

The Affectively Embodied Perspective of the Subject

Sean M. Smith, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

2530 Dole St., Sakamaki Hall, Honolulu, HI 96822

smsmith9@hawaii.edu

Short Abstract:

This paper treats of phenomenal consciousness and its relation to an organism's capacity to be hedonically perturbed or affected by its environment. This paper offers an empirically informed, phenomenologically descriptive conceptual analysis of subjective character in terms of an organism's ability to feel with its body. I call this the 'affectively embodied perspectival view' of subjective character. The subjective character of an organism's phenomenally conscious states is at least partially constituted by embodied affect, that is, by our ability to *feel* what is happening on and inside our living bodies.

Long Abstract:

This paper treats of phenomenal consciousness and its relation to an organism's capacity to be hedonically perturbed or affected by its environment. I distinguish between two important aspects of phenomenal consciousness. This paper offers an empirically informed, phenomenologically descriptive conceptual analysis of subjective character in terms of an organism's ability to feel with its body. I call this the 'affectively embodied perspectival view' of subjective character: The subjective character of an organism's phenomenally conscious states is at least partially constituted by embodied affect, that is, by our ability to *feel* what is happening on and inside our living bodies. It is in virtue of our being able to feel with our bodies that our experiences disclose the world as seeming a certain way for us. In §1 I provide some conceptual analysis of the notion of 'affect' and some initial motivations for AEP. I develop an empirically informed, systematic argument for AEP in §2. In §3, I consider three objections. First, in §3.1 I argue against the possibility that bodily affect contributes only to the qualitative character of phenomenally conscious experiences but not to their subjective character. I then argue against the view that we are only aware of bodily affect by attending to it (§3.2). Lastly, in §3.3, I consider the connection between affect and agency in the constitution of subjective character.

Keywords: access, affect, consciousness, embodiment, phenomenality

Introduction

This paper treats of phenomenal consciousness and its relation to an organism's capacity to be hedonically perturbed or affected by its environment. I distinguish between two important aspects of phenomenal consciousness. Call the first aspect 'qualitative character' or 'content' and the second

‘subjective character’ or ‘perspective’ (Kriegel 2009).¹ The qualitative character of phenomenal consciousness is that aspect of experience in virtue of which the world seems a certain way to a subject of experience. If I am having an experience of an apple seeming red to me, it is the redness of the apple that makes up the qualitative character of my visual experience. The subjective character of phenomenal consciousness is that aspect of experience in virtue of which any qualitative character is apprehended from an embodied first-personal point of view. Any and all phenomenal experiences happen to and for the subjects having them (Nagel 1974). This aspect of phenomenal consciousness has also been called ‘for-me-ness’ (Kriegel 2009).

This paper offers an empirically informed, phenomenologically descriptive conceptual analysis of subjective character in terms of an organism’s ability to feel with its body. I call this the ‘affectively embodied perspectival view’ of subjective character:

AEP: The subjective character of an organism’s phenomenally conscious states is at least partially constituted by embodied affect, that is, by our ability to *feel* what is happening on and inside our living bodies.

It is in virtue of our being able to feel with our bodies that our experiences disclose the world as seeming a certain way for us. I use the notion of ‘constitution’ as a way of saying that *what it is* to be phenomenally conscious is to be affectively perturbed by one’s world. I hedge with the locution ‘at least partially’ in order to acknowledge that there might other processes that are also constitutive of subjective character.² In §1 I provide some conceptual analysis of the notion of ‘affect’ and some initial motivations for AEP. I develop an empirically informed, systematic argument for AEP in §2. In §3, I consider three objections. First, in §3.1 I argue against the possibility that bodily affect contributes only to the qualitative character of phenomenally conscious experiences but not to their subjective character. I then argue against the view that we are only aware of bodily affect by

¹ The term ‘subjective character’ originally comes from Thomas Nagel (1974), but my usage follows Kriegel’s (2009), which is slightly different from Nagel’s. Nagel uses ‘subjective character’ as a synonym for ‘phenomenal character’. I use ‘subjective character’ to refer to that aspect of phenomenal character that makes it the case that experiences are *for me*.

² For example, in the human case, cognitive capacities for inference and judgment might bring about a phenomenal sense of being a *thinking* subject and not just an *embodied* and *feeling* subject.

attending to it (§3.2). Lastly, in §3.3, I consider the connection between affect and agency in the constitution of subjective character.

1 Subjectivity and the Centrality of Affect

To begin, I lay out some necessary conceptual preliminaries regarding the nature of affect as well as some important data from affective neuroscience. These preliminary exegetical and empirical details will allow me to formulate a first pass at a positive articulation of and motivation for AEP.

1.1 Homeodynamic Affect

'Affect' is a general category of the mental that refers to different types of states or events whereby an organism is perturbed by its environment in a way that is pleasant, unpleasant or neutral for it. Affect is a capacity or sensitivity in virtue of which an organism has a hedonic relation — a relation that is graded along a spectrum of pleasant, neutral, and unpleasant feelings — to its environment. As embodied subjects of experience, we are not simply observers of the world, but participants in it. We are both agents and patients as we are bombarded by sensory stimuli and then respond to it in kind with our sensorimotor, attentional, and cognitive agency. We deploy our various forms of agency in response to affective primes provided by our environment and felt in our bodies. These primes solicit our responses. Our capacities for agency enable those responses.

A bodily affect is any felt occurrence within the framework of the body. Such feelings are significant to the subject because they are valenced. This notion of 'valence' refers to the fact that affective events are felt as instantiating a kind of value that is felt or understood by the subject in terms of a positive/negative spectrum (Colombetti 2005; Prinz 2010). For example, actions can be morally valenced by being either praiseworthy or blameworthy. Bodily feelings are hedonically valenced by being either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.³

³ Whenever I use the term 'valence', I am referring to the hedonic value of affective mental events, especially those that arise within the framework of the body.

Even within my focus on hedonic affect arising within the framework of the body, there are still many different sorts of affect that are relevant to the question of how the subjective character of experience might be constitutively affective. Distinguish between three types of affect: sensory, emotional, and homeostatic (Panksepp 1998, 2005, 2011).⁴ Philosophers have had much to say about the sensory and emotional aspects of mental life. However, homeostatic affect—or, as I will call it, for reasons to be explained shortly, 'homeodynamic affect' (Damasio 1999; 139; Rose 1998) - has been largely neglected in philosophy of mind, including the philosophy of emotion.

Exceptions to this neglect include Thompson (2007), Ratcliffe (2008) and Colombetti (2014). My work here builds on these important contributions. However, my approach here differs in important ways from these thinkers. Colombetti's analysis of what she calls 'primordial affect' is highly suggestive but bears no necessary connection to phenomenal consciousness (Colombetti 2014, 2). Thus, most of her phenomenological analysis is focused on emotions and moods, there is no in-depth treatment of the phenomenal character of homeodynamic affect in her work. When Ratcliffe discusses 'existential feelings', he does so with reference to kinaesthesia, proprioception, and interoception (2008, 123-4). Most of his treatment of these phenomena happens within the framework of a Heideggerean approach to phenomenology and his treatment of the related empirical literature focusses too much on pathological cases. My work extends his important contributions by jettisoning the reliance on Heideggerean fundamental ontology and treats of empirical literature that bears on both ordinary and pathological cases. Lastly, Thompson's *Mind in Life* (2007) is a watershed piece of philosophy that has set the agenda for embodied cognitive science over the last ten years. Yet his discussion of 'the feeling of existence' and the homeodynamic processes that undergird it lasts only two short pages in the eighth chapter (2007, 229-30). My work here extends and builds upon his important work by developing a systematic argument for the centrality of homeodynamic affect for understanding subjective character and deploys a wider range of empirical data to bolster that argument.

⁴ In §1.2 I will say something specific about how I understand the differences between these various forms of bodily affect.

Homeodynamic affect is physically realized by regulatory processes through which an organism maintains an internal equilibrium in the face of a changing and often hostile environment.⁵ The term most commonly used to describe these basic life-regulation processes is 'homeostasis'. 'Homeostasis' is the process of self-regulation by which an organism maintains a balance of physiological factors such as temperature, pH, and nutrient levels in its internal milieu (Craig 2003b). Such self-maintenance is necessary to keep the organism primed for dealing with possible interruptions to that balance from without (Damasio and Carvalho 2013, 145). A note on the differences between 'homeostatic' and 'homeodynamic' is in order. They refer to the same process. How might two suffixes with seemingly opposite meanings come to specify the same process? The term 'homeostasis' puts emphasis on the fact that an organism survives by aiming for a kind of steady-state that allows it to persist in the face of an unstable world. The organism withstands the onslaught of environmental perturbances by maintaining a balance. This balance is what the 'stasis' in 'homeostasis' refers to. This process of self-regulation is also 'homeodynamic' because perturbations born of self-world contact are constant. Perfect balance is asymptotic. There are always minor fluctuations in the internal milieu of the organism. Persistence is achieved when those fluctuations occur within a permissible range of excitation; organismic stability is really meta-stability. The organism is not aiming at a steady state but at preservation of dynamic flexibility that keeps it robust across a variety of self-world interactions. Therefore, I use the term 'homeodynamic' to refer to this most basic level of bodily affect. It is a more accurate description of the regulatory micro-dynamics of the organism.⁶

⁵ I use the locution 'physically realized' as a metaphysically agnostic catch-all for the relation of the physical to the mental. I assume this relation is causal in some respect. The precise semantic values of these realization terms is an important topic in its own right. However, I leave such a project to the side as it is not my intention to solve the hard problem of consciousness in this paper (Chalmers 1996). I try to couch my view in a way that is acceptable to functionalists or dualists. Nevertheless, in the interest of transparency, I confess that my theoretical inclinations are non-reductive in nature.

⁶ Homeodynamic processes are not just present in complex organisms. Such processes are proper to the functioning of all living cells (Cook et al. 2014). Organic systems strive for equilibrium in the face of perturbances at every level of organization in the tree of life. Insofar as homeodynamic affects are experienced by organisms like us, such feelings provide a window on phylogenetically basic processes of biological persistence. Thus, it is plausible to think that such forms of experience exist in many other sorts of creatures besides ourselves. Here is not the place to speculate on how far down the phylogenetic tree phenomenality extends. For now, I focus on how such self-regulation processes ramify through human experience.

Homeodynamic affects are experienced as feelings that occur in and on the body, in both a holistic and local way. A local bodily sensation is one occurring in a determinate location in and on the body. An example would be the parched sensation in your throat when you are thirsty or the grumbling feeling in your stomach when you are hungry. Further examples of the feeling component of homeodynamic affect besides thirst include the need for air, sexual arousal, the need to expend waste from the body through defecation and urination, as well as general visceral and muscular feedback in the body (Denton 2006, Denton et al. 2009, 501). While most of these bodily affects tend to be local — arising in and on a specific region of the body — there are also holistic bodily affects. A holistic bodily sensation is one that animates larger sections of the body in a more diffuse way. An example from William James' discussion of attention is the subtle cascades of arousal that animate the trunk and limbs of the body during experiences of fatigue (James 1890/1950 Vol. I, 404). Another way to get a sense of such feelings is to think about the way the body shows up in absorbed skillful activity such as running or playing the drums. In these situations, the body is present in experience in a more global way.⁷

As I mentioned above, such feelings, whether global or local, are 'valenced', meaning that they are felt by the subject as having a hedonic tone that ranges across a spectrum from pleasant to neutral to unpleasant (Colombetti 2005, Prinz 2010). Local bodily sensations tend to be more explicitly valenced, as when I feel pain in my stubbed toe or an itch on my lower back. Holistic bodily sensations tend to be more neutral in their valence, as when I am just about to fall asleep and I can feel my whole body. That being said, holistic bodily sensations can be more explicitly valenced as well. If my band and I are performing well together, then my holistic bodily feelings are hedonically pleasant while I am playing the drums. If I am nervous and the sound isn't good, then my body feels tense and uncomfortable. In addition to these obviously valenced embodied affects that there are relatively neutral bodily sensations, that are being felt constantly whether or not there is a localized

⁷ I will have occasion to speak of these sorts of examples in more detail in §3.1 in response to an important objection to the view I am developing here.

and obvious sensation arising in some specific region of the body. All of the preceding local homeodynamic feelings represent departures of various kinds from a more general feeling that arises when the organism is in homeodynamic equilibrium. This more general feeling has been referred to as 'the feeling of being alive' (Thompson 2007). The feeling of being alive, in particular, is the one that I think is central to the subjective character of phenomenal consciousness in humans and other animals.

1.2 Some Varieties of Bodily Affect

When discussing consciousness, philosophers have tended to concentrate on sensory aspects of experience, neglecting homeodynamic affect. Lists of such sensory aspects of experience tend to include sights, scents, tastes, and sounds, but also pains. Sensory affects can be generally classed as those that are experienced *via* exteroceptive information channels. Interoception by contrast is a process whose function is to map the body's condition. Homeodynamic affects arise as a result of interoception providing information to phenomenal awareness about the status of the body's condition through feeling.

In addition to sensory and homeodynamic affects, there are emotional affects, the feelings that accompany emotional episodes.⁸ There is some debate in the philosophical literature about how to explain them and emotions more generally. One point of general agreement is that emotions comprise at least two components, appraisal and valence. An appraisal is the part of an emotion that evaluates the significance of an emotionally salient event for the subject. The valence is the feel or hedonic component that makes the emotion positive or negative in some way. Emotion theorists do not agree about which of these components is more important for explaining emotions. Some emotion theorists tend to identify emotions with a kind of cognitive appraisal, focusing on the contribution that emotions make to rationality in perception (De Sousa 1990) and judgment

⁸ It is worth noting that many of these examples (like tastes and pains) would qualify as examples of the qualitative character of a phenomenally conscious experience. However, as I will show in what follows, homeodynamic affects within the body should be thought of as contributing to the subjective character of phenomenally conscious experience as well.

(Nussbaum 2001). Others focus more on the affective valence component as the essential feature (James 1890/1950, Damasio 1999, Prinz 2006). Both groups of theorists can agree that there is something felt during an emotional episode that helps to individuate the emotion. These theorists disagree about how central such feelings are in their contribution to the rational role that emotions play in our mental lives.⁹

Finally, undergirding our sensory affective and emotional lives, we return to homeodynamic affect. In mammals, the process of homeodynamic life regulation is carried out by the interoceptive system; a network of nerves that converge in the lamina I of the dorsal horn in the spine and innervate the entire living body (Craig 2002, 2003a). This point regarding innervation is important because it provides a physiological basis in virtue of which the baseline feeling of being alive, or homeodynamic equilibrium, is realized by nerves of the interoceptive system that innervate the entire living body. Innervation is the process of providing nerve energy to muscle tissue. In virtue of the pervasive distribution of the peripheral nervous system through the body in this way, we have some reason to

⁹ Within the category of emotional affects, there are three relevant sub-categories. First, there are emotions proper. These are the familiar episodic affective episodes that animate our life with so much meaning. Relevant examples that are particular to the human case would include happiness, pride, jealousy, and anger. Moods are another form of affective event that could be rightfully understood as falling under the category of emotional affect. Moods are to be differentiated from emotions proper on account of at least two factors (Prinz 2006). The first is that moods often lack a proper intentional object. Moods permeate our experience in ways that colour our perceptions of the world without necessarily picking out any one aspect of the world as being a certain way. On the other hand, emotions tend to have specific intentional objects (usually meaningful events of personal interactions) which occasion them. The other aspect of asymmetry between emotions and moods is their temporal duration. Emotions usually have a fairly circumscribed life. They come and go and do not last very long, often because the proper object of our emotions changes quite rapidly. Thus, emotions might last from a few seconds to a few hours. Moods by contrast can last for a much longer period, for days or even weeks depending on a person's situation. Finally, there are also core emotional affects. These are the raw phylogenetic materials out of which our individual human emotions are built. According to affective neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp (1998, 2005, 2011), there are at least seven 'core emotional affects' that need to be differentiated from more common human emotional affects. Core emotional affects are primitive, genetically constrained, affective arousal patterns that are tied to habitual, survival-oriented behavioural scripts. By a 'behaviour script' I mean a kind of behavioural response that is habitual and reflex-like. Responses of this sort are activated by the organism feeling core emotional affects. The core affects are SEEKING, FEAR, RAGE, LUST, CARE, PANIC, and PLAY. Core emotional affects are the basic feelings that get worked up into the hedonically felt components of emotions proper through cognitive development over both ontogeny and phylogeny (Panksepp and Biven 2012). Panksepp emphasizes the phylogenetic component of this development, insofar as he takes core emotional affects to be 'evolutionary gifts' that we have inherited at a species level. However, it is also important to recognize the role that ontogenetic or individual, organism-centered development plays in molding core emotional affects into emotional affects through environmental interactions and cultural variability (see Prinz 2006). These more primitive emotional affects are connected through a motivational interface with homeodynamic affects.

believe that homeodynamic feelings are also so distributed. Thus, even in very ordinary experiences there is a multitude of affective factors shaping the way the stimulus appears, how the subject relates to it, and how the subject understands themselves as an embodied agent so related.

We regularly apprehend perceptual particulars according to their affective valence, and form emotional responses to the perceived meanings of these situations (Todd et al. 2012, Barrett and Bar 2009, Lebrecht et al. 2012). All of this worldly interaction happens against a background of constant homeodynamic self-regulation which facilitates and conditions all of our experiences through the embodied perspective of the organism interacting with its world. These various forms of affect are constantly structuring our experience.

2 The Affectively Embodied Perspectival View of Subjective Character

I now develop a positive argument that the subjective character of an organism's phenomenally conscious states is at least partially constituted by embodied affect (AEP). I begin by providing reasons to endorse the first two premises of my argument for AEP. The first premise is the following:

A1. The living body is a locus of affective subjectivity.

This premise seeks to establish that the living body is not just a biologically complex object but a feeling subject of experience. I will argue for (A1) in §2.1 by further developing some of the claims I made in the last section regarding the affective neuroscience and phenomenology of homeodynamic affect. In particular, I will focus on the feeling of being alive (Thompson 2007).

The second premise of my main argument is the following:

A2. The living body *affectively* relates the subject to a meaningful world.

This premise seeks to establish that in being affectively embodied, we do not simply enjoy private raw feels in our body, but that we enter into complex affectively intentional relations to our meaningful world. I will argue for (A2) in §2.2 by amplifying some of my previous remarks about the

ubiquity of affect in ordinary experience as well as by developing an interpretation of some of the empirical literature on affectively biased attention.

If these two premises hold — and I will argue at length that they do in what follows — then we can generate the following conditional:

A3. If the living body is a locus of subjectivity that affectively relates the subject to a meaningful world, then the phenomenal character of experience is at least partially constituted by embodied affect.

The antecedent entails the consequent because the combination of A1 and A2 assert that my body, and the intentional relation to the world that I have in virtue of being embodied, is permeated by phenomenal affect. If that is so, then the phenomenal character of my experience is at least partially constituted by embodied affect. Therefore, the conclusion that follow from these premises is the AEP view:

AC. The phenomenal character of experience is at least partially constituted by embodied affect.

My method of argument is a bit complicated. I rely heavily on phenomenological description and empirical evidence. But the upshot of those arguments is also meant to function as a kind of conceptual analysis. That is, I am making an argument about the concept of ‘phenomenal consciousness’, about what it even means to have phenomenally conscious experience at all. The structure of such a concept cannot be fully articulated *a priori*. By working with careful phenomenological analysis and empirical evidence, we can deepen our understanding of what it is to be phenomenally conscious.

2.1 The Living Body as a Locus of Affective Subjectivity

In order to effectively argue in favor of (A1) I need to further develop my analysis of homeodynamic affect. As I explained in the opening section of the paper, homeodynamic affects are a particular kind

of bodily sensation or affect.¹⁰ Embodied affects are feelings in and on the body that are experienced, bodily sensations that there is something it is like for an organism to have (Nagel 1974). Previously I mentioned some examples of what I call 'local homeodynamic affects', things like muscle tension, hunger, and the example that will preoccupy us moving forward, thirst. These are obvious enough. However, there is also a more general homeodynamic affect that I called 'the feeling of being alive'. This kind of feeling is more difficult to understand.

One can home in on the feeling of being alive by doing the following. Press your finger down with some pressure on a flat, hard surface.¹¹ Your attention will naturally shift to the resistance offered to your finger from the surface. Instead, focus your attention on the felt pressure within the part of your finger that is making physical contact with the surface. The pressure will create a specific focus-point of felt affect in that part of your finger. Now shift your attention away from the point of pressure in the finger to the other less focal and intense sensations further up in your finger that are outside the halo of contact between the tip of your finger and the surface against which you are pushing. Such feelings are usually less salient but they are almost always being tacitly felt in the attentional background of conscious experience.

If you were to follow a course back through your finger up your forearm and then down from your shoulder into your chest cavity, it would be possible for you to feel a whole host of bodily sensations that animate the entirety of your living body. This is not an easy task. Some people have difficulty feeling such sensations. Part of the reason that such feelings of homeodynamic equilibrium are particularly easy to miss is that, "In contrast to the many discriminable sensations from the body, the subjective appreciation of visceral sensation is more diffuse, less well localized, and usually below perceptive thresholds" (Craig 2002, 664; Craig 2010).¹² If I stub my toe, certainly that local feeling

¹⁰ I use 'sensation', 'affect', and 'feeling' interchangeably unless otherwise noted.

¹¹ This exercise is a proxy for any other local bodily sensation you might be feeling for non-constructed reasons such as being told to move your body in a way so as to cause such a sensation to arise.

¹² I suspect that this is mostly because our conscious attention is habitually oriented through our vision and cognition; we tend to focus on what we see and what we think at the expense of how our body feels.

will become salient, but these more general bodily feelings are more diffuse and usually less focal in our attention and thus, less salient. With some practice, however, one can learn to experience their body as the ever-present pre-reflective background of their perceptual perspective on the world. Your local feeling of pressure (or whatever) emerges out of this affective baseline of bodily sensations.

Consider another example, thirst. You feel local sensations in your mouth and throat that motivate you to find something to drink. Once you start to drink the water, there is a feeling of satiation in the mouth and throat, and perhaps even in the stomach, depending on how empty it is. A cooling cascade of diffuse sensations also animates the rest of the trunk and perhaps even your limbs. Once the feeling of thirst has cleared, there is a background feeling that remains. This is the same type of feeling you felt around the halo of pressure in your finger once you expanded your attention¹³ to experience what was going on in the rest of your hand and maybe arm, namely, a diffuse homeodynamic bodily affect with a relatively neutral hedonic valence. It is the same type of feeling you have when your body is fully engaged in an activity like playing the drums or dancing, the holistic bodily feeling of being alive.

Explicating the phenomenal character of homeodynamic affect, especially the feeling of being alive, can be tricky because this kind of phenomenal consciousness is importantly different from other, more familiar forms like exteroceptive sensing, emoting, and thinking. Recall that phenomenal consciousness has a two-fold structure. It has qualitative character in virtue of which segments of the world seem to have certain qualities like colour, taste, and smell, qualities that there is something it like to behold. Further, phenomenally conscious experiences have a subjective character in virtue of which there is something it is like *for me*, as a subject of experience, to behold the world of qualitative characters from a particular embodied point of view (Nagel 1974; Kriegel 2009). Homeodynamic affects can contribute to the phenomenal character of an experience as qualitative character and as subjective character. When a pain arises it distresses us and this tends to draw our

¹³ The perceptive reader will note that by helping myself to the language of attention here that I have potentially begged the question. I address this objection in §3.2.

attention to it. One is aware *of* the pain as having a location in the body; the pain is an example of qualitative character and thus an intentional object of consciousness. However, the pain is also a change in and of *me*. When I say, 'Ouch, that hurts!' in response to the arising of the local pain, I am expressing a thought to the effect that something about *me*, as the subject of the experience, has changed (Soteriou 2013, ch. 3). As I probe the body with my attention in and around the pain, I discover other sensations that are not painful but are just as present. I realize that my entire living body is a kind of organic furnace whose constant interoceptive processing yields a churning mass of such sensations.¹⁴ This change in me consists in a disturbance of my homeodynamic equilibrium, an episodic incursion from without that impacts and alters my holistic affectively neutral feeling of being alive. Holistic bodily feelings are not just physical events on a body that I carry with me as a mental subject; they are also a feature of my subjectivity in virtue of which I am able to intelligently perceive and navigate the world. When local disturbances arise, they are disturbances of this general feeling of equilibrium. In this sense, the holistic feelings that animate the living body and constitute the feeling of being alive are mental and contribute to the subjective character of phenomenally conscious mental states.

We quite naturally carve up the world in terms of the mind and the body as well as in terms of a perceptual subject and a world of objects. This is part of what we are trying to capture with the notions of the qualitative and subjective character of phenomenally conscious experience. There is nothing wrong with these distinctions, they are helpful and illuminating. However, in the case of homeodynamic affect these distinctions begin to break down. Homeodynamic affect is in this way different from other forms of phenomenal consciousness, such as distal perception. In perceptual cases the content of the experience does not count as an aspect of *me* in the same way that a bodily feeling does. Both types of experience have a subjective character and are thus experienced as being *for me*, but in the case of embodied affect, the feelings in the body can be both a qualitative character

¹⁴ I use the metaphor of the furnace intentionally. It is meant to denote the fact that the organism is constantly transforming parts of its environment into energy that it then uses to construct and maintain itself in the face of a changing milieu (Thompson 2007).

of a phenomenally conscious experience, or be a part of the subjective character by contributing to the affected sense of 'me-ishness' that partially constitutes phenomenally conscious experience.

When our homeodynamic balance is disturbed by perturbations from the environment, then more particular, episodic, and local homeodynamic affects arise. If there is a rise in the concentration of salt in the bloodstream, the organism experiences thirst. If it has been too long since the last feeding, then it feels hunger. These specific interoceptive affects are felt as departures from the affective baseline of homeodynamic equilibrium. Part of what gives the feeling of thirst, hunger, or pain its motivating quality is the fact that it lets the organism know that things are out of balance. The organism must then have *some* sense of what that balance consists in such that departure from it is felt as significant. The feeling of being alive plays that role. Without a feeling of homeodynamic equilibrium, there would be a chasm between an unconscious sense of balance and a conscious sense of imbalance that seems hard to cross. Once you have finished drinking your water and the thirst dissipates, does your sense of the body completely disappear? Of course not. It is just that the body is no longer giving you direct and local signals that there is a lack of balance that needs to be corrected for, so your habit of attention re-orientes to its sensory receptors and you go back to whatever worldly engagement you were occupied with before the feeling of thirst arose in the first place.

I now consider some empirical evidence that bears on the phenomenological picture I have been developing. In sum, the empirical literature suggests that our capacity to apprehend and integrate sensory information is dependent upon a whole host of affectively charged homeodynamic self-regulation processes. These include respiration (Zelano et al. 2016), heartbeat (Babo-Rebelo et al. 2016), and gastrointestinal functioning (Richter et al. 2016). These considerations provide empirical evidence for the claim that homeodynamic processes of self-regulation help to realize the psychological functions proper to phenomenal awareness. My contention is that these empirical studies considered in conjunction with my phenomenological analysis constitutes a compelling reason to endorse the first premise of AEP.

Recent research has shown that natural respiratory function synchronizes with electrical activity in the piriform cortex and limbic areas, including the amygdala and hippocampus (Zelano et al. 2016), areas known to be associated with perceptual salience and evaluative cognition. In the experiment, subjects were given a visual discrimination task of categorizing emotionally salient faces. When the faces were presented during the inhalation phase of nasal respiration, subjects were much faster and more accurate in discerning the faces (ibid., 12460). Further, in a subsequent memory recall task, subjects were much better at recalling previous images when those images were encoded during inhalation. Such results indicate that inhaling naturally has a pronounced effect on our capacity to discern relevant stimuli in our environment and remember task-relevant data. The homeodynamic sensation of breathing exercises a palpable conditioning influence over how objects of perception are consciously apprehended. It is commonsensical of course that breathing rates are affected by what we do. When we are angry, our breathing becomes shorter and faster, when we are calm, breathing is longer and more relaxed. However, in the aforementioned study, it was shown that the influence goes the other way. The basic homeodynamic function of breathing in and out, in addition to oxygenating the blood and expunging carbon dioxide, directly entrains areas of the brain that realize perceptual salience (ibid., 12449).

In another study, it has been shown that the phase-amplitude of alpha waves in the anterior insula and occipito-parietal regions of the brain are entrained by gastric basal rhythms (Richter et al. 2016). The resting state of the brain is continuously influenced by feedback from the stomach *via* the vagal nerve and the spine. This influence propagates through subcortical relays and a number of important cortical sites. The latter include the insula, ventral anterior cingulate cortex, and somatosensory cortex (ibid., 1). In this study, participants fixated on a black dot against a grey background. The subjects were instructed to stay still and fixate on the dot and to let their mind wander. Using magneto-encephalography (MEG), the electrical signals created by the brain were measured from the subjects' scalp. The authors point out: "The alpha rhythm is known to exert an inhibitory influence on spike-firing rate and has a versatile impact on perception, attention, and

memory” (ibid., 7). The alpha rhythms of subjects with a fixation task with no cognitive burden show that the alpha waves of the brain are continuously modulated by the gastric system. Thus, we see another example of how homeodynamic processes – in this case, gastrointestinal self-regulation processes – have a pervasive influence over the neural functions that realize central cognitive processes like perception, attention, and memory.

A final study that bears on my point here concerns the way our capacity for self-processing is grounded in an entrained synchrony between heartbeats and the default network (Babo-Rebelo et al. 2016). In this study, the experimenters measured heartbeat-evoked response (HERs) using MEG in a thought sampling paradigm where subjects were instructed to rate the different ways that their spontaneous thoughts were self-related. Following William James (1890/1950) and others (Christoff et al. 2011; Mandrigin and Thompson 2015), the authors differentiate between two kinds of self-related processing: the self as ‘I’ and the self as ‘Me’. The self-as-I is a pre-reflective sense of self which is grounded in the subject’s capacity to experience the world from a first-personal perspective, what I have been calling ‘subjective character’ or ‘subjectivity’. The self-as-Me represents the capacity of an individual to think about themselves as a self. An example of a thought had by the self-as-I would be something like <I am feeling hungry>. By contrast, an example of a thought had by the self-as-Me would be <I wonder if they like me or if they are just pretending> (Babo-Rebelo et al. 2016, 7834).¹⁵

In the experiment, subjects were asked to fixate upon a point on a screen and to let their thoughts wander until the appearance of another visual stimuli (a halo around the fixation point). At the point of interruption, subjects were asked to give a report on the nature of their thoughts at that moment along four different axes of analysis. The first axis was whether the thought was self-related as an ‘I’ in terms of it being about the subject of experience (as acting, feeling, or perceiving). Secondly, they

¹⁵ Note that this distinction is operating at the level of kinds of thoughts. Our capacity to think of ourselves in different ways is distinct from the different ways in which we experience our bodies as objects or subjects (Christoff et al. 2011; Mandrigin and Thompson 2015).

were asked to report on the so-called 'Me'-scale as well as whether the thought was in the past, present, or future and its emotional intensity. The authors found two different networks of brain-viscera entrainment that undergird the two kinds of self-related processes. In particular, subject-as-I reports were correlated with the ventral precuneus differentially responding to heartbeats and a similar level of response by the ventralmedial prefrontal cortex for the subject-as-Me. As the authors point out, the ventral precuneus is associated with a whole host of cognitive functions associated with the organism's capacity to experience itself as an embodied subject. These include, episodic memory retrieval, perspective taking, body ownership, self-location, spatial navigation, imagination, future planning, and the feeling of agency (ibid., 7838). In both cases of self-related processes, the recursive cognitive function that facilitated both 'me' and 'I' cognition was conditioned by processes of homeodynamic self-regulation in the circulatory system.

This empirical data couples well with the phenomenological descriptions I offered earlier. We have here strong evidence in support of the claim that the self-regulating processes that undergird our experience of homeodynamic affect exert a direct conditioning influence over various neural functions that realize a host of cognitive functions including perception, memory, inference, and imagination. Our living body is a locus of affective subjectivity. That is, our capacity to feel our own bodies is constitutive of our basic sense of being a subject (Craig 2010; Christoff et al. 2011). Without this basic feeling of being alive, our capacity to think of ourselves as a subject would be empty. This feeling organizes and orients our cognitive functions in myriad ways and provides an affective frame through which the world is manifest to us.

In this sub-section I have provided some reasons for endorsing the first premise of my argument for AEP. This premise states:

A1. The living body is a locus of affective subjectivity.

I have argued for this premise in two ways. First, I have claimed that we have good phenomenological reasons for thinking that there is a global, diffuse kind of bodily affect that contributes to the subjective character of our experience. I called this unique form of homeodynamic affect, ‘the feeling of being alive’ (Thompson 2007). I claimed that this sort of diffuse and holistic bodily affect is the dynamic baseline out of which more local and obvious bodily affects emerge. Second, I have also shown that there is good evidence to suggest that our basic capacity for homeodynamic self-regulation exerts a modulating influence over a host of cognitive functions associated with consciousness.¹⁶

2.2 The Affective Relation of the Embodied Subject to its Meaningful World

Affect is not just a private raw feel. When we are affected, we are affected by a meaningful world and we are thereby related to that world affectively (Ratcliffe 2008). Thus, the second premise of the argument for AEP that I will consider in this subsection is:

A2. The living body *affectively* relates the subject to a meaningful world.

When we have affective experiences, a meaningful relationship between the self and the world is established. This basic affective relation between an organism and its environment is not an occasional modification of an otherwise non-affective stream of conscious experiences. Our experience is always affective in different ways (sensory, emotional, homeodynamic), and experience is world involving.

In addition to episodic and obvious emotional affects like anger and fear that arise and pass in response to relevant stimuli, we live through a pervasively affective baseline of bodily feeling. Psychologists of emotion and affective neuroscientists have characterized this kind of baseline affect

¹⁶ This argument is not without its difficulties. Therefore, in §3 I will consider an important objection to (A1) to the effect that any phenomenal upshot that might be tied to homeodynamic self-regulation will be tied constitutively to the qualitative character of phenomenally conscious experience rather than to its subjective character, as I have argued here. For now, though, I will move on to a consideration of reasons for endorsing (A2).

in terms of microvalences that orient our perceptual attention in all kinds of ways (Lebrecht et al. 2012; Barrett and Bar 2009). This notion of ‘microvalence’ refers to the fact that there is an asymptotic process of homeodynamic self-regulation whose relatively neutral baseline — what I have called ‘the feeling of being alive’ — animates the lived body with a host of feelings that prime and motivate us to act, attend, and think in different ways in virtue of our perceiving tacit and fluctuating values in the world. These feelings need not be as explicit as a strong feeling of disgust in the presence of a noxious odor or the craving that comes with the promise of a home cooked meal to end a prolonged hunger. It is in virtue of our feeling microvalences in response to our everyday commerce with useful objects that those objects come to be perceived by us as having the use-value that they do. When I perceive a cup, I see it not as an open-faced, cylindrical solid but as a vessel for potable liquids (Gibson 1986, Chemero 2003). First-personal facts about how thirsty I am at the moment I behold the cup and third-personal facts about whether or not the cup is full of something I might like to drink have a marked impact on how the cup seems to me. Our perceptions recruit a host of associated memories that encode the content of those experiences with a valence that we interpret within the framework of numerous nested hierarchies of value ranging from basic pain and pleasure responses to goal achievement and personal ownership (Truon and Todd 2016).

It has been recently shown that perceptions of reward value function as a cross-modal integrator in perception, one that primes environment-responsive behaviour (Pooresmaeili et al. 2014). Subjects were primed to associate certain auditory tones with high and low monetary reward. They were then given a visual orientation discrimination task involving Gabor patches. It was found that the high-reward associated tones helped subjects to increase their visual accuracy in the discrimination task even though the tones and their associated rewards were not task-relevant. Such studies indicate that we have implicit attentional sets that are organized around reward *via* attraction to pleasure and avoiding pain. Even in situations that are not explicitly valenced around pain and pleasure, such attentional sets are operating as a background condition that orients our attention in various ways.

This idea of an affectively oriented attentional set can be made clearer by considering some pathological cases. In an important study of veteran soldiers with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Rebecca Todd and colleagues (2015) have shown that such survivors have a radically altered salience map of their environment, one organized around their expectation of violent threats. In this experiment: "[MEG] data were collected while participants identified two targets in a rapidly presented stream of words. The first target was a number and the second target was either a combat-related or neutral word. The difference in accuracy for combat-related versus neutral words was used as a measure of attentional bias" (Todd et al. 2015, 821). This experiment deploys an attentional blink paradigm (AB), which utilizes that fact that subjects often miss targets within an approximately 500 milliseconds window after an initial target capture. There were three groups that were tested: (1) PTSD suffering soldiers, (2) non-PTSD suffering soldiers, and (3) non-military controls. Both military groups had a decreased attentional blink when the second target was a combat-related word. There was also greater accuracy for combat versus non-combat words, but with overall accuracy decreases compared to non-military controls (ibid., 824). As the authors explain: "Crucially, soldiers with PTSD also rated combat-related words as significantly more arousing relative to neutral words than soldiers without PTSD, indicating a greater subjective emotional response to the words" (ibid., 826). The significance of these findings is substantial. We are pre-tuned to the world by phylogenetic endowment; that is, we are sensitive to objects in virtue of their affordance value to us (Gibson 1986; Chemero 2003). The contours of our salience map are also conditioned by our individual development, especially previous emotionally intense experiences. Both of these phylogenetic and ontogenetic factors radically condition our attentional control sets, and create biases that condition how things seem to us. Our affectively biased attention helps to sculpt the contours of our affordance landscape by rendering the affectively relevant aspects of our environment salient to us (Walsh 2011). When traumatic experiences like violent combat traumatize us, the meaning of the world can change for us and this penetrates the phenomenal field of our perception and the lifeworld in which we dwell as conscious subjects.

Being tuned to the world in this way can help us intelligently ignore those things that are not necessary or relevant for our survival, flourishing, and general goal achievement. This affective relation to the environment is harmful when we are overly or insufficiently sensitive or when traumatizing experiences re-organize our salience map in a way that prevents us from skillfully discerning the contours of the affordance landscape. This process of salience construction is fallible and profoundly dependent on our habits of reaction to intense situations. Our habits of reaction are not always skillful. Whether skillful or not, these habitual reactions have as much impact on our attention sets — and thus, on what shows up as affectively salient — as do niche building affordance sensitivities.

Finally, in another important study, it has been shown that the spontaneous fluctuation of neural response to heartbeat is predictive of accuracy in visual detection tasks (Park et al. 2014). In this experiment, participants were presented with a stimulus that was just at the threshold of visual detection. Subjects were instructed to fixate on the centre of the screen and were then given a warning stimulus followed by a 0.05 second exposure to a halo around the fixation point. This was followed by a delay and then a report as to whether they had seen the halo. Successful visual discrimination can be reliably predicted by enhanced heartbeat response before stimulus onset. Such enhanced heartbeat response is differentially linked to pre-cortical pathways that connect reliably to the ventral anterior cingulate cortex, ventromedial prefrontal cortex, and the right inferior parietal lobe (ibid., 612). As the authors explain, “...heartbeat-evoked responses contribute directly to the signal used for the final perceptual decision” (ibid., 617). The dynamic and differential network of the circulatory and nervous system undergirds the precision with which perceptual information is consciously experienced. Thus, our basic perceptual relation to our environment is the product not just of a skull-bound neural representation, but a whole-body responsiveness in which homeodynamic self-regulation directly modulates the way in which the brain processes sensory information to realize conscious experience.

In this subsection, I have provided reasons for endorsing the view that the living body *affectively* relates the subject to the world (A2). It is not just that we feel private sensations within the framework of the body (A1). We do feel these things, but in feeling them our various bodily affects relate us to the world in a number of important ways (Ratcliffe 2008). In being so related, our commerce with the world is affective all the way through and all the way down.

2.3 Drawing Out the Conclusion

I now want to pull things together and discuss the final parts of the argument I have been developing. Recall that the third premise is the following:

A3. If the living body is a locus of subjectivity that affectively relates the subject to a meaningful world, then the phenomenal character of experience is at least partially constituted by embodied affect.

The reasons for endorsing this conditional should be clear from what has been claimed already. The pervasiveness of embodied phenomenal affect means that in virtue of being the kind of embodied creature that I am, the world is manifest to me as a field of solicitations that dwell within my living body as a host of feelings that motivate and orient me to engage with the world. Being affectively related to the world by having an embodied perspective on it is part of what it means for us to have phenomenally conscious experience. The body is a vehicle for perception and that vehicle is animated with phenomenal affect. In virtue of these pervasive feelings, the world shows up for as valuable and meaningful in different ways. Thus, I can draw the conclusion embedded in the consequent of (A3). Namely:

AC. The phenomenal character of experience is at least partially constituted by embodied affect.

According to the AEP view of subjective character, feeling is not just an occasional modification of an otherwise non-affective stream of phenomenally conscious experiences. What it is to experience the world is for a subject of experience to be affectively perturbed by its perceptual commerce with its environment and to thereby be affectively related to that environment.

3 Objections

In this section, I consider three important objections. My responses to these will provide further details on key features of the AEP view.

3.1 Bodily Affect and the Qualitative Character of Experience

In arguing for the AEP view of subjective character I have claimed that homeodynamic bodily affects of different sorts partially constitute the subjective character of phenomenally conscious experience (A1). One might object to the AEP view by arguing against (A1) on the grounds that bodily affect is always an instantiation of the qualitative character of experience, not of subjective character. This is not an uncommon view, especially for representational theories of consciousness which take phenomenal character to be exhausted by the qualitative character of experience, and the latter in turn to be exhausted by representational content. According to this objection, the body only contributes to the phenomenal character of experience by being something that the subject is aware of as a content of an experience.

In response to this objection, I begin with an important distinction made by Edmund Husserl between two ways of thinking about the nature of the body. He called them '*Leib*' and '*Körper*' (Husserl 1997; 2001). The *Leib* is the living phenomenal body, as it shows up in experience. The *Körper*, by contrast is the third-personal objective body that is the proper object of study for physiology, medical science, and biology. We can also distinguish between the body understood as an object and the body as a subject (Mandrigin and Thompson 2015; Truong and Todd 2016). This objection to (A1) belies a certain tendency of philosophers to think of bodily experience exclusively in terms of the body as a physiological object that *just happens* to show up in experience as might any other object of perception. When we understand how it is that the body shows up in experience as a subject, this objection evaporates. Framing the issue of experiencing bodily sensation in terms of

one's being aware *of* one's body obfuscates the extent to which one *is* one's body.¹⁷ We are not only capable of being aware *of* our body as an *object* of perception. The living body also enters experience as a *subject* because we are aware *with* our body (Mandrigin and Thompson 2015). The body as a subject experiences the world by being a vehicle for perception (Colombetti, 2014).

Consider instances of expert task absorption. When playing the drums one is able to engage one's entire body in a coordinated way that is highly salient to attention but not objectified. The body, in such situations is, "...neither transparent nor an intentional object of awareness; it is the body as experienced during the skillful performance of a specific activity when one need not attend to one's body but is nevertheless very much aware of its presence and activity" (Colombetti, 2014; 117-8). So, while playing the drums the entire body is fully deployed in the action and there is a high degree of foregrounded body awareness, but the object of attention is the music. The feelings in the body are not localized and specific but global and diffuse.

Unlike a local bodily sensation like an itch in the knee, in such situations, one's whole body is felt in a diffuse but foregrounded way, the body is disclosed as a perspectival locus of action and feeling. The feelings that animate the body during such experience are conspicuous though not objectified: "Conspicuous feelings...include 'highly self-luminous' *foreground* bodily feelings, namely, bodily feelings where the body is not an intentional object of experience but is nevertheless very much at the front of awareness" (Colombetti, 2014; 132). Ratcliffe (2008) calls bodily feelings of this kind, 'existential feelings'. Bodily feelings are 'existential' insofar as they provide the subject with a sense of being situated in and related to the world: "Existential feelings are both 'feelings of the body' and 'ways of finding oneself in a world'. By a 'way of finding oneself in a world', I mean a sense of the reality of self and of world, which is inextricable from a changeable *feeling* of relatedness between body and world" (Ratcliffe 2008, 2). Ratcliffe further describes two important characteristics of

¹⁷ Note, that in claiming that we *are* our bodies I am not endorsing the so-called 'mind-body identity' theory of consciousness (Smart 1959). The claim isn't that consciousness is type-identical with some physical, behavioural, or functional property of the body. It is that the body is thoroughly phenomenal. The body is not simply an object, but an experiential subject.

existential feelings. First, existential bodily feelings are not directed at specific objects or situations. They provide a phenomenological background of affectively charged embodiment through which the concrete specifics of experience are structured. Secondly, they are occurrent feelings in the body of which and with which we have awareness of ourselves and the world (ibid). In the context of the previous example, we can see the coordination of one's playing the drums with the other players one is working with as a way of providing a heightened context of salience whereby this more general poised orientation of the body towards the world can be seen in a clearer way. But in fact, this kind of orientation is always present in all experience; it is just usually in the background of attention.

Such feelings as I have described are constitutive of what it means to have a perceptual perspective on the world. They provide an 'affective frame' whereby the specific features of the world that we are attending to are put into relief. This is because, "...an individual's affective orientation makes her prone to certain patterns of thought and behaviour rather than others, shapes the way she attends to and interprets her surroundings, and thereby allows other cognitive processes of reasoning, deliberation, and justification to get off the ground" (Maiese, 2011; 5). Localized bodily sensations of whatever type are local perturbations emerging out of this more general phenomenological context of embodiment. A proper appreciation of this background indicates that the subject of perceptual experience is thoroughly embodied and that the body should not be considered as being just an object of perceptual experience but also as being a subject. That is, "...the body-as-subject can be described as the embodied and subjective perspective of perception, in contrast to the body perceived as one object among others from within that perspective" (Mandrigin and Thompson 2015). If these considerations are correct, then this first objection fails.

3.2 Attending to the Feeling Body

One might object to the argument for AEP by rejecting (A2). Recall that the second premise of the argument for AEP states that:

A2. The living body *affectively* relates the subject to the world.

It might seem that (A2) is false on the grounds that bodily affect only enters experience by being the object of attention. If it were true that bodily affect, of whatever sort, only enters phenomenally conscious experience by being an object of attention, then it would not be the case that bodily affect relates a subject to their world, but that a subject is related to their bodily affect as an aspect of the world. Thus, this objection is a way of re-framing the objection from the previous section without committing to the view that bodily affect can only contribute to the qualitative character of experience. On this version of the objection, it might very well be the case that bodily affect can contribute to the subjective character of experience, but not in a ubiquitous way that relates the subject pre-reflectively to the world, but in a way that is only manifest when bodily feelings are attended to in a subject-centered act of reflection.

My view contains within it a tacit endorsement of a view about phenomenal consciousness that I now want to make explicit, one that this objection rejects. Distinguish between rich and thin views of phenomenal consciousness. Rich views claim that the content of phenomenal experience overflows our attentional capacities (Block 2007). There is a steady flow of multi-modal experience, only a fraction of which we actually attend to and act on. The thin view maintains that we are perpetually subject to a refrigerator light illusion whereby we come to think that there is rich experience where there is none. When we are not attending to the world, our experience of it goes dark, just as when we close the refrigerator door.

This dispute between rich and thin views of phenomenal consciousness can be understood in terms of the relationship between homeodynamically realized subjective character and attention. The idea is that the former is either partially or completely determined or perhaps is even constituted by the latter (Charland 2005, Lambie and Marcel 2002, Schwitzgebel 2007). Such a view would constitute an objection to my account insofar as it would deny that there is a pervasive form of bodily affect that helps provide experience with a subjective character thereby relating the subject affectively to a meaningful world. On the contrary, the thin view would claim that homeodynamic affects are

experienced only when they are the object of attention. That is, the pervasiveness of homodynamic affect is an illusion generated by our habits of attention.

In support of this objection, it is worth noting that all of my earlier phenomenological analyses relied on attention to probe the body in different ways to gain access to diffuse, holistic bodily sensations. Consider another example: I am running a race and near to the finish line I develop a cramp in my side. At first it is faint and I keep running. As time wears on, the pain increases. I do my best to breathe through it but it keeps getting worse. I push myself as hard as I can and try my best to ignore it but the pain shows no signs of abetting. Gratefully, I cross the finish line and enjoy some well earned water. I pace about slowly and allow my pulse to normalize and I then sit down. To my dismay the pain in my side persists. Perhaps I've torn a muscle. I start to probe that part of my body with my awareness and really attend to it carefully, demarcating where the centre of pain is and where it starts to peter out into non-painful bodily feelings. Gradually, the pain starts to fade and I am able to enjoy a post-race celebration with my friends.

According to John Lambie and Anthony Marcel (2002) all of these examples of bodily affect should be accounted for in terms of the style of attention applied to them. At the onset of the pain, it was more in the periphery of my awareness, pushing itself into focus against my will due to its interruption of my goal of continuing to run at the same speed. When I sit down and pay more careful attention to the pain, things change. By attending to the pain in my side in a "...sufficiently analytic and detached manner, hedonic tone may be distanced, diminished and disappear" (Lambie and Marcel 2002; 243-4). Louis Charland thinks this capacity of attention to modulate affective experience can be generalized into an indeterminacy thesis. According to this thesis, "...there is no intrinsic objective scientific fact about what the valence of a particular emotional affect or feeling is apart from its elaboration in second order awareness..." (Charland 2005; 233). If the phenomenal content of any affective state is only experienced as a result of a cognitive modulation by attention,

then there is no room for the pre-attentive felt affect to do its work in orienting and organizing sensory attention.

I think the phenomenological analyses of attention and second-order awareness on offer from the objectors are clearly false. They conflate first-order embodied affect and second-order response. Attention can alter the latter, but not the former. By taking a more detached attitude towards the pain in my side, I am able to modulate my reaction of aversion to the painful feeling in that part of my body. In modulating my aversive reaction, the pain does not disappear. The nature of the first order affect itself is not constituted by my attention to it. Attention modulates my response to the pain. The pain has less impact on me mentally because my aversive attitude towards it is modified by attention. The pain itself persists for some time and then disappears as homeodynamic equilibrium is re-established. It is fully available to my opponent(s) to deny this phenomenological description and to double down on their own intuitions about the issue. Thus, we ought to turn to some relevant empirical findings to help adjudicate the dispute.

Woo et al. (2015) have published a study that postulates distinct brain systems undergirding nociceptive input and self-regulation. Nociception is the process responsible for interpreting and integrating afferent nerve signals that indicate pain. This process is realized by a distributed network in the brain referred to as 'the neurological pain signature' (NPS). By contrast, the self-regulatory network responsible for the modulation of pain is realized by connections between the nucleus accumbens (NA), part of the basal ganglia near the hypothalamus, and the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC) In this experiment, thirty-three subjects were given thermal stimulation on their left forearm while connected to an fMRI scanner. Different trials of ascending temperatures were given with temperatures ranging from 44.3-49.3°C. On some trials a self-regulation strategy was implemented whereby subjects would use active imagining and subvocal narratives to modulate their experience of the pain induced by the thermal stimulation. On other trials, no such self-regulation strategy was implemented (Woo et al. 2015; 2). It was found that the NPS was of a similar level of

activation in both types of trials. However, the self-regulation network was only active during those trials where the self-regulation strategy was implemented. During these self-regulation trials, the NPS was not affected. The NPS only responded to nociceptive input and the NA and vmPFC was non-responsive to this input. Thus, there is a primary pain input and a cognitive appraisal thereof. The latter can certainly influence the former insofar as it is able to modulate the felt intensity of pain. However, the baseline pain signals are not affected by such attentional modulation. Since pain was reported in both types of cases, we can conclude that homeodynamic affect is not constituted by attention.

One point I do want to concede is that attention to affect is important. Eric Schwitzgebel (2007) makes this point in a helpful way by focusing on the inadequacies of both rich and thin views of phenomenal experience. Both views suffer from being underdetermined by available empirical evidence and under motivated by introspective report. My own view tends towards a Jamesian version of the rich view. According to James, "...every one of the bodily changes, whatsoever it be, is felt, acutely or obscurely, the moment it occurs....Our whole cubic capacity is sensibly alive; and each morsel of it contributes its pulsations of feeling, dim or sharp, pleasant, painful, or dubious, to that sense of personality that everyone of us unfailingly carries with him" (James 1890/1950, Vol. II; 450-1).¹⁸ However, this may be too phenomenologically extravagant or at least subject relative. The lesson that attentional modulation teaches us is that the background of attention is structured differently for some individuals than for others. Following Schwitzgebel (2007), it is reasonable to conclude that there is always *some* phenomenal experience outside the focus of attention. This view that there is always some non-attentional phenomenal experience is what he calls a 'moderate view'. I would add that some of this background is always and necessarily bodily. If we did not have at least some tacit experience of being alive, we would likely be dead.¹⁹ Nevertheless, some version of the moderate view is all the AEP view of subjective character requires.

¹⁸ Cited by Schwitzgebel (2007; 9).

¹⁹ This might seem like an odd expression given the phenomenon of deep sleep and anesthesia, but see Thompson (2015).

I am sympathetic with the moderate view but would add the following point. My hypothesis is that what ends up counting as experientially in the background, on one hand, and as unconscious information processing, on the other, will be a matter of affective bias and attentional habituation. One's habits of attending determine not just the way the foreground of experience appears in relation to the background but also the scope and structure of the background itself. Attention is a skill and some people are better at it than others. Some people's background can hold more than others. Thus, James' conception of a fully conscious person is not so much a default reality but rather an empirical possibility. Perhaps James was accurately describing his own experience; it certainly resonates with my own.

3.3 The Pendulum of Consciousness: Affect and Agency in the Making of Subjectivity

Here I consider agential views of subjectivity, in particular, enactive or sensorimotor approaches to phenomenal character. Generally, the enactive approach maintains that perception is a form of embodied action that enacts a meaningful world of relevance (Varela, Thompson, Rosch 1991, 107). However, there are different versions of this view. My approach is friendly to some, but not to others. Therefore, first I will sketch a possible worry that some enactivists might have with the AEP view of subjective character and argue that enactivists with such a worry have an impoverished view of enactivism. I then provide some reasons for thinking that my view is friendly to some versions of enactive approaches and that these approaches are to be preferred over the ones that cannot accommodate my view.

Enactive or sensorimotor views claim that perception is constitutively linked with action. When we perceive objects we do not do so merely as passive information processors. Objects are not sensory inputs and our subsequent judgements and actions are not outputs. Instead, perception of objects and our sensorimotor capacities are dynamically integrated. In Alva Noë's words: "Perceptual experience acquires content thanks to our possession of bodily skills. *What we perceive is*

determined by *what we do* (or what we know how to do); it is determined by what we are *ready* to do.” (Noë 2004; 1). Perception is sensorimotor know-how; it is skill based embodied action.²⁰

One of the things that philosophers of perception in general are concerned with — not just enactive theorists — is something called ‘perceptual presence’. Perceptual presence refers to the fact that when I visually perceive an object, I perceive it as three-dimensional in spite of the fact that the occluded sides are not reflecting photons to my retina when I look at it (Jacob, 2015). The enactive account of presence is built right into its fundamental view about what perception is. Presence emerges given the fact that what it is to perceive an object is tied up with our having a practical understanding of how stimulus would change with movement. The reason stimulus changes with movement is that different profiles of an object become salient as one moves around it. Thus, the object presents itself in any given profile as being capable of presenting other such profiles. It is this concatenation of possible profiles — as implicitly understood by the agent in terms of her capacity to move so as to reveal those profiles — that explains perceptual presence for enactivism.

This view of perception and perceptual presence is pre-figured in the work of Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) who spoke of the normativity of perception.²¹ For example, Merleau-Ponty writes, “The distance between me and the object is not a size that increases or decreases, but rather a tension that oscillates around a norm. The oblique orientation of the object in relation to me is not measured by the angle that it forms with the plane of my face, but rather experienced as a disequilibrium, as an unequal distribution of its influences upon me.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012; 316). The reason an

²⁰ Enactivism is empirically motivated in the following ways. Noë (2004; 4-7) notes some interesting cases where patients suffering from cataracts — which obstruct the passage of light through the retina — who have them removed but are still blind. They are ‘experientially’ blind because the passage of light through the retina has been restored but the sensations the subject experiences do not assist them in thought or action about the world. It takes active movement of the body to integrate the sensations in such a way that the persistence of the objects can be apprehended. Now, Noë is right to point out that there is an interpretation of these results which does not necessitate an enactive approach. Specifically, it is possible that the quality of the sensations themselves are the cause of the perceptual distortions given the immediacy of the cataract removal. Nevertheless, this initial case gives some indication of how the active sensorimotor dynamics of the embodied agent could play a more central role in perception than has been genuinely thought.

²¹ Noë (2004) makes no explicit reference to Merleau-Ponty, though Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991) do.

object is experienced in its obliqueness as a disequilibrium is that for Merleau-Ponty, perception of an object as that object brings with it a norm for perceiving it in maximal relief. This norm is revealed to me in the way in which my body has an 'optimal attitude' which it aims for in a perceptual situation with an object. As Sean Kelly puts it, "Every experience of size or shape is not just the perceptual representation of a property. Rather, the experience already involves a kind of normative self-referentiality: It is part of the very experience of the size of an object that I am drawn to improve the experience by changing my distance to the object." (Kelly, 2007; 149; Kelly 2010). This notion self-referentiality can be explained in terms of the embodied subject's sense of what it would take for them to move in such a way so as to change the object's profile, and their perspective on it, such that a new movement resultant perspective would be maximized in terms of the object's size and shape being seen by the subject.

Such a view might be construed as problematic for my account for the following reasons. I have been at pains to describe the subjective character of experience as an essentially affective phenomenon. I have gone as far as to characterize the affective nature of subjective character in terms of an organism's capacity to be hedonically perturbed by its interactions with its environment. Indeed, on my view, sensory bombardment is a kind of ever-present burden by which we are passively affected by the world; we are weighted down by it, to the cellular level (Cook et al. 2014). We struggle to maintain homeodynamic equilibrium in the face of such ceaseless perturbations. In this way, I have characterized the embodied subject as a kind of patient or victim, one who is constantly, passively, and affectively perturbed by their environment. The enactive view emphasizes the agent in its analysis of phenomenal character. The perceptual presence of the world is the organism's achievement. The domain of meaning that the organism lives within is enacted by that organism. Affordance landscapes or niches are constructed by the activity of organisms. To adequately explain the phenomenal character of experience, one must account for these active agential features of the embodied subject. Being passively affected and hedonically perturbed are not sufficient to explain subjective character.

Broadly speaking, I think that this criticism is exactly right. But I also think that in accepting it, my view is enriched rather than weakened. However, to take the point on board requires some nuance, as the enactive approach to perception is both controversial and polysemous (Hutto and Myin 2013). Considering its controversial status, in acknowledging my friendliness to enactivism, I do not wish to fully endorse it, as I think my view can still be adopted by those who reject enactive approaches. Additionally, since there are many versions of the view, I want to get clear on two important species of the enactive genus. My view is friendly to one but not to the other.

Alva Noë's (2004) account of enactivism focuses exclusively on how the dynamics of attention disclose the perceptual presence of explicitly intentional objects in terms of the subject's tacit knowledge of what it would take to move to further disclose otherwise occluded profiles of the perceived object. This is a more restrictive account of enactivism because its conception of how perceptual presence is constituted focuses exclusively on the idea that perception is a form of action constituted by knowledge of sensorimotor contingencies. This knowledge is delivered to the subject by its capacities for attending to that which it perceives.

An enactive account of perception should include an analysis of the pre-reflective experience of being a bodily subject in and through affect. Noë's (2004) attention-centred version neglects an analysis of our subjectivity as a constituent of phenomenal character (Thompson 2005; 2007). Attentional and sensorimotor agency modify an already existing subject's experience. Attention and action structure and sculpt the contours of our phenomenal field; they do not exclusively constitute it (Merleau-Ponty 1945/2012). Our capacity to attend and agentially respond to the world depends on a subject being already affected in some way by its experience of the world (Husserl 2001). This is because "whatever becomes noticeable must already have been affecting one and must have some kind of affective force or allure, or affective 'grabiness', in relation to one's attention" (Thompson 2007, 263). My view is friendly to a version of enactivism that makes room for the affective substructure that primes and

orients the organism to be able to respond to the world with its various capacities for agency (sensorimotor, attentional, cognitive).

Still, it might be protested that the agential structure of experience makes the world available in a way that goes beyond the structures of affect that I have outlined in this paper. For example, a mug might afford holding but have no affective pull on a subject whose knowledge of the mug's perceptual presence is based on knowledge of how to move with respect to it. Thus, the extent to which an object affords certain opportunities to a subject does not necessarily tell us anything about its affective salience. Fair enough. My view doesn't entail that every particular content of perception has an explicit affective valence. The point is that the world first and foremost exerts a force upon the subject in the form of sensory bombardment. This subject is hedonically perturbed by such bombardment. It is in virtue of being affectively perturbed by the world that a subject responds with sensorimotor and attentional agency, sculpting out a niche for itself in order to survive. Thus, we might characterize affective subjectivity as a kind of *to-me-ness* to capture the fact that experience is at its most basic something that happens *to* us. In turn, we can then characterize the agential component of subjectivity as *for-me-ness* to capture the extent to which the world is subsequently interpreted and shaped by the organism's purposes in responding to its initial affective perturbation (Christoff et al. 2011). Our subjective lives are like a pendulum swinging back and forth between hedonic disturbance and agential response.

Conclusion

As embodied subjects who live through phenomenally conscious experiences, we inhabit a living body and populate a meaningful world that is thoroughly affective in multiple overlapping ways. All phenomenal experience is affective in some way and to some degree. In responding to some substantial objections to my view I have bolstered and expanded it to embrace important insights regarding the nature of attention and agency. At the root of the mind is a capacity to be affectively perturbed by the world and that we in turn respond with attentional and sensorimotor agency.

We feel more than we explicitly know. In living through these feelings, we are oriented towards a meaningful world that shows itself to us in the way it does because of how our attention is deployed in implicit and explicit response to the motivations that our feelings deliver to us. Those motivations are both phylogenetically ancient and ontogenetically specific. The individuality of our affective lives is born in the blending of our concrete individual experiences with our evolutionarily primed dispositions. By feeling through our bodies, we are both individuals in the world, and a drop in an ocean of feelings that unite us with each other and many other creatures further down the phylogenetic scale. Because the ocean of feelings is so deep, it is often more convenient to ignore what is happening inside the body and to focus on the world outside. The deepest core of our conscious lives is the one that unfolds within the framework of the body. It is a nexus of affect that renders our commerce with the world meaningful, and that is something worth knowing well.

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