for the sake of argument, since instances of curiosity characteristically carry with them a sensed drive to discover. It is hard to characterize this (putatively) qualitative state intrinsically, beyond saying that it is that familiar feeling of curiosity, and harder still to offer ground-up arguments for its existence; but as a phenomenal matter, it seems an easy matter to ostend it, and the same holds true for a host of other cognitive states: wondering, hoping, believing, remembering, anticipating.⁴ There is, in fact, nothing remarkable or

³ So Block (1980).

⁴ Much of Horgan and Tienson's (2002) brief for what they call PI (the Phenomenology of Intentionality), the view that 'consciously occurring intentional states have phenomenal character that is inseparable from their intentional content', takes this form. While I am in sympathy with their general view, I am disinclined

tendentious about ostending the feelings associated with any of these cognitive states: like other qualitative states, cognitive *qualia* are perfectly mundane, easily recognizable experiences, the denial of whose existence should require very special pleading indeed. Cognitive *qualia* are, in identifiable and repeatable ways, *feelings*: there is something which it is like to be puzzled or pleased, and something else which it is like to be curious or confounded. Since these states are also among the propositional attitudes, we evidently unreflectively regard some propositional attitude states as experiential states; in this way, we accept the existence of cognitive *qualia*.

Precisely what we are accepting when we acknowledge the existence of such feelings is, however, a further and more contentious matter. In fact, there is nothing obvious or innocent about the postulation of cognitive *qualia*—if, at any rate, we are to characterize this thesis robustly enough.⁵ To begin, if we regard the existence of cognitive *qualia* as immediately obvious upon a moment's reflection, then we should be given pause by those who just as earnestly deny their existence altogether. Consider the following two perfectly plain and evidently sincere denials. First, Tye, speaking of two cognitive states sometimes alleged to be qualitative, namely, beliefs and memories:

It seems to me not implausible to deal with these cases by arguing that insofar as there is any phenomenal or immediately experienced felt quality to the above states, this is due to their being accompanied by sensations or images or feelings that are the real bearers of the phenomenal character.⁶

Nelkin is still more confident and dismissive:

There are propositional attitudes, and we are sometimes noninferentially conscious about our attitudinal states. But such consciousness does not *feel* like anything. A propositional attitude and consciousness about that attitude have no phenomenological properties.⁷

It is noteworthy that these two denials take markedly different forms. Tye at least nods to the phenomena by conceding that there may be feelings associated with cognitive states, but denies that these feelings belong to the states themselves; instead, he contends, they must belong to distinct, non-cognitive states, however closely tied those states may be to their allied cognitive states. Nelkin, by contrast, simply denies the phenomena altogether. No propositional attitude feels like anything at all.

We should in the first instance accept these denials for what they seem to be: non-doctrinaire, non-polemical reports that where we friends of cognitive *qualia* find something to report about our experiences, others find nothing, or at least nothing

to accept the philosophical morals they infer from its truth. There further seems to me to be a non-trivial question about what non-separability amounts to. I make some recommendations of my own in this regard by adverting to the more familiar language of essential and accidental intrinsicity.

⁵ See, e.g., Strawson (1994) for a relatively robust formulation.

⁶ Tye (1995: 4).

⁷ Nelkin (1989: 430). Cf. also Carruthers (2005). Bayne (2009) characterizes the impulse towards 'phenomenal conservatism', as he aptly calls this stance.

intrinsic to the states we take ourselves to be describing. Moreover, it bears stressing that the first denial affirms the existence of *qualia* only for some range of mental phenomena. That is, someone with Tye's orientation is not a *qualia-denier tout court*, a *quiner* as for instance Dennett claims to be,⁸ but rather what I will call a *demi-denier*. As a clear and forthright *demi-denier*, Tye allows perceptual *qualia*, and supposes that he owes the world a reductive account of them; but he thinks that nothing is owed in the case of cognitive *qualia*, since there simply is no phenomenon for which an account is needed. At most, one would need to explain away the appearance of cognitive *qualia* by locating the subjects of the qualitative characters outside the narrowly cognitive realm.

The situation with respect to cognitive *qualia* is thus rather distressing: some philosophers of goodwill point to a phenomenon which they take to be more or less obvious and uncontroversial, while their colleagues of equal goodwill inspect what these philosophers indicate and find them to be pointing to a mental vacuum. The suggestion thus lies near that the champions of cognitive *qualia* and their detractors are arguing at cross purposes, or are at least talking past one another. At any rate, one hopes that this is so, since otherwise, the debate regarding cognitive *qualia* quickly devolves into an unproductive stalemate, with one side ostending an item of phenomenal consciousness which the other simply claims not to experience. It is as if one psychologist characterized proprioception as the *introceptive sense of the orientation of one's own limbs in space* only to be rebuffed by another psychologist who insisted, with no polemical intent, that she has never experienced any such sensation and that she accordingly denies the existence of proprioception altogether. It would be a bit difficult to know the way forward for these two.

One way forward in the realm of cognitive *qualia* is to draw two related contrasts. We may do so by borrowing an example from Tye. Suppose someone describes the memory of her first kiss as sweet. In the face of this report one might, without drawing any immediate substantive conclusions, identify two aspects of her memory event (*m*), which we will introduce as a mental episode occurring on New Year's Eve, 2000: (i) the content (*c*) of this memory, the kiss she experienced at some earlier time, let us say New Year's Eve, 1988; and (ii) the feeling that the memory (*m*, not its content) is sweet. There seem to be two aspects of *m* here: its content *c*, and its character, the *quale* *q*. Having drawn this distinction, one might in principle move to any of a number of different substantive theses, by relating the features *c* and *q* of *m* as follows:

Single- v. Two-State Solutions:

Single-state: there is but one state, the memory *m*, which has as intrinsic properties both the intentional property *having-content-c* and the qualitative property *being-q*.

Two-state: the memory *m* has the intrinsic property *having-content-c*, but the memory report alludes also to an associated but distinct state, *n*, which is the bearer of the qualitative property *q*;

⁸ Dennett (1988).

presumably n is a state directly related to m , perhaps because the existence of m causes the existence of n , or, more narrowly, because m 's having c causes n 's being q .

Tye seems to articulate a two-state solution, whereas Nelkin has advanced a no-state solution. I will be arguing for a single-state solution, which itself might be characterized in a weaker and a stronger form:

Accidental v. Essential One-State Solutions:

Accidental: there is but one state, the memory m , which has as an essential property *having-content-c*, but also happens to have, as an accidental intrinsic property, *being-q*.

Essential: there is but one state, the memory m , which has as *essential* intrinsic properties *having-content-c* and *being-q*.

Armed with just these two pairs of distinctions, some headway becomes possible.

To begin, given these distinctions, one can sharpen the debate about the existence of cognitive *qualia* as follows. Cognitive *qualia* deniers, like Nelkin, simply deny the phenomena outright. (NB that such cognitive *qualia* deniers need not, though might, join Dennett in denying the existence of *qualia* altogether; in what follows, I will address only those who do not, that is, those who affirm the existence of some qualitative states, but who deny that there are any cognitive *qualia*.) Cognitive *qualia* demi-deniers, like Tye, admit that there are *qualia* in the neighbourhood of various contentful states such as memory, but deny that these *qualia* are intrinsic to those states, let alone essential to them. These kinds of deniers contrast with different kinds of affirmers. Amongst the cognitive *qualia* affirmers, some allow that various cognitive states are intrinsically qualitative, while denying that they are essentially so; others insist that the contentful states in question are not only themselves intrinsically qualitative, but that it is essential to those states being the states they are that they be qualitative. I will advance the stronger, essentialist version of the one-state solution.

This framework, I suggest, helps to explain at least one source of disagreement between our philosophers of goodwill: they are wrangling about the bearers of the *qualia* associated with cognitive states. It also helps, I argue, to disarm some arguments against the existence of cognitive *qualia*.

3 An argument against cognitive *qualia*: The variability argument

Moving forward with the example of memory, let us consider Tye's primary argument against cognitive *qualia*, which I will call the *variability argument*. I should say, however, that in calling this Tye's argument, I do not mean to suggest that it is his alone, or even his originally. On the contrary, it is an argument one very frequently encounters in this area. It is just that Tye offers an exceptionally clear and direct formulation of it, and thus provides an especially helpful focus for our discussion.

Let us then focus more minutely on our memory report. Rebecca reports, on New Year's Eve, 2000, that the memory of her first kiss, which transpired on New Year's Eve, 1988, is sweet. On the basis of this report, we may say:

- (1) The memory of Rebecca's first kiss is sweet.

On its surface, (1) is a simple, monadic predication, on a par, for example, with:

- (2) The pain in Rebecca's knee is sharp.

Just as sharpness characterizes the qualitative character of her pain, so sweetness characterizes the qualitative character of her memory. Without having qualitative character, her pain could not possibly be sharp. Should one then equally hold that her memory could not possibly be sweet without its having a qualitative character?

Tye thinks not. When canvassing the kinds of mental states he understands as phenomenally conscious, he includes, as distinct types: (i) perceptual experiences, such as hearing a trumpet play; (ii) bodily sensations, for example, feeling a pain or a hunger pang; (iii) emotions and felt reactions, including love, fear, and jealousy; and (iv) felt moods, such as happiness and depression.⁹ He then pauses to ask:

Should we include any mental states that are not feelings and experiences? Consider my desire to eat ice cream. Is there not something it is like for me to have this desire? If so, is not this state phenomenally conscious? And what about the belief that I am a very fine fellow? Or the memory that September 2 is the date on which I first fell in love? Is there not some phenomenal flavor to both of these states? In the former case, some phenomenal sense of pride and ego, and in the latter some feeling of nostalgia?¹⁰

As we have already seen, he thinks not, because he believes that in all such cases 'insofar as there is any phenomenal or immediately experienced felt quality . . . this is due to their being accompanied by sensations or images or feelings that are the real bearers of the phenomenal character'. If one will '[t]ake away the feelings and experiences that happen to be associated' with these sorts of states, one will find that 'there is no phenomenal consciousness left' (Tye 1995: 4). Tye here offers a version of *the variability argument*.

Before we state the argument, however, we should note Tye's fairly tendentious way of reporting the phenomena. He says that he wishes to know whether mental states that are 'not feelings and experiences' belong on any list of phenomenally conscious states. The answer to that question ought to be analytic: no. Plainly, no non-felt, non-experiential state is a state of phenomenal consciousness. That there is a question to be asked at all in this arena stems from the fact that some desires and some beliefs—as well as a host of other non-perceptual, non-emotive states—certainly seem to feel some way. I know how it feels to desire something ardently; and I know how it feels to struggle to remember the name of an old acquaintance when I meet her on the

⁹ Tye (1995: 4).

¹⁰ Tye (1995: 4).

street (especially when she remembers my name with an expectant smile). Our question about the existence of cognitive *qualia* cannot be trivially reduced to the question of whether some states which are not feelings or experiences qualify as states of phenomenal consciousness; for the states we are considering are—or at least certainly *seem* to be—experiential.

Tye tacitly acknowledges this when allowing that some desires and beliefs sometimes ‘happen’ to have feelings and beliefs associated with them. In urging that it is a matter of happenstance that any given memory has an associated feel, Tye has already characterized the situation so as to ease his way into the variability argument. Perhaps, he implies, a memory of my first love might happen to carry along with it wistful pinings for simpler times in my life; but it need not have. So, these experiences pertain not to my memory as such, but are instead merely occasioned by my memory. This shows, one might infer, that any phenomenal states associated with my memory are not intrinsic to the memory itself, and belong, if anywhere, to states discrete from the memory itself. After all, urges Tye, I might have had precisely *the same memory* with *different* associated feelings altogether. I might rather feel bitter or angry or hurt. This shows, Tye concludes, that it is not my memory which has qualitative character. If I try to transfer the phenomenal character onto the memory itself, I have erred: memory states are not themselves intrinsically experiential at all. They are devoid of qualitative character.

This sort of variability argument is unconvincing. To see why, it is necessary to appreciate first that it admits of at least two formulations. In its first and simplest formulation, the argument attempts to show that no cognitive state is *intrinsically* qualitative. That is, in this first version, it is intended to refute the cognitive *qualia* affirmer who maintains the *accidental one-state solution*, that is, the friend of cognitive *qualia* who believes that cognitive states are intrinsically but not essentially qualitative. In this first formulation, the variability argument is plainly unsound, because it relies upon an obviously false premiss. Even so, the argument admits of a second formulation, which attempts to refute only the stronger affirmative thesis, the one-state solution, according to which cognitive states are not merely intrinsically but essentially qualitative. On this formulation, the variability argument is at least not obviously unsound. In its second formulation, however, it features a premiss which is tendentious at best. In fact, I shall argue, upon closer inspection, the situation with respect to the second formulation collapses into the situation which obtains for the first: it too features a false premiss and so is unsound. In either formulation, then, the variability argument fails.

The core idea of the variability in any formulation is this: the intentional content of my cognitive states may be held fixed while any associated qualitative states are varied; hence, the cognitive states themselves are not intrinsically qualitative. If there are any qualitative properties in the neighbourhood at all, they belong not to the cognitive states but rather to closely associated affective states, e.g. emotional states or bodily sensations, which are the genuine bearers of qualitative character. The argument, then, in its first and simplest formulation is as follows:

- (1) Every cognitive state is intentional.
- (2) For any given cognitive state, it is possible to alter its qualitative character without altering its intentional content.
- (3) If (2), then no cognitive state is *intrinsically* qualitative in character.
- (4) So, no cognitive state is *intrinsically* qualitative in character.
- (5) If (4), then there are no cognitive *qualia*.
- (6) Hence, there are no cognitive *qualia*.

We grant (1); (2) seems correct, at least for the kinds of cases which Tye considers; so we may grant it for the present.¹¹ Inescapable trouble, however, begins with (3).

(3) claims that the possibility of variability is sufficient for a quality's being non-intrinsic to an intentional state. It should, however, be immediately clear that this is false. The Washington Monument, the white marble obelisk in Washington D.C., might one day be painted pink in order to celebrate the legalisation of gay marriage in the United States. Then it would be the same monument, but the same monument with a different colour. If (3) were correct, we would need to conclude that the Washington Monument is not *now* intrinsically white; yet clearly it is now intrinsically white. Hence, something is amiss with (3).

The irremediable problem with (3) is now easy to state. If (3) were correct, then only essential properties would be intrinsic; for it is always possible to vary non-essential intrinsic properties without threatening the identity of the bearer of those properties. So, (3) is simply false. It is on a par with insisting that since you might hold my gender fixed while altering my eye colour, I cannot be both intrinsically male and intrinsically blue-eyed. Yet I am.

So far, this is enough to see that (3) is false, and obviously so. It relies upon a principle which no one could support. The problem with (3) can also be made clear when we apply it to other sorts of mental states, states whose qualitative character we are disinclined to deny. Imagine someone who has his leg badly broken in a skiing accident. He remains in the hospital for a few days. During his early days in hospital, his pain is, he reports, throbbing, sharp, excruciating. Towards the end of his stay, he speaks of his pain as having abated somewhat. All along, his pain is a source of discomfort. So, one might conclude, the state which is a source of discomfort to him at first has the property of being excruciating and then later has the property of being simply unpleasant. Since its intrinsic character has changed, one must conclude, if (3) is true, that the pain could not have been excruciating but then abate somewhat. Yet it was and it did.

This example brings out still more clearly what is wrong with (3): it relies upon the thought that so long as I can vary the properties of some diachronic continuant in one way while holding some other properties fixed, the variable properties cannot be

¹¹ Horgan and Tienson (2002) offer what is in effect a spirited attack on (2), though they do not formulate what I am calling the variability argument (cf. n. 4 above). For the present, I am neutral about the force of their contentions, since my aim is to point out that the variability argument fails even if (2) is granted. I return to (2) below, however, and argue for reasons other than Horgan and Tienson's that it is tendentious at best.

intrinsic properties of that subject. The same point could as well be made in non-temporal, counterfactual terms. In its elementary version, the variability argument relies upon the thought that I could not hold some intrinsic properties fixed while counterfactually altering others. This is false in general, and so false in the domain of the mental. Still, it suggests how (3) might be rewritten so as to avoid this obvious problem.

Perhaps (3) should be understood not in terms of intrinsic properties, but rather in terms of a subset of intrinsic properties, namely, those which are essential. This would permit us to rewrite the argument as directed against the thesis I actually maintain, the *single-state essentialist solution*, according to which cognitive states are not only intrinsically but also essentially qualitative. The enhanced variability argument holds:

- (1★) Every cognitive state is intentional.
- (2★) For any given cognitive state, it is possible to alter its qualitative character without altering its intentional content.
- (3★) If (2★), then no cognitive state is *essentially* qualitative in character.
- (4★) So, no cognitive state is *essentially* qualitative in character.
- (5★) If (4★), then there are no cognitive *qualia*.
- (6★) Hence, there are no cognitive *qualia*.

As written, the argument is hopelessly flawed, since (5★) is plainly false: a state may be intrinsically ϕ without being essentially ϕ . So, taken as a general argument against the existence of cognitive *qualia*, the enhanced variability argument already fails.

That said, in the current dialectical context, it is really (3★) which is at issue. Its general form is now, I concede, correct. If some ϕ thing may be made non- ϕ without threatening its existence, then that thing is not essentially ϕ . So, if one really can alter the qualitative character of some cognitive state without threatening its status as a cognitive state, then that state is not essentially qualitative. Can one?

This question is really in fact directed at (2★), the bald assertion that for any given cognitive state, it is possible to alter its qualitative character without altering its intentional content. Let us revert once again to Tye's memory example. Suppose the memory of Rebecca's first kiss is pleasant for her. It is not at all obvious that one could vary the qualitative character of her memory and *have it remain the same memory*. A claim to the contrary is question-begging at best, and, I suggest, actually false: if her memory were bitter rather than sweet, then it would not be, or would not obviously be, the same memory. (Again, to be clear, we are at present focusing on *m*, the episode of her remembering, and not the character of the event remembered.) Of course, it would have the same content *c*, though what is at issue in the present context is precisely whether sameness of content is sufficient for sameness of memory *m*. Suppose, for example, that at some point subsequent to her first kiss, which had been pleasant enough for her at the time, it came to her attention that the boy who had bestowed it upon her did so only because her mother had paid him handsomely to do so. Of course, the content of the memory would be the same: it would be the kiss of New Year's Eve, 1988. From that it does not follow that the bitter memory would be the

same memory as the pleasant memory she had before she learned the unhappy truth about the original event. Indeed, this seems to be the very point at issue. So, even overlooking the other problems already identified in this argument, we should be unmoved by the variability argument, even in its revised formulation.

We can see this more clearly, and more clearly to the detriment of the revised variability argument, if we move away from Tye's memory example towards other cognitive states. Consider, for instance, the case with which we began: curiosity. Suppose Fernando is curious as to whether p , where p is the proposition *that Uruguay has won the World Cup in football*. According to (2*), it is possible to alter the qualitative character of this instance of curiosity without altering its intentional content. Yet for (2*) to have any hope of supporting (3*), this must be possible without bringing it about that Fernando is no longer curious as to whether p . Yet that seems plainly false: if Fernando comes to develop feelings of doubt, or hope, or disbelief, or indifference, with respect to p , and is thus no longer drawn to investigate its truth, then he is no longer curious. It is hardly the case, then, that one could alter the qualitative character of his curiosity while holding its propositional content fixed without threatening its status as an instance of curiosity. Quite the contrary, if his mental state lost the relevant qualitative character, then we would also for that very reason lose our grounds for treating Fernando's relation to p as an instance of curiosity.

Taking all that together, any reason to suppose that (2*) might be true is also a reason for thinking that (2*) provides no grounds for (3*); and without (3*), we have no reason to doubt that (at least certain) cognitive states are essentially qualitative. So, the enhanced variability argument gives us no reason to deny that cognitive states may be essentially qualitative, and indeed, on the contrary, some reason to conclude that they must be.

Summing up the discussion thus far, then: the variability argument was initially introduced to show that cognitive states are not intrinsically qualitative. Thus construed, the argument is a non-starter. Perhaps, though, its supporters were really after another point, that cognitive states are not essentially qualitative. The argument so construed also fails. Hence, in neither version does the variability argument establish that cognitive states are not qualitative. Therefore, despite its undeniable popularity, the variability argument fails to establish that we cannot hold what the phenomena recommend, namely, that some cognitive states have qualitative character.

4 What went wrong?

Despite what I regard as its obvious shortcomings, the variability argument has enjoyed a widespread appeal. This is a matter which calls for some explanation. There are, of course, various genetic explanations, having to do with people's hopes and motivations in the realm of cognitive psychology. These may range from the salutary to the peculiar; but they are not my current focus. Rather, I mean to investigate, briefly, why, when it is so poor an argument, the variability argument could be thought to

have such philosophical appeal. For a consideration of this question will lead naturally to a discussion of what parity cognitive *qualia* may have with other forms of *qualia*.

Judged from a sufficient distance, the variability argument trades on the indisputable fact that every cognitive state can be taxonomized in terms of its propositional content. That is, cognitive states, like all intentional attitudes, can be thought of as *p-states*, where a *p-state* is a state with a specifiable propositional content. Since it is (evidently) understood that every cognitive state is essentially a *p-state*, it is easy to conclude that it is not *also* essentially another kind of state, a *q-state*, a state with a discernible qualitative character. At any rate, this conclusion follows easily from the general principle that no mental state can be essentially both a *p-state* and a *q-state*. This assumption, though false, is easily made.

The problem with the variability argument can now be put in more general terms, and these terms can help explain why even those sympathetic to the phenomena have felt constrained to adopt some manner of two-state solution. Allow that when I entertain whether a given proposition *p* is true, I am in a certain mental state, an *m-state*, where being an *m-state* is to be neutrally characterized with respect to whether it might or might not be a qualitative state. (We are taking it as given that *some* *m-states* are *q-states*. That is, in the current discussion, we are not accepting any form of complete *qualia* eliminativism.) If we believe that a given *m-state* is essentially a *p-state*, we may conclude, without further consideration, that it is therefore not essentially a *q-state*. Indeed, on the other side, we may equally be inclined to conclude that since a given state is essentially a *q-state*, it is therefore not also essentially a *p-state*. (This is, after all, what a fair number of Humeans have thought about the emotions.) We are not entitled to this quick conclusion, however, in either direction. For it is entirely possible that one and the same *m-state* be *both* essentially a *p-state* and essentially a *q-state*. Any assumption to the contrary, that *m-states* can be at most essentially and exclusively either *p-* or *q-states* leads, I think, to the unsustainable conclusions we have identified.

Cognitive states, I maintain, are states which are essentially both contentful and qualitative. That is, when I doubt that you are truthful, my *m-state* is *both* a *p-state* and a *q-state*. From this perspective, the revised variability argument gained some specious plausibility only from the fact that the original variability argument held the *p-state*-feature of an *m-state* fixed, while varying its *q-state*-feature. But also from this perspective, we can appreciate more precisely the shortcomings of the variability argument. It was supposed to establish the theses, in first its weaker and then its stronger form (where the subscripts denote intrinsic and essential predications), that:

$$\langle _ \diamond \exists x_m (P_i x \ \& \ Q_i x), \\ \langle _ \diamond \exists x_m (P_e x \ \& \ Q_e x)$$

Without a general principle to the effect that no *m-state* could be essentially taxonomized under non-equivalent, discrete sortals, no such variability argument can succeed.

The variability argument itself provides no such general principle. Nor, if any of the arguments of the next section succeeds, could it. For the principle is false.

5 Parity arguments

I have indicated that I regard it as difficult to argue positively *ab initio* for the existence of cognitive *qualia*. Still, one can do more than point and invite one's interlocutors to reflect on their own mental lives. In particular, for at least some sceptics, argumentation is possible. For our purposes, sceptics appear in two guises, already indicated: demi-deniers and those cognitive *qualia* deniers who eschew the full-scale eliminativism of Dennett. To refresh, not every cognitive *qualia* denier is a quiner: some would eliminate the phenomena as pertains to cognitive states, even while acknowledging the existence of other qualitative states, characteristically perceptual or sensational. Demi-deniers both acknowledge the existence of the qualitative character of at least some mental states, and are prepared to acknowledge that there may seem to be qualitative states in the neighbourhood of the cognitive, but for theoretical reasons opt for a two-state solution in the face of the phenomena. While they deny cognitive *qualia* per se, regarded as intrinsic states with propositional content, they tolerate closely associated qualitative states, connected at best causally to phenomenologically blank cognitive states. In their different though related ways, I contend, these theorists find themselves in an unstable and untenable situation with respect to cognitive *qualia*. Left by the wayside in what follows are only those radical eliminativists, the quiners, who deny that any mental states *ever* manifest qualitative features; but we have not been hoping to engage the fringe.

Accordingly, my general strategy is to show that those who accept the qualitative character of some mental states, including the perceptual or sensational states, but who reject the qualitative character of cognitive states, do so only incorrectly. Thus, my arguments are *parity* arguments: if one has reason to accept the qualitative character of some mental states, then one has equal reason to accept them in the case of the cognitive. Complete eliminativism about the qualitative is, I allow, a stable, if untenably radical view; non-quinning eliminativism and demi-denial are, by contrast, unstable views, and so ought to be rejected. In sum, I argue that since cognitive *qualia* have all the hallmarks that other, non-cognitive qualitative mental states have, it follows that from the standpoint of the qualitative, cognitive *qualia* are on a par with other kinds of qualitative states. This result invites either undifferentiated acceptance or wholesale elimination of the qualitative. Such a result, of course, a *qualia* quiner could gladly champion.

The parity arguments I have in mind are three: (i) a *seeming seeming argument*; (ii) a *determinability argument*; and (iii) an *argument from willing*.

(1) *Seeming Seemings*: I seem to be able to imagine that the puddle before me lacks oxygen. I seem, consequently, to be able to imagine something which many hold to be necessarily false, namely, that it is possible for water to lack oxygen. How can this be?

Beyond the now familiar point that bare, low-grade imaginability does not by itself entail possibility, lies a diagnosis of what has gone wrong in those cases in which we seem to imagine the impossible. The diagnosis is that what I take myself to be imagining may not be exactly what I am in fact imagining.

More exactly, suppose I describe myself as imagining that it is possible for water to lack oxygen. When asked why I should think such a thing, I respond that I am at present picturing a puddle at my feet, supposing that it contains water, and further imagining that the puddle is made up of some oxygen-free stuff. When my scientific essentialist friend, whose views on metaphysical necessity we may grant for the present purpose, points out that I am evidently describing myself as imagining that there is something which is *identical* with H₂O, and so which in every possible world in which it exists *is* H₂O, is somehow also such that it possibly lacks oxygen, I backpedal. I paraphrase: I was only imagining myself to be in the perceptual situation in which I find myself when I am in front of a puddle. That is, I imagine myself to be in a perceptual state qualitatively indiscernible from the state I am in when I perceive water. I imagine myself, for example, to be standing before an impression in the concrete just after it has rained and gazing down into some clear liquid. What I am imagining is that *that clear stuff lacks oxygen*. That clear stuff, which looks a lot like water, is not water—not, at any rate, if it lacks oxygen; and it really is possible that some clear liquid might lack oxygen. That much, indeed, is actual.

For our present concern, what is important about these sorts of situations is that the putative imaginability can be paraphrased away. Paraphrase is possible. A story can be told. It is easy to make sense of my mistake: I thought that I was imagining water without oxygen, but in reality I was imagining some other clear water-like stuff which lacked oxygen.

Now we may compare this situation with another. I imagine myself to be consciously entertaining a proposition *p*, perhaps the proposition that ‘*transmogrify*’ is a nonce word. I do not believe this proposition, but neither can I trace the etymology of this word. So, I come to entertain the possibility that it is a nonce word. I now step back and reflect in a second-order sort of way on my entertaining of that proposition. I think of that entertaining as seeming a certain way to me: it seems to me, I claim, that entertaining is like a kind of non-committal considering. Now, if the non-quining eliminativist were correct, it should be possible for me to paraphrase away that seeming. For though it seems to me that my cognitive state seemed a certain way to me, this must be false, and necessarily false, since it is not possible for the m-state in question to be both a p-state and a q-state.

This, I maintain, cannot be done. Or, in any case, it cannot be done any more for the cognitive states than it can for other uncontroversially q-states, like being in pain. (To be clear: in what follows I am not worried about the question of whether I can be mistaken as to whether I am in pain, but rather with the more attenuated question of whether I can be mistaken about a pain’s seeming to seem a certain way to me.) Now, the non-quining eliminativist might wish to argue that I am somehow confused when

I report, for instance, that my being perplexed about a certain proposition *p* seems a certain way to me. This is, however, difficult to credit. Evidently, if something seems a certain way to me, then it involves, well *seeming*. Whereas I might in principle be wrong about *how things seem* to me, unless I am a quiner, there is no route to my being wrong *that things seem* to me in general. So, the non-quiner eliminativist has no recourse for paraphrase.

Matters are more complex with the demi-denier. The demi-denier credits the seeming: he agrees that things do seem a certain way to me. He then hastens to relocate the qualitative feature in a second, associated state, evidently on the grounds that it is known *a priori* that the cognitive state itself cannot be intrinsically qualitative. Hence, the two-state solution.

One may respond in two phases. First, there is no need of a two-state solution, because there is no problem in need of solving. There would be a problem if—as the demi-denier allows—there were a qualitative feature in need of a home *and*—as the demi-denier wrongly assumes—its home could not be where it seems to be, namely, in the cognitive state in question. The reason for maintaining the second conjunct of this supposed problem, recall, was just the now discredited variability argument. So, there seems to be no problem in search of a two-state solution.

Moreover, and more importantly, the demi-denier's commitment to a two-state solution does in fact raise a difficult and delicate problem about the individuation of mental states, namely, the question of how fine-grained a mental state should be individuated. The source of this problem is as follows. The demi-denier allows that some cognitive states seem to seem some way, and even credits their seeming seemings. Still, he wishes to re-describe what seems to be the case. He seeks not to paraphrase away the seeming itself, but rather the seeming subject of that seeming. To make this slightly more manageable by way of illustration: it seems that curiosity, a propositional attitude, seems to seem a certain way (I have said mine seems like a mental itch), but since we are, according to the demi-denier, committed to the belief that a *p*-state cannot seem any way, we must find some other associated subject to underlie the *q*-state, the mental itchiness. Which subject might that be? One is inclined to ask: what other state *could* it be, if it is not the state of curiosity itself? If it is not the very state of being curious which seems the way curiosity seems, then what are the other candidate bearers?

However that question is to be addressed, in the current dialectical context, one need not meet the difficult question about mental state individuation given rise by the demi-denier's re-description head-on. Indeed, one *should* not address it, in as much as it is held to arise only in the case of cognitive states and not perceptual or sensational states. Here, however, we are modestly demanding only parity for all of the mental states which seem to seem some way. Thus, whatever the grain of individuation we adopt for cognitive states which seems to be qualitative, such evidently will be the grain for other, uncontroversially qualitative states such as perception and sensation. To illustrate, we may agree that perceiving green is an information-bearing state. It is, in

this regard at least, not a qualitative state. So, one might wish to hive off the qualitative character of perception, and locate in some other non-information-bearing state, on the grounds that nothing could be both information-bearing and qualitative. Now, I see no reason at all why one should wish to proceed in this way. That is not, however, my present point, which is rather, that there is parity between the cognitive states and the non-cognitive states as regards the question of fine-grainedness of individuation. If for some reason one wishes to be ultra-fine-grained about individuation conditions across the full spectrum of mental states, then her doing so remains open at least as a theoretical possibility. Then, however, two- or several-state solutions would reign over all. Parity recommends not that states be individuated in some way or other, but only that all m-states be treated on a par as regards their individuation conditions. No reason has been given for treating different qualitative states differently, by taking some to be individuated thick-grainedly and others fine-grainedly. On the contrary, seeming seemings seem the same across the sweep of the mental.

The demi-denier is thus in an important respect unlike the non-quinning eliminativist. Yet both encounter the same instability, and for much the same reason: whatever inclines them to grant qualitative features in one domain of the mental should equally incline them to grant it in others, and to do so in like fashion.

Their joint situation thus recommends the following argument. It seems to me that some of my p-states are also q-states. Hence, it seems to me possible that some of my p-states are also q-states. Yet, if I am wrong about that—if what seems to me to be the case is not and *could not* be the case—then there must be some rephrasal strategy available to me. Now, such a rephrasal strategy is possible for p-states which are also q-states only if it is possible for q-states which are not also p-states. Looking in the direction of non-quinning eliminativists, no such strategy is available. Looking in the direction of demi-deniers, such a strategy is available only if it occasions unmotivated and unwanted fragmentation of uncontroversially qualitative states. Hence, rephrasal strategies lead either nowhere or to the wrong destination. So, both non-quinning eliminativism and demi-denial are unstable, and ought to be rejected.

Consequently, any attempt to paraphrase away the qualitative by moving towards increasingly fine-grained mental states in the end devolves into a shell game which relocates the phenomena without explaining them away. The purport of the present argument is that paraphrase is possible or not possible equally across the full range of the seemingly qualitative. This is to say, then, that paraphrase is possible in all cases in the same way and to the same degree: either not at all or only to ill effect.

(2) *Intensity and Determinability*: Some pains we describe as sharp, others we describe as intense, and still others we describe as dull or diffuse. The reason we are able to do so stems from two facts about the qualitative character of pain. The first is that pain states admit of degree. One and the same pain can be more or less intense. The second is that being painful is a determinable qualitative character of pain states, one admitting of a range of determinants beneath it. Every pain state, whether throbbing, or acute, or

mild, is also painful; but not every state of pain is throbbing, or acute, or mild. It is plausible to suppose that these are ways of being in pain, and that being in pain is a determinable qualitative property of a certain sort. Moreover, it seems plausible to suppose that the range of potential determinants is categorically constrained by the nature of the determinable in question: it will not do to describe my hunger pain as gaudy, or as enchanting, or as winsome. Like other determinables, qualitative determinable properties admit of only a fixed range of categorically appropriate determinants.

Now, I also describe some of my qualitative cognitive states in much the same way. My belief that *p* might be fervent or weak, or it might be a bit shaky at the moment. Similarly, my suspicion is acute, or it is slight, or it is a bit uncomfortable. Then again, my curiosity is intense, or mild, or burning to the point of being distracting. In all of these cases, I treat the qualitative character of my cognitive state as admitting of degrees; and I also allow that there are ways of being curious. In this sense, unsurprisingly from my perspective, the qualitative character of my *p*-states behaves like the qualitative character of my non-*p*-states. For they are all equally *q*-states.

This situation recommends the following two arguments. The first is direct.

- (1) It is possible for the qualitative character of my *p*-states to admit of degrees and to act as determinables act only if they are also *q*-states.
- (2) The qualitative character of my *p*-states admits of degrees and acts as determinable qualitative states act.
- (3) Hence, my *p*-states are genuinely *q*-states.

Of course, the eliminativist shrugs, and simply denies (2).

This does not seem open to the demi-denier. A second formulation brings this out a bit more clearly, by being a bit more indirect. It simply seeks to establish parity:

- (1) The qualitative character of some of my *p*-states (i) admits of degrees, and (ii) behaves like a determinable under which fall various qualitative determinants.
- (2) In this respect, the qualitative character of my *p*-states behaves like the qualitative character of my non-*p* *q*-states.
- (3) The only or best explanation of (2) is that the qualitative characters of *p*- and non-*p* mental states are qualitative in the same way.
- (4) Hence, the qualitative character of *p*- and non-*p* mental states are qualitative in the same way.

Once again, the total eliminativist is happy with this result. Indeed, he happily embraces the conclusion. All of my *m*-states, he says, are qualitative in exactly the same degree: not in the least.

Evidently, both the non-*quining* eliminativist and the demi-denier must deny either (2) or (3). A denial of (2) seems to implicate both in a further denial of the phenomena: sometimes my curiosity is intense, and sometimes it is waning. Presumably, then, only

(3) is open for questioning. But a wedge between my various q-states now seems like special pleading. We have already seen that there is no principled reason for supposing *a priori* that some of my m-states cannot be both p- and q-states. Absent any such argument, the only remaining approach would need to be piecemeal, explaining why each p-state which is also a q-state only seems to admit of degrees, or only seems to admit of a constrained range of determinants under a determinable. The motivation for such an approach escapes me; the likelihood of its success does not.

(3) *Willing and Qualia*: It is often remarked that we are somehow passive before the qualitative properties of our experiences. If this stew tastes salty to me, then this *quale*, seeming salty, characterizes my experience. If the sky seems azure to me, then this *quale* too seems a character of my experience. It seems difficult to fathom, but in the vast literature on *qualia*, the obvious connection between this kind of passivity in experience and the inefficacy of the will is rarely made explicit. Though I would not say it is a defining feature of the qualitative, I would want to insist that it is altogether characteristic of *qualia* that it is not open to the subject experiencing them to make them disappear at will. Although I can will myself, with some success, to forget experiences after I have had them, and I can will myself to move out of the states in which I am as I experience them, I cannot will myself to remain in a given qualitative mental state while not continuing to experience its qualitative character. I cannot will myself to continue consciously experiencing the heat of the fire without also experiencing this state as qualitatively hot. Nor indeed can I will myself not to experience this Zinfandel as jammy if this is how it seems to me at the moment. My will is impotent in the face of the phenomenal.

Notice that this is not a point concerning the difficult matter of incorrigibility. I fully allow that I can mistake, for instance, the sensation of a pin pricking my skin for a freezing sensation. Rather, the point is that if an experience feels sharp to me now, I cannot will it not to feel sharp even as I experience it. Perhaps, if I am a Stoic sage I can bring myself not to care about how things seem to me at the moment; but in not caring about how things seem to me at the moment, the things about which I do not care evidently seem a certain way to me.

Thus, there seems to me to be a general fact about *qualia*: if I am now in an occurrent conscious state with qualitative character *q*, I cannot now will myself not to experience *q* without also bringing it about that I am no longer in that state.

For instance, when I am tasting *Trockenbeerenauslese* and experiencing it as sweet, then I cannot will myself to experience it otherwise while I am in that experiential state. Similarly, and by parity, when I am curious, my curiosity may now seem to me fierce or mild. If so, it will not seem to me merely to be a random fierce or mild state, but a fierce impulse or a modest inclination to investigate the truth of a certain proposition. When I am in this state, I am incapable of willing it to seem other than it does. I may be able to will myself to diminish my curiosity, or to set it aside

altogether; but I utterly fail if I try to will myself now, while remaining in this state, to make it seem other than it does.

This connection between willing and *qualia* recommends the following argument:

- (1) When someone is in an uncontroversially qualitative state, say a perceptual state, she is incapable of willing that state to lose its qualitative character.
- (2) When someone is in a cognitive state which also seems to have qualitative character, she is incapable of willing that state to lose its qualitative character.
- (3) The only or best explanation of this parallelism is that the p-state is no less qualitative than the uncontroversially q-state.
- (4) Hence, there is every reason to conclude that our p-states are no less qualitative than our non-p q-states.

The uncompromising eliminativist denies (1), on the grounds that there are no uncontroversially q-states. The rest of us accept (1), as long as we acknowledge the impotence of will in these circumstances.

If enough has been done to motivate that principle, the non-quinean eliminativist and the demi-denier may turn to (2) or (3). (2) is an assertion which I will not undertake to defend, except to say that it is admitted as part of our initial phenomena, and to invite the critic to attempt to will himself not to be in a state of seeming to be drawn to investigate some state of affairs the next time he finds himself curious about something. (3) is then the last recourse. The best way to deny (3) is to offer another explanation which is better than the one I have offered. I cannot myself envisage any such explanation which does not implicitly invoke radical eliminativism.

6 Conclusion

Some cognitive psychologists intent on naturalizing the mind have hoped to cordon off the cognitive attitudes from the hard problem of phenomenal consciousness.¹² Their thought was that if the cognitive states could be functionalized or otherwise handled within the confines of a suitably physicalist framework, then that would leave only the problem of addressing the qualitative character of perceptual experience and bodily sensation. Perhaps, then, their further thought was that these problems could be addressed by treating the qualitative character of such experiences within a representational theory of mind: if perceptual and sensational *qualia* could be shown to be representational states, they would no longer pose any problem for a naturalized theory of the mind. The job, at last, would be complete.

When they have relied upon the variability argument for the first part of their campaign, these cognitive psychologists have failed to advance their strategy. If this result seems unsurprising, then that is due at least in part to their transparent methodo-

¹² In addition to Tye, an especially clear example of this strategy can be found in Dretske (1995).

logical integrity. Rather than adopting a stridently eliminativist stance towards *qualia* in general, such cognitive psychologists have displayed an admirable willingness to attend to the phenomena—however diaphanous they may be—of phenomenal consciousness. That is, these cognitive psychologists have wanted to take the data of phenomenal consciousness seriously in some domains at least, and so have not gone the expedient way of the unapologetic quinean eliminativist. When they go part of the way, however, they must go all of the way or decide to backtrack and go nowhere at all. Every consideration to be adduced for non-cognitive *qualia* tells equally on behalf of cognitive *qualia*. At any rate, this follows if at least one of the parity arguments I have offered is compelling. I believe that all three are perfectly sound; and I note, in closing, that my belief in this regard feels a certain way to me: firm.¹³

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¹³ I first began thinking about the topic of this paper some years ago in a seminar at Stanford on naturalizing the mind led by Fred Dretske. He would, I expect, be unsympathetic to the primary contentions of this paper. Even so, I owe to Dretske, a philosopher of admirable clarity of mind and sympathetic intellectual honesty, my initial framework for approaching these issues. During the course of that seminar I also had especially fruitful conversations with Güven Güzeldere, for which I remain grateful. Earlier drafts of this paper were presented to audiences at The University of Colorado at Boulder, Yale University, and University College, Dublin. Many members of those audiences provided stimulating objections and suggestions. I remain cognizant of revisions effected in the face of especially instructive observations made by Daniel Stoljar, Luc Bovens, Paul Studtmann, Jessica Wilson, Graham Oddie, Troy Cross, Robert Adams, and Rowland Stout. More proximately, Tim Bayne and Michelle Montague have kindly given me detailed comments which have helped me to clarify the main contentions of this paper considerably, as have two anonymous readers for this volume, both of whom offered astute and extremely helpful criticisms. Reading some of Bayne's work has also proven cautionary for me: he is right, I fear, that some issues regarding phenomenal *qualia* recede from view even as we bring them into focus. That acknowledged, I remain optimistic that progress is possible, and I am accordingly grateful to all these critics for their intellectual generosity.

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