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A PHENOMENOLOGICALLY ORIENTED ACCOUNT OF THE PHENOMENON OF ASPECTUALITY IN PROPOSITIONAL ATTITUDES

abstract

My main concern in this paper is to provide an account of the aspectuality of propositional attitudes. After having made the negative point that aspectuality cannot be accounted for in purely semantic terms, I shall maintain that what accounts for aspectuality are phenomenal modes of presentation. The fundamental difference between my modes of presentation and those employed in the several variants of the standard account of aspectuality is that while the latter are properties (taken to be true) of the objects which are involved in the content, my modes of presentation are properties of the subject's experience of the objects and in this sense qualify as "subjective". My thesis is that only phenomenal modes of presentation are suited to account for aspectuality because they incorporate that peculiar way of appearing of the object to the subject which explains whether or not he takes different attitudes towards contents which concern the same object. That modes of presentation have to play this role is an unquestioned point in the debate. That in order to do it they need to have a phenomenal nature is what I shall try to argue for here.

keywords

Aspectuality, propositional attitudes, opacity, modes of presentation, phenomenal characters, consciousness, intentionality

1.
The standard
account of the
phenomenon of
aspectuality

My main concern in this paper is the phenomenon of aspectuality. Aspectuality and directionality (or aboutness) are the two distinguishing features of intentionality: intentional mental states are always directed towards something and the way in which they are so directed is always perspectival in the sense that what a given mental state is about is always given in a certain way (“under a given aspect”), where this way is crucial to account for the motivational role which the mental states the subject enjoys exert in her (verbal and non verbal) behavior. Even though the phenomenon of aspectuality manifests itself in every kind of mental state, here I shall deal with it only in connection with the attitudes, that is states such as *believing/desiring/fearing*, both in their propositional form (S desires that p) and in their objectual form (S desires x)¹. The question I shall address is how aspectuality has to be accounted for as far as attitudes are concerned.

A widespread tendency in the philosophical literature has been to equate the *aspectuality* of the mental states with the *opacity* of the sentences used in the attitude attributions and to account for the former in terms of what accounts for the latter. This strategy, which was inaugurated by Frege’s account of propositional attitudes in the last part of *Über Sinn und Bedeutung* and which was very congenial to the (explanatory) priority thesis of the linguistic content over the mental content which characterized the “linguistic turn” in analytic philosophy, has been subsequently endorsed even by people who have rejected Frege’s analysis in terms of senses and even by people who have rejected the priority thesis characteristic of the linguistic turn. We can distinguish different varieties of this general strategy of accounting for aspectuality in terms of modes of presentation: (i) the Fregean variety which treats modes of presentation as constituents of the proposition expressed; (ii) the hidden-indexical variety which treats them as unarticulated constituents of the proposition expressed; (iii) the overt-indexical variety according to which modes of presentations are constituents of quasi-singular propositions; (iv)

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¹ Since my main concern here is in the propositional form I shall make use of the label “propositional attitudes” which is standard within the literature.

the neo-Russellian strategy in which modes of presentation do not enter into the semantic content of a belief report but in what is pragmatically conveyed by an utterance of it. Notwithstanding the differences, what all these strategies share is the assumption that the aspectuality of propositional attitudes has to be accounted for in semantic or in semantic plus pragmatic terms.

This assumption has of course a strong intuitive appeal: as a matter of fact both propositional attitudes and their linguistic reports manifest the phenomenon of “perspectivalness” (just to use a general label to cover both the mental and the linguistic case). If one can account for perspectivalness at the linguistic level in a given way (i.e. in semantic or semantic plus pragmatic terms), why not claiming that the same kind of explanation can be provided for the mental level?

The idea that it is not possible to account for perspectivalness at the mental level in purely semantic terms because the phenomenon of aspectuality does not coincide with the phenomenon of opacity of attitude reports has been defended by many people in the more or less recent literature in the philosophy of mind². Here I shall side with those people and in the first part of my paper I shall provide some arguments in support of the thesis that any attempt to explain aspectuality in terms of opacity is doomed to fail.

This point about aspectuality matches a parallel point about directionality or aboutness. Many people nowadays maintain that it is not possible to explain “mental aboutness” in terms of “linguistic aboutness” because the former is original and non derivative. I accept this point even though I will not argue for it here. What I shall try to defend in the first part of this paper is the parallel point about aspectuality. I think that even though the two points can go together³, they can be argued for on independent grounds.

In the second part of the paper, after having made the negative point that aspectuality cannot be accounted for in purely semantic terms, I shall address the question as to what positively accounts for it. The gist of my proposal is that what accounts for aspectuality are *phenomenal modes of presentation*. To anticipate, let me explain why I think that we need them. My reason is the following: to account for aspectuality one needs to account for the way in which the object is given to the subject. The question is how modes of presentation have to be conceived in order to account for what we shall call the “to-aspect”. My idea is that only phenomenal modes of presentation are suited in so far as they incorporate that peculiar way of appearing of the object to the

² See e.g. Crane 2001.

³ An example of the conjoined strategy is provided by Searle who accounts for the original aboutness of conscious mental states in terms of their intrinsic aspectuality. I shall come back to Searle’s position at the very end of this paper.

subject which explains whether or not he takes different attitudes towards contents which concern the same object. That modes of presentation have to play this role is an unquestioned point in the debate. That in order to do it they need to have a phenomenal nature is what I shall try to argue for here. The fundamental difference between my modes of presentation and those employed in the several variants of the standard account of aspectuality is that while the latter are properties (taken to be true) of the objects which are involved in the content, my modes of presentation are properties of the subject's experience of the objects and in this sense qualify as "subjective". By contrast, "traditional" modes of presentation qualify as "objective" in the sense that they are not properties of the subject's experience. The notion of mode of presentation is indeed ambiguous between these two readings. In order to avoid confusion I shall use the label "manners of presentation" for the subjective reading and "modes of presentation" for the objective reading⁴. I shall conclude my paper by addressing some objections to my positive account of aspectuality.

Before arguing for the first thesis that aspectuality cannot be accounted for in purely semantic terms let me say a word about the repercussions of my present suggestion on one central debate in the philosophy of mind which deals with the question of the relation between consciousness and intentionality. That my suggestion has repercussions on that debate is obvious in so far as it claims that aspectuality, that is one of the two distinguishing features of intentionality, has to be explained in terms of phenomenal modes of presentation. To defend this stance is to reject the idea that intentionality can be wholly accounted for independently of consciousness and so to reject "intentionalism" in the debate concerning the relationship between intentionality and consciousness⁵. Many people nowadays defend the thesis that there is an explanatory priority of intentionality on consciousness. The general strategy those people have adopted, in the attempt to provide a naturalistic account of the mind, has been that of *divide et impera* which enjoins to separate intentionality from consciousness, to provide a naturalistic account of intentionality and then to naturalize consciousness itself by analyzing it in terms of intentionality without remainder. We can distinguish two main ways of pursuing the goal of grounding consciousness in intentionality. One way is provided by so called "Higher-Order Theories of consciousness" which analyze conscious states in terms of higher-order states that represent them: to be

⁴ The distinction between manners and modes of presentation has been acknowledged for example by Chalmers, See e.g. Chalmers 2004.

⁵ I shall here use "intentionalism" as a label for the general strategy of grounding consciousness in intentionality.

conscious for a state, according to this picture, is for the state to be represented in a special way by a higher order representation⁶. The other way, which is more popular, tries to analyze phenomenal conscious states as certain sorts of first-order intentional states, advocating in this way “representationalism” that is: the thesis that the phenomenal properties of a mental state are identical, or equivalent (and therefore reducible) to certain representational properties of the state⁷. Intentionalism has been challenged in recent times by people who have argued that consciousness itself plays a crucial role in the constitution of intentionality. Some have defended the strong claim that all intentionality is grounded on consciousness, others the more modest claim that not all intentionality is independent of consciousness and that there is a crucial sort of intentional content which is grounded in and derive from the phenomenal character of mental states⁸.

Having drawn the main theoretical articulations of this debate let me clarify which position my proposal occupies within it. In so far as I want to defend the claim that one of the two distinguishing features of intentionality (namely the aspectuality of the mental states) has to be accounted for in terms of phenomenal characters I reject the intentionalist strategy. Rejecting intentionalism places me in the anti-intentionalist side of the debate but here I need to make some qualifications. In general those who enter this debate do not take care of distinguishing between directionality and aspectuality and, as a consequence, they do not raise the question as to whether it is directionality or aspectuality or both or neither to depend on consciousness. I think it is important to introduce this further question because in my view the range of available options is wider than the participants in the debate tend to assume. Not only can one be an intentionalist or an anti-intentionalist *tout court* (either of the strong or of the weak variety); one can be an intentionalist/an anti-intentionalist as regards directionality (in so far as he claims/he denies that no appeal to consciousness is needed to account for directionality) and at the same time he can either endorse or reject the parallel point about aspectuality. In this paper I shall not raise the question as to whether aboutness or directionality depends on consciousness, but the parallel question about aspectuality. In answering this question I shall defend a qualified form of anti-intentionalism claiming that a feature of intentionality, namely, aspectuality,

⁶ Among the proponents of Higher-Order Theories of consciousness there are Carruthers 2000, Lycan 2004, Rosenthal 2002.

⁷ The representationalist position is very well exemplified by Dretske 1995 and Tye 2002. For this characterization of “representationalism” see Chalmers 2004, p. 4.

⁸ A representative of the strong position is Searle 1992. Among the representatives of the weaker position there are Horgan and Tienson 2002, McGinn 1988, Siewert 1998.

cannot be accounted for independently of consciousness. From this nothing follows as far as directionality is concerned. As things stand, directionality could be explained wholly independently of consciousness⁹.

2. Why aspectuality cannot be accounted for in purely semantic terms

My aim in this part is to make the negative point that aspectuality is not the same as opacity and, consequently, that it cannot be accounted for in terms of what accounts for the latter. I shall start by a minor consideration. The way in which the phenomenon of opacity is defined does not seem to be sufficiently general to cover all mental states. Let me explain. Opacity is defined in terms of failure of substitution *salva veritate*, but this feature does not seem to be applicable to mental states having a non propositional content for example, because the notion of truth-preservation has no application there in so far as objective contents are neither true nor false¹⁰. It goes without saying that this consideration does not prove that opacity is not the same as aspectuality. At most it shows that the characterization provided of the linguistic phenomenon is not sufficiently general to capture the mental phenomenon. The more substantial point we have to consider is whether it is possible to account for aspectuality in terms of what accounts for opacity. The general tendency within the literature has been to account for opacity in semantic (or in semantic plus pragmatic) terms, that is, in terms of modes of presentation taken as articulated or unarticulated constituents of the proposition expressed or communicated. Modes of presentation have been conceived in very different ways: as senses, intensions, guises, characters. My claim is that modes of presentation do not account for aspectuality because they do not capture the way in which the object is given to the subject who is entertaining a given mental state. Many people have criticized the so called standard account of the attitudes on the ground that it does not succeed in individuating in a

⁹ In Sacchi and Voltolini, submitted, aboutness has been treated as a relation of constituency holding between an intentional state, a thought, and the object it is about, the intentional object. In the account we provided consciousness does not play any role. Our position therefore is not compatible with the anti-intentionalist idea that mental aboutness is grounded in consciousness.

¹⁰ One could claim that every objectual content is equivalent to a propositional content and therefore that truth-preservation applies there as well. For example, one could claim that Petrarca's desire for Laura is a desire to meet and kiss Laura and so a state with a propositional content. Nonetheless the idea that states with objectual content can be reduced to states with propositional content has been strongly criticized within the literature. As far as perceptual states are concerned, for example, those who, like Dretske, 1995, defend the plausibility of a "non-epistemic seeing", reject the idea that any objectual seeing is reducible to a propositional seeing (I can see an object without categorizing it and so without seeing that the object is so and so). For a defense of the irreducibility claim as far as emotions are concerned see Crane 2001.

sufficiently fine-grained way the modes of thinking of the objects which are required to account for aspectuality. I side with those people in criticizing the standard account. Yet I do not claim that we need more fine-grained modes of presentation. That they would not help is a point which has been stressed, among other people, by Kent Bach in discussing Kripke's Paderewski puzzle¹¹. Given that our interest here is in the failure of substitution *salva veritate* I shall formulate Kripke's puzzle along the lines of Frege's cases.

Here is how the case goes. A subject, Peter, has had interactions with a politician he knows under the name 'Paderewski' and interactions with a pianist he knows under the same name. Unbeknownst to Peter, Paderewski the politician is the same person as Paderewski the pianist. Peter, who does not know this, believes that they are two different guys who happen to have the same name. As regards Paderewski the pianist Peter believes that he has musical talent (he has attended several concerts of Paderewski and in those occasions he has very much appreciated his skill); as regards Paderewski the politician Peter is agnostic about his having musical talent. So we have a situation in which

1. Peter believes that Paderewski has musical talent (as regards the pianist he knows under the name 'Paderewski') is true, and nonetheless
2. Peter believes that Paderewski has musical talent (as regards the politician he knows under the name 'Paderewski') is false.

The problem which this case raises is how to account for Peter's situation. A standard reply to this puzzle is to claim that the *that*-clauses used in the attributions do not completely specify the content of Peter's two beliefs and that, in order to provide a more accurate formulation of his beliefs, one just needs to insert additional material (more verbiage) by adding for example "Paderewski, the politician" and "Paderewski, the musician".

According to Bach the idea that it is possible to account for this puzzle by introducing more concepts in the subject's modes of presentation of the object, so that in one case Peter would believe that Paderewski under the concept *PIANIST* has musical talent and in the other he would neither believe nor disbelieve that Paderewski under the concept *POLITICIAN* has musical talent, does not make the problem go away. In order to show how the problem would present itself one step further, Bach proposes the following variation of the original puzzle. Suppose that Peter hears a recording of Paderewski playing Rachmaninov in Carnegie Hall and that he likes what he hears. Then he hears a recording of Paderewski playing with a jazz combo at the Apollo Theatre and this time he hates what he hears. He does not realize he has heard the same pianist twice. But here, Bach claims, it won't do any good to say that Peter disbelieves that Paderewski, the pianist, has musical talent, because we could

¹¹ See Bach 1997.

also have truly said that he believes that Paderewski, the pianist, has musical talent. We could make the that-clauses more precise by adding “Paderewski, the classical pianist” and “Paderewski, the jazz pianist” but this ploy, he claims, won’t ultimately work either in so far as one could imagine a situation in which the enriched that-clauses could be used to generate further versions of the puzzle.

Bach’s point is that it is not possible to individuate belief contents in terms of purely conceptual specifications. The train of thought behind his argument seems to be the following: if conceptual specifications were sufficient to individuate the mental states a subject enjoys in a given context, then it shouldn’t be possible, by sticking to those specifications, to generate a new version of the puzzle at a subsequent level. But this is possible. Therefore purely conceptual specifications are not sufficient for the individuation. According to Bach, the lesson to draw is that “that-clauses” are not content clauses in the sense that they do not specify what the subject believes and therefore there is no reason to suppose that there is a unique thing that he both believes and disbelieves. I think that his argument legitimates a weaker conclusion, namely that belief reports do not specify beliefs fully. What is left out or in any case not fully determinate is precisely the peculiar way in which the object is given to the subject in the two cases. Whether this implies that belief reports do not specify belief contents very much depends on which ontology of the propositional attitudes one adopts. If one thinks that the attitudes are two-places relations, then differences in modes of presentation determine differences in content, but if one conceives of them as three-places relations (between a subject, a content and a mode of presentation/way of thinking), then differences in modes of presentation do not determine differences in content. In what follows I shall stick to the more general moral, which I deem less theoretically laden.

The claim that the that-clauses used in the attribution may not fully specify the content of the mental states of the subject (or, more generally, the subject’s mental states) is not new in the literature. As far as thought’s contents are concerned a case in point is provided by Brian Loar. In *Phenomenal Intentionality as the Basis of Mental Content*, for example, Loar claims in a vein very similar to that of Bach’s: “Mental content is individuated more fine-grainedly than the interpersonally shared ‘oblique’ content of certain that-clauses... That-clauses as they are standardly used apparently capture too little information, even on oblique interpretations, and that information is not of the right sort... They are not especially psychologically informative” (Loar 2003, pp. 229-230)¹².

¹² In Loar’s view what matters for the individuation of the mental (or as he says “psychological”) content of a subject’s thought is not “what her thoughts represent as it were impersonally, but also how they represent things to her” (Loar 2003, p. 229).

If Bach and Loar defend the claim that the that-clauses used in the attribution may not fully specify the contents of the mental states of the subject by considering the case of propositional attitudes, most of those who have endorsed that claim have taken into account the case of perceptual experience. That the content of a perceptual experience cannot be fully specified in purely linguistic terms is a point widely acknowledged. People who endorse this claim ground it on the idea that the way in which the object is perceptually given is different and irreducible to a conceptual mode of presentation. The idea that manner of perception are irreducible to (Fregean-like) modes of presentation is explicit in Peacocke's work. In *Perceptual Content*, for example, Peacocke claims that "these manners of perception constitute a genuine level of content in their own right" and goes on distinguishing that level from both the level of the objects in the world which are perceived and the level of modes of presentation which can enter thought-contents. This irreducibility has to do with the irreducibility of what we can call "the level of experience" to the conceptual level. As far as perceptual demonstrative thoughts are concerned, Peacocke acknowledges that they are partly individuated by elements at the level of experience; for he claims that what individuates a demonstrative mode of presentation such as *that* distance is not only the perceptual mode of presentation of the line and the concept DISTANCE but also the manner in which the distance is perceived. But even though he acknowledges this point he deems phenomenology to be out of place as far as the individuation of propositional attitudes are concerned: "The distinctness of the content of perception at the level of manners from the contents of the attitudes seems ultimately to derive from the different demands made by the two very different notions which individuate the two kinds of content. *Individuation of the content of perception is answerable to matters of phenomenology in the first instance, while the content of attitudes is answerable to matters of epistemic possibility - and these two notions can come apart*" (Peacocke 1989, p. 314. Emphasis mine). Peacocke exemplifies the standard stance in philosophy of mind according to which matters of phenomenology are relevant for the individuation of so called qualitative states such as sensations and feelings but not for the individuation of propositional attitudes.

3. According to my proposal, phenomenal characters play a fundamental role in accounting for the aspectuality of the mental (not just as regards qualitative states but as regards every kind of mental state) for they are precisely the phenomenal characters that are responsible for the subject's taking or not taking the same attitude towards contents which concern the same object and which ascribe the same properties to it. My thesis is that what we need to account for aspectuality are *manners of presentation*, i.e. modes of presentation

which are individuated in terms of phenomenal characters. So, to come back to Kripke's Paderewski puzzle, what in my view accounts for the difference in Peter's two beliefs is a difference in the phenomenal characters of his two beliefs. When Peter thinks of Paderewski (*qua* pianist) in entertaining the belief that Paderewski has musical talent he is phenomenally affected by Paderewski in a way which is different from the way in which Paderewski affects him when he thinks about him (*qua* politician). In order to highlight the difference between the nature of my modes of presentation (*manners of presentation*) and that of those that have traditionally been employed in the philosophical literature on propositional attitudes we must use the contrast subjective/objective. Manners of presentation are subjective: they are constituted by properties of the subject's "experience" of the objects and properties thought about. Modes of presentations are objective: they are constituted by properties the thinking subject takes what he is thinking about to possess.

In this sense my proposal differs radically from that of those who reject the idea that it is always possible to individuate modes of presentation in purely conceptual terms and that introduce non-conceptual modes of presentation within the picture to cope with the above mentioned problems¹³. Both conceptual and non conceptual modes of presentation are objective in the sense that they are not properties of the subject's experience. What is new in my picture is precisely the idea that we need subjective modes of presentation to account for aspectuality because objective modes of presentation, even if implemented with a non-conceptual level, are not fine-grained enough to account for aspectuality. A subject could not recognize that it is one and the same object that is given to him in two different occasions even though both the conceptual and the non-conceptual specifications of the object in the two cases were identical. This would be a case in which the subject's experience of the object has different properties even though there is no difference at the objective level of what is represented¹⁴.

My proposal commits therefore to the claim that not just in perceiving an object but also in thinking about it there is something it is like to be presented with the object, whatever the attitudinal mode of the act turns out to be. That there is something it is like to perceive an object (to see a

¹³ An advocate of this position is, for example, Récanati. See e.g. Récanati 1993.

¹⁴ Of course a representationalist could claim that even the subjective properties of experience are part of the content of the mental states. But even the representationalist would need to distinguish them from the other properties of the content reintroducing in this way that distinction between subjective and objective presentations which I claim has to be acknowledged in order to account for aspectuality.

ripe tomato, to hear a melody, to taste a cherry) is a point that everyone is willing to concede. In my view the same holds for thinking. That that is so is something which everyone can ascertain on the ground of her own experience (provided her theoretical biases do not prevent her to make this acknowledgement). And this turns out to be true not only of a very peculiar subclass of thoughts (such as, for example, perceptual demonstrative ones) but of every thought. To acknowledge this point is of course not enough to ground the claim that phenomenal characters play a fundamental role in accounting for aspectuality. What does ground this claim then? My answer is that they are the phenomenal characters what ultimately account for the subject's taking or not taking different attitudes towards contents which ascribe the same properties to the same object. Let me explain. Whether a given subject takes the same or a different attitude is not explained by the fact that in the two cases he entertains the same or a different set of conceptual specifications of the object. The concepts of the object which get mobilized in the two cases could be the same and nonetheless the subject could take different attitudes. What explains the subject's taking the same or a different attitude is the fact that he takes/does not take that it is one and the same object that is *presented to him* in the two cases. The fact that he uses the same or a different set of conceptual specifications of the object does not explain this fact. One could put this point by saying that sameness or difference in conceptual specifications do not explain the subject's taking the thing he is thinking about to be the same as itself or not. Objective modes of presentation seem therefore to be inadequate to play the role they have been introduced to play. This is a point which an author such as Ruth Millikan, for example, has stressed in a series of works¹⁵. In *Perceptual Content and the Fregean Myth*, for example, she attacks Frege by saying that he has done something like "confusing sameness in the vehicle of representation with a representation of sameness" (Millikan 1991, p. 439), generating in this way the illusion that sameness in meaning immediately translates into sameness in intermediaries and then into sameness in cognitive mechanics and conversely. Against Frege, she claims that the iteration of a thought via the same mode of presentation cannot, simply as such, necessitate an act of grasping the sameness of the contents involved. I deem Millikan's criticism to the point. Yet, against her, I do not think that sameness or difference have to be "represented" in order for the rational mind to respond to them. Sameness or difference, or better presumed sameness or difference, are, so to say, to be "felt". When a person on two different occasions is thinking of

¹⁵ See e.g. Millikan 1991, 1993.

what he takes to be the same object (whatever conceptual specifications he uses in the two cases) his two episodes of thinking have the same phenomenal character. By contrast, when two episodes of thinking have different phenomenal characters this shows that the subject does not take them to be about the same object.

Let me now clarify how phenomenal characters have to be conceived. The phenomenological account which I promote commits itself to the claim that every (occurrent¹⁶) mental state has a phenomenal aspect: so not only sensations and feelings but also propositional attitudes have a phenomenology¹⁷. What is worth stressing here is that even granting that propositional attitudes have a phenomenology as far as their attitudinal mode is concerned (i.e. even granting that there is something it is like to desire that *p* and that it is different from what it is like to fear that *p* for example), it cannot be that dimension what accounts for aspectuality. The reason is simple. Let us consider Kripke's Paderewski puzzle (or Frege's Hesperus/Phosphorus puzzle). In both cases we are dealing with attitudes having the same attitudinal mode. Given that the attitudinal mode is the same it cannot be differences in the phenomenological mode which explain the difference in the way the object is "*presented to S*" in the two cases. The difference has to be explained in terms of the way in which the objects and properties *S* is thinking about are given to her. We therefore have to say that they are the contents themselves which are responsible for the differences in the phenomenal characters of the subject's experience in the two cases. So the phenomenologically based account of the attitudes commits itself to the claim that *contents themselves contribute to the phenomenology* in the sense that they figure in our phenomenological domain when we consciously entertain them in a given attitudinal mode¹⁸.

Does this mean that contents have associated with them distinct *qualia* or raw feels? Well, many people simply identify phenomenal characters with raw feels. If one makes this identification he can hardly see how something devoid of sensible properties (as contents as opposed to sentences

¹⁶ The rationale for this qualification will become clear at the end where I shall address some objections to my proposal. To anticipate the point, let me say that if the aspectuality of the mental is explained in terms of phenomenal characters then, given that only conscious states can have phenomenal characters and that only occurrent states can be conscious, it follows that what I am accounting for is the aspectuality of occurrent mental states. How the case of dispositional mental states can be dealt with is a point which I shall address at the end.

¹⁷ I shall not provide any argument for this claim here even though at the end I shall briefly present some lines of arguments which could be put forward in its defense.

¹⁸ For a defense of this point see McCulloch 2003; Strawson 1994, 2004.

seem to be) could be associated with a phenomenal character¹⁹. But it is a mistake to make that identification: the phenomenal characters associated with sense experience are but a variety of phenomenal characters. Many people in the recent literature have acknowledged this point and have introduced the distinction between sensuous phenomenology and non-sensuous phenomenology²⁰. The idea is that both a sense experience and a propositional attitude may be associated with a distinctive phenomenal character which is of the sensuous variety in the first case and of the non-sensuous variety in the other case. Once the idea of a non-sensuous phenomenology has been introduced, a further distinction has to be drawn between the non-sensuous qualities associated with the attitudinal mode of the act (non-sensuous act phenomenology) and those associated with the subject's experience of the content of the acts (non-sensuous content phenomenology). They are the latter which are needed in order to characterize the aspectuality of propositional attitudes, because aspectuality has to do with the way in which the content is (experientially) given to the subject and the content is something devoid of sensible properties. The non-sensuous phenomenal character of *S*'s belief that *p* is the way in which that *p* affects *S* when *S* entertains the belief.

But what relation is there between the (non-sensuous) phenomenal character and the content? As far as this issue is concerned one can take one of two stances: one can claim that (i) the phenomenal character is a constituent (and therefore a determiner) of content; or that (ii) the phenomenal character does not determine content but the way in which it affects the subject's act of entertaining it. Position (i) is very well exemplified by McGinn in his 1988 paper *Consciousness and Content* where he talks about the Janus-faced character of conscious content having both an outward looking face (a face which points to the external world) and an inner looking face (a face which points to the subject). In his view, these faces or aspects (the *of-aspect* and the *to-aspect*) are

¹⁹ It goes without saying that if one's model of phenomenal character is based on sensory experience one would hardly attribute phenomenal characters to one's acts of entertaining contents. For in the latter case there aren't any of those sensuous aspects which are present in sense experience. Undoubtedly, what it is like to taste a ripe tomato, or to kiss one's lover, or to smell a scented flower is incomparably different and richer. And yet this should not prevent one to recognize that there are other kinds of qualitative features of a non-sensuous kind.

²⁰ The distinction between sensory and non-sensory qualia is acknowledged by several authors: Crane 2001, for example, draws it (he uses "qualia" or "qualitative features" for sensory properties and "phenomenal character" in the broader sense of what it is like to be in a mental state); Kriegel 2008 also draws it and distinguishes between phenomenal character as a kind of sensuous quality and phenomenal character as whatever property the explanatorily gap concerns.

a function of each other. I don't want to follow the first stance which McGinn exemplifies. My reasons for not adhering to (i) is that in my view it ends up subjectivizing contents in a way which makes it impossible for two subjects to entertain one and the same content. Let me explain. If the to-aspect (the phenomenal character) is a determinant (however partial) of the content a given subject entertains, then given that the to-aspect involves reference to the subject who is entertaining the content, it follows that no two different subjects could entertain one and the same content. This seems to me a very undesirable consequence. I think it is possible to account for subjectivity without making contents themselves subjective. That's why I think that option (ii) is preferable. According to it, to be Janus-faced are not the contents but the subject's conscious acts of entertaining them. To adhere to (ii) is to locate subjectivity on the act-hand side of the divide; a mental act has both representational features and phenomenal features: the representational features of the act account for the of-aspect (the directionality of the mental act); the phenomenal features account for the to-aspect (the aspectuality of the mental act). In my view, the tendency to locate the subjective aspects of our mental states in the content of the state, i.e. on the "objective side" of the so called subjective/objective divide, is a mistake made by all forms of "representationalism". According to representationalism phenomenal properties are a special kind of representational properties. The strong variety of this doctrine defends the idea of the reducibility of phenomenal properties to representational proprieties by claiming that the former are identical or equivalent to the latter. But even those varieties which rejects reducibility²¹, and McGinn's position is one of those, make in my view the same mistake of thinking that the phenomenal properties contribute to what is represented. Let us now consider how the relation between the phenomenal character and the phenomenal mode of the act has to be conceived. We can here distinguish two possible ways of treating phenomenal characters: either as independent from the phenomenal mode of the act (so that, for example, a given content, that *p* say, may affect the subject in a given way no matter whether that *p* is perceived or thought about for example), or as dependent from the phenomenal mode of the act (so that the way in which that *p* affects the subjects depends on the attitudinal mode under which that *p* is entertained). The alternative which I deem more congenial to my proposal is the former. Let me explain why I think so. If I am right in claiming that they are the phenomenal characters of the subject's mental states that account for whether the subject takes what he is thinking about to be the same or

²¹For a discussion of the various forms of representationalism, reductive and non reductive, strong and weak, pure and impure, see Chalmers 2004.

different in different mental episodes, then since it is patently possible for a subject to make an assumption of identity/difference towards the “intentional object” of mental states of different attitudinal modes (i.e. he can deem that it is one and the same object that is both perceived and thought about or desired or feared or whatever), it ought to be possible for states in different attitudinal modes to have the same phenomenal character. But this requires that phenomenal characters are independent from the attitudinal modes of the act. This follows from the explanatory role which manners of presentation are claimed to play in my picture. Of course if one questions my assumption my line of argument collapses, but in order to do it one has to show that other candidates are better suited to play that explanatory role. Even though there are many arguments against the suitability of objective modes of presentation to play the mode of presentation role, I know of no argument to the same effect which is directed against manners of presentation. Given that it is in “the very nature” of manners of presentation to account for the way in which the object is (experientially) given to the subject and given that this is precisely what one needs in order to account for aspectuality, I do not see which arguments the objector could device against them. What he could do is to question their existence. But pending that demonstration, and the *onus probandi* is on the part of the objector, we can go on undisturbed.

But if phenomenal characters can be common in mental acts with different intentional modes and if phenomenal characters are properties of the act, the question immediately arises as to which act they are properties of. A plausible answer is to claim that any mental act, whatever its intentional mode may be, is actually “grounded” in a more basic act which can be conceived as a presentation of the object to the subject²².

An issue on which I prefer to stay neutral here is the way in which the claim according to which the phenomenal characters do not determine contents but the way in which they affect the subject’s act of entertaining them is to be articulated. I just signal two ways in which one could develop that claim which could be called the adverbialist and the non-adverbialist way as regards manners of presentation²³.

According to the “adverbialist way”

²² This kind of answer seems to be in line with some of Brentano’s thesis about the role of *Vorstellungen*. Brentano (in Brentano 1874) distinguishes three classes of mental phenomena or acts: representations (*Vorstellungen*) – including ideas, images, thoughts and sensations –, judgments and emotions. After having made this distinction he presents in ch. 7 appendix IX a theory of judgment according to which all judgments are based on presentations.

²³ This qualification is important not even the former qualifies as adverbialist as regards the analysis of the attitudes in so far as it provides a relational account of them.

S's believing that p (that Hesperus is F) is for S to believe-Hesperus-wise that p
and
S's believing that q (that Phosphorus is F) is for S to believe-Phosphorus-wise that p.

According to the “non-adverbialist” way

S's believing that p (that Hesperus is F) is for S to believe in a Hesperescent way that p
and
S's believing that q (that Hesperus is F) is for S to believe in a Phosphorescent way that p.

Even though these two ways seem to be notational variants, the kind of metaphysics of the attitudes on which they are based is different. The adverbialist way conceives of propositional attitudes as two-places relations (between an individual and a proposition); the non-adverbialist way conceives of propositional attitudes as three-places relations (between an individual, a way of appearing – sort of non-sensuous looking – and a content).

4. Addressing some objections

I shall conclude this paper by considering some objections to my suggested phenomenologically oriented account of aspectuality. The first objection goes like this: “Your suggested account of the aspectuality of propositional attitudes cannot be right because propositional attitudes do not have any phenomenology, only sensations have phenomenal or qualitative aspects”²⁴. As I said, one of the principal resistances to the idea that propositional attitudes have phenomenal characters comes from the identification of phenomenal characters with sensuous *qualia*. To reject that identification is a fundamental step in accepting the idea that phenomenology extends far further than the domain of the sensible. So which arguments could be provided in support of the idea that propositional attitudes have a phenomenology (of a non-sensuous kind)? I shall here present two arguments. The former, which is a revision of what is called in the literature “the argument from subjective identification”, goes like this²⁵. First step: we have an immediate access to some aspects of the state we are in (we can know immediately not just the intentional mode of a propositional attitude – whether it is a desire or a belief or a fear for example – but also how it presents things to us); second step: we can have immediate access only to aspects which are endowed with a phenomenal dimension; conclusion:

²⁴ An author such as Dretske for example could make this objection. See e.g. Dretske 1995.

²⁵ Among the proponents of the original version see Boghossian 1989 and Bonjour 1998. The name of the argument has to do with the proponents’ rejection of the functionalist account of our subjective identification of the mental states we are in. Arguments against functionalist accounts of our self-ascription of mental states can be found in Goldman 1993.

both the intentional mode of a propositional attitude and the aspect under which the content is given to us must have a phenomenal dimension²⁶.

Let us now consider the second argument which is grounded on the intuition that mental states of different attitudinal modes may exhibit a high degree of phenomenological continuity. The basic idea behind this argument is that when we move from a state of non-conceptual perception (or pre-perceptual awareness of properties: a sensation of cat-shapedness, a sensation of carpet-shapedness) to one of non-conceptual perception (I see a cat on the carpet), and from there to propositional perception (I see that there is a cat on the carpet) and thinking (I think that there is a cat on the carpet) we keep our focus on the object and do not experience any qualitative “break” or “jump”. To deny that propositional attitudes have a phenomenology would amount to claiming that when the subject moves to the level of thought he ceases to be phenomenally conscious. But this is contrary to the “phenomenological continuity intuitions”²⁷.

Even though these arguments may not support the strong claim that propositional attitudes are *essentially* phenomenal they seem to support the weaker claim that phenomenology does not disappear at that level. That’s enough for my present purpose. To defend my phenomenologically based account of the aspectuality of the attitudes I do not need essentialism but the more modest claim according to which propositional attitudes present a general dependency on states with phenomenal characters. Let us now consider another objection. Here what the objector rises is a point about the range of application of my proposal: “Since only occurrent mental states can have phenomenal characters, how to account for the aspectuality of dispositional mental states?”. I think that there are at least two ways in which one could accommodate the case of dispositional mental states. The most radical way is to deny that there is any aspectuality at that level or, less radically, to claim that there is only “as-if aspectuality”. The other way is to resort to the distinction between original vs. non original and to provide an explanation of the aspectuality of dispositional mental states along the lines in which Searle, for example, accounts for the non original intentionality of non-conscious mental states²⁸. One could therefore say that

²⁶In its original version the argument maintains that we have an immediate access to (and therefore that we know immediately) not only the attitudinal aspect of the state we are in but also its content. This version of the argument has been challenged on the ground that, in so far as it is possible to provide a non phenomenological account of our immediate self-knowledge of content, the second step of the argument has to be rejected and so the conclusion does not go through. Even though some authors (see e.g. Pitt 2004) have tried to defend the second step against the objection that it is possible to provide a functionalist account of our immediate self-knowledge of content, I do not want to follow that line. Given that in my picture the phenomenal character is not an aspect of the content of the act I do not need to defend the idea that the best account of our immediate self-knowledge of content is a phenomenological one.

²⁷For a presentation and discussion of this argument see Klausen 2008.

²⁸See Searle, 1992.

what makes a non-occurrent belief of S the belief that Hesperus is beautiful and not the belief that Phosphorus is beautiful is this: if the belief were conscious then it would have a Hesperescent phenomenal character and not a Phosphorescent phenomenal character.

I shall conclude by making a comment on Searle's thesis that only conscious intentionality has genuine aspectuality. In *The Rediscovery of the Mind* Searle tries to defend the thesis that intentionality depends upon consciousness and makes use of aspectuality to make this point. The general outline of his argument is the following: no genuine intentionality without intrinsic aspectuality; no intrinsic aspectuality without consciousness; therefore no genuine intentionality without consciousness. We can distinguish two dependence claims in Searle's argument: the dependence of intentionality on aspectuality; the dependence of aspectuality on consciousness. The two claims are independent and can be held separately. I agree with Searle's second claim and in my paper I have tried to give some substance to it. In commenting Searle's proposal in the context of the discussion as to whether intentionality is dependent on consciousness Kriegel says: "According to Searle, when x becomes aware of her belief... her belief is endowed, in and of itself, with an aspectual shape... But what is it about the *conscious* thought that endows it with this intrinsic aspectual shape? Searle has nothing to say about that" (Kriegel 2003, p. 280). Well, I think that this criticism is to the point. What I have tried to do in my paper is precisely to show how an answer to that question could be provided.

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