

The Subjective Character of Experience from an Embodied Point of View

Abstract

In this paper, I argue for the embodied perspectival view of subjective character. The subjective character of an organism's phenomenally conscious states is at least partially constituted by the organization of its embodied perspective on the world. Current opinions on subjectivity tend to flounder on one of two problems: one concerns a problematic assumption that we can explain subjectivity in terms of what the subject is conscious of in experience; the other is to leave any analysis of the subject out of the view. I will argue that these problems dissolve when it's understood that the subjective character of phenomenally conscious experience is constitutively linked with the embodied perspective of the organism having the experience.

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Introduction

Philosophers distinguish between two important aspects of phenomenal consciousness. Following Uriah Kriegel (2009), I call the first aspect 'qualitative character' or 'content' and the second aspect 'subjective character' or 'perspective'.¹ Both aspects make up what I will call the 'phenomenal character' of conscious experience. The phenomenal character of experience comprises both the world's having a qualitative character, or the world's seeming to be a certain way, and the organism's perspective on the world from its embodied, subjective, first-personal point of view (Nagel 1974). Philosophical

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.

investigations of consciousness have tended to neglect subjectivity by focusing on the qualitative aspects of sensory experience (often called qualia).

In this paper, I argue for the embodied perspectival view of subjective character:

EP: The subjective character of an organism's phenomenally conscious states is at least partially constituted by the organization of its embodied perspective on the world.

Current opinions on subjectivity tend to flounder on one of two problems: one concerns a problematic assumption that we can explain subjectivity in terms of what the subject is conscious of in experience; the other is to leave any analysis of the subject out of the view. I will argue that these problems dissolve when it's understood that the subjective character of phenomenally conscious experience is constitutively linked with the embodied perspective of the organism having the experience. Because of this neglect, most of the extant views on subjective character are either wrong or incomplete.

To begin I canvass a number of different views from the contemporary literature that focus on the subjective character of experience (§1) and explain what each of them has to offer to a positive characterization of this feature of our experience. I then deploy some of the resources from a reconstruction of Nagel's view (1974) in conjunction with views canvassed at the outset of this paper to provide an argument in favor of the embodied perspectival view of subjective character (§2). In §3 I consider two important objections to the embodied perspectival view before concluding.

1 Contemporary Views of Subjective Character

There are a number of contemporary philosophers whose discussions of consciousness focus explicitly on subjectivity (Levine 2004; McGinn 1997; Kriegel 2009; Zahavi 2005; Zahavi and Kriegel 2015). My discussion here builds on their important contributions. Nevertheless, I will argue that these views do not give as much weight as they should to the embodied perspective of the organism.

1.1 Block on Subjectivity

My discussion of contemporary accounts of subjectivity begins with Ned Block. In a short section of ‘Consciousness, accessibility and the mesh between psychology and neuroscience’ (2007), Block discusses what he calls ‘Awareness’ or ‘me-ishness’. Block writes:

We may suppose that it is platitudinous that when one has a phenomenally conscious experience, one is in some way aware of having it. Let us call the fact stated by this claim — without committing ourselves on what exactly that fact is — the fact that phenomenal consciousness requires Awareness... Sometimes people say Awareness is a matter of having a state whose content is in some sense ‘presented to the self or having a state that is ‘for me’ or that comes with a sense of ownership or that has ‘me-ishness’... (Block 2007, 484).

Block then distinguishes three different modes of analyzing awareness, beginning with one that is ‘minimal’ and another that is ‘higher order’. One’s Awareness of one’s own experiences is minimal just if one’s awareness discloses one’s experience to oneself in the

same way that smiling or dancing acquaints a smiler or a dancer with their smiling or dancing: one knows by doing. One's awareness is higher-order if there is another token state which takes a first order representation as its intentional object. On this view, it is this higher order relation that constitutes awareness. The third option is a same-order view that purports to be a middle-path between the two previous views. Same-order views are like minimal views in that they posit no second-order mental states in order for there to be awareness, and they share with the higher-order views the desire to construe awareness as an intentional relation that takes a first order representation as its object. The difference between them is that same-order views think a state can be intentionally directed towards itself.

Block aligns himself with either the first or third approaches.² Block's explanatory goals do not require him to be more precise because his only point here is to acknowledge that we have no *a priori* reason to build in a conceptual connection between phenomenal consciousness and cognitive access. A minimal or same-order view is capable of

² I follow him in this. I do not think that the higher-order theory is a viable road to an understanding of subjective character or consciousness more generally. There is a substantive literature on this topic and I do not wish to get embroiled in its many subtleties. To my mind, there are two decisive problems for the view. Briefly, it's not at all clear how a non-phenomenal second order state (either thought-based or perceptual) could render a first-order representation phenomenal. In the event that this phenomenality bestowing relation between first- and second-order states can be rendered intelligible, the question of regress looms. Namely, in virtue of what does a second-order state gain its phenomenality bestowing power? Perhaps the second-order state needs to be the intentional object of a third-order state. For the *locus classicus* of the higher-order thought view, see Rosenthal (1986). For a monograph-length treatment, see Carruthers (1996). See also Carruthers (2016) for a nice survey of the view's various permutations. For an incisive set of criticisms, see Siewert (1997) and Seager (2004).

explaining how we are aware of our own experiences without claiming that we have cognitive access to the content of those experiences.

The problem with this view is that it is too vague. Block runs together at least three different ideas. The first is that we are aware of our own experiences. The second is that a subject of experience is present in experience. Lastly, the content of experience is present to the subject. To these I will add a fourth, namely, that subjects stand in relationships of ownership or mineness to their experiences. These are not obviously equivalent notions (Guillot 2016). Therefore, in the analyses that follow, I will be careful to distinguish between these different ideas.

1.2 Phenomenal access to qualia

One way of trying to think about subjectivity — one not included in my brief discussion of Block — is the idea that the qualitative character of experience is *present* in a particular way. We have a particular kind of phenomenal access to our qualia. On this view, subjectivity is to be explained in terms of *how* qualia are present. Subjectivity is a kind of mode of presentation of qualia:

MPQ. *Mode of Presentation of Qualia* – Subjective character is to be explained in terms of the ‘substantive’ and ‘determinate’ mode of presentation of qualitative characters.

Joseph Levine (2004) has provided the strongest version of this view. He contrasts our use of phenomenal concepts — concepts used to think about the phenomenal character of our experience; e.g. ‘reddishness’ — and ordinary physical and functional concepts like ‘cat’ or ‘water’ or even ‘red’. According to Levine, phenomenal concepts have a

‘substantive’ and ‘determinate’ mode of presentation while natural kind and other physical and functional concepts do not. A mode of presentation is a cognitive relation between a knowing subject and a property that it thinks about with a concept. This relation puts a subject in touch with what they are thinking about by representing the property with its concept. It is the nature of the ‘being in touch with’ relation that differs in cases of thinking involving phenomenal vs. non-phenomenal concepts.

Levine’s argument begins with a pair of premises designed to emphasize the important presentational features of qualitative characters:

L1. Qualitative characters have a substantive mode of presentation.

Phenomenal concepts are substantive because when we think about qualitative characters with them, the qualitative characters themselves are present to us. In this way, phenomenal concepts are ‘presentationally thick’. By contrast, the mode of presentation of non-phenomenal properties are ‘presentationally thin’ (2004, 8). Phenomenal concepts are presentationally thick because thinking about qualitative characters involves the presence of those very characters for me. Whether I am perceiving, imagining, remembering, or thinking about red, there is a reddishness that is present to me in all of these intentional acts. To think about reddishness entails that reddishness is somehow present to me, just in virtue of my thinking about it. Thinking about non-phenomenal kinds does not involve the very presence of that which is thought about.

L2. The mode of presentation of qualitative characters is also determinate.

The presence of qualitative characters in experience acquaints us with specific characters that can be defined by us with phenomenal concepts without any necessary reference to properties outside of the qualitative character that is present to us, including physical and functional properties. The reddishness of the apple is a relevant example here. Determinacy consists in the distinctive way that qualitative characters are present and capable of being thought about with concepts that refer exclusively to those properties and no others. It can seem to me that the apple is red regardless of whatever other physical or functional facts might be true of the apple.

The two premises analyzed above form two conjuncts of the antecedent of the following conditional inference:

L3. If the modes of presentation of qualitative characters are substantive and determinate, then when we think about them with phenomenal concepts, there is a special cognitive relation to a subject, qualitative characters are *for me*.

The conclusion follows:

L-C1/MPQ. In thinking about qualitative characters with phenomenal concepts, there is a special cognitive relation to a subject, qualitative characters are *for me*.³

³ I have used the appropriate terminology to frame (L-C1) in terms of the rest of the premises in the argument. However, it is important to note that (L-C1) is the equivalent of (MPQ).

The question now arises: what is the nature of this special cognitive relation? Levine thinks that this is almost impossible to articulate positively. One specific thing we can say is that it is in virtue of qualitative characters being specially related to the subject of experience that the subject has a first-personal perspective on those characters. Levine tries to use the presentational asymmetry between phenomenal and non-phenomenal concepts to argue that consciousness cannot be explained in physical or functional terms.

L4. If thinking about qualitative characters instantiates a special cognitive relation, then qualitative characters are not physically explicable.

The motivation for thinking that the consequent of this conditional follows from its antecedent is the following. If there is a radical asymmetry between how qualitative characters are represented by phenomenal concepts, on one hand, and other kinds of properties being represented by non-phenomenal concepts, on the other, then it's not clear how we could use anything but phenomenal concepts to talk about phenomenal character. If we can't use physical and functional concepts to explain the presence of qualitative characters to a subject, then physicalism cannot explain consciousness. Therefore, the conclusion follows:

L-C2. Qualitative characters are not physically explicable.

The conclusion is open ended. It does not commit to anti-physicalism because even though it might be the case that we can't *explain* consciousness physically, this does not entail that consciousness isn't physical. It is worth noting that this argument doesn't have

much of a defense against a view that claims that phenomenal concepts refer to physical states in a special way. That is, one might hold that this special relation between a phenomenal concept and the qualitative characters they seem to refer to only seems to hold, but doesn't hold in fact (cf. Metzinger 2004). It is also possible that a physical explanation of this relation might be forthcoming, say when we get finished with neuroscience. One might reply that this kind of reductive optimism is missing the point, however. That is, to hold that the special intentional relation is *only* an appearance whose reality is *a posteriori* identical with some functional system in the brain would be to help oneself to a view from nowhere, it would be to try and fail to say something about the first-personal perspective from a third-personal perspective in a way that abandons the very explanandum (Nagel 1974). Nevertheless, I leave such metaphysical issues aside. What is important is the characterization of subjective character embedded in the account; at this juncture, I take no sides in the metaphysical debate about the hard-problem of consciousness.

What is important about this view is that Levine tries to explicate subjectivity in terms of the mode of presentation of qualia. In Levine's words: "One way of elucidating what being 'for the subject' comes to is that the contents of conscious experience are presented in this distinctively substantive and determinate mode" (Levine 2004, 9). Part of his motivation for explaining subjectivity in this way is that he doesn't think that, "...we currently have any idea how to explain subjectivity, especially not in physical, or non-mental terms" (ibid). The problem with this view is that it doesn't tell us very much about subjectivity itself. It certainly tells us something positive, namely, that subjectivity is that in virtue of which qualia seem to be such a puzzle. It is because qualia are present in a

special way for subjectivity. On this view, subjectivity is the reason why qualia have a substantive and determinate mode of presentation.

Levine's account is incomplete. To explain subjectivity requires more than explaining how subjectivity conditions that which appears to it. We still need an explanation of what subjectivity is, what a subject of experience is, and how these relate to qualitative character. Levine focuses on an explanation of the last of these three issues, but this leaves the substantive task untouched.

1.3 The Presence of the Subject

Colin McGinn (1997) agrees with Levine about subjectivity and qualitative character being equally important aspects of consciousness, and that these phenomena are utterly mysterious. However, McGinn's approach is importantly different from Levine's because instead of focusing on the special cognitive relation that obtains between a subject and its qualitative characters in virtue of the former thinking about the latter with phenomenal concepts, McGinn claims that being conscious of the world instantiates a special kind of intentionality at the level of perception. By 'intentionality', McGinn is referring to a world-oriented feature of perceptual states that makes it the case that such states are *about* certain features, properties, or objects in the world. On this view, consciousness is 'Janus-faced' because conscious perceptual states simultaneously disclose a world of qualities and a subject of experience (McGinn 1997, 298).⁴ By contrast, non-phenomenal

⁴ The focus on intentionality rather than on the reference of phenomenal concepts side-steps a lurking objection: the so-called 'phenomenal concepts strategy' (Loar 1990; Balog 2009). This objection states that the reason it seems like (L4) is true is not because of anything special about qualitative characters themselves, but because of the special

perceptual states only necessarily refer to the world. There is no necessary inclusion of the subject of experience in the content of such a state precisely because there is no experience, only the presence of a non-conscious mental state.

We can formulate this approach to subjective character in the following way:

SO. *The Subject and Object of Experience are Co-Present* – Subjective character is to be explained by the dual intentional structure of token perceptual states. Phenomenally conscious perceptual states simultaneously disclose, from a first-personal perspective, objects in the world and the subject who is perceiving the world by having that perceptual state.

In spite of this important difference between approaching consciousness from the point of view of intentionality rather than phenomenal concepts, McGinn's argumentative strategy is similar to Levine's.

Consider the following reconstruction of McGinn's argument:

M1. Phenomenally conscious perceptual states disclose a world of qualities and a subject of experience. They are in this way, 'Janus-faced'.

Premise (M1) is the equivalent of (L1) and (L2). It establishes that in conscious experiences there is something particular about how conscious states represent the world.

referring properties of the phenomenal concepts we use to represent qualitative characters, the latter of which are held to be properties of the brain. I do not have the space to get into the details of this debate.

They do so not only by purporting to disclose what some part of the world is like, but they also disclose to a subject of experience that there is something it is like to be when one is conscious of the world.⁵

M2. If phenomenally perceptual states disclose both the world and the subject of the perceptual state, then such perceptual states instantiate a special form of intentionality.

This special kind of intentionality needs to be understood in contrast to non-phenomenal intentionality. For McGinn, non-phenomenal intentionality can be given a physical or functional explanation. For example, ordinary non-conscious intentional states might be thought of in terms of the activation of neural populations that co-vary with sensory input. There is no need to speak of a conscious subject in analysing such states. Phenomenally conscious intentional states are special because the world is disclosed for a subject of experience. The self is experienced in being intentionally oriented toward the world. Therefore, we can derive the consequent as our first conclusion:

M-C1. Phenomenally conscious perceptual states instantiate a special form of intentionality.

⁵ When I use the demonstrative 'that' I do not mean to say that the awareness in question is propositional. Further, at this juncture, we can remain agnostic as to the status of the subject. It is consistent with this view that there ultimately is no subject. I will have more to say about this below.

In McGinn's words, such states are, 'shot through with subjectivity' (1997, 300).⁶

Consider the following conditional:

M3. If conscious intentional states instantiate a special form of intentionality, then such states are not physically explicable.

The reasoning here is analogous to the (MPQ) view in that because phenomenal intentionality instantiates the special property of disclosing a phenomenal world and the subject who beholds that world, we cannot explicate phenomenal intentionality with physical or functional concepts. Therefore:

M-C2. Conscious states are not physically explicable.

McGinn thinks that the asymmetry between conscious and non-conscious forms of intentionality is a difference of kind, one that stymies the explanatory pretensions of physicalism.

McGinn has gone one step further than Levine by claiming that there is a dual intentionality in each token perceptual state rather than a singular one that discloses the way that qualitative characters are present. Token perceptual states disclose a world of qualities and a subject of experience who has those qualities in view. What is special about consciousness is that the states that instantiate it disclose a subject of experience for

⁶ In §1.5 I will explain why characterizing the relation between a token mental state and the subject having it in intentional terms is problematic.

whom the world is the case (SO). The difference between Levine's view and McGinn's view is that McGinn thinks that there is a subject of experience disclosed to itself in the phenomenal character of experience and that this is something in its own right over and above the special mode of presentation of qualia emphasized by Levine.

However, the same question remains that I posed at the end of my brief treatment of Levine: what is a subject? This is a very difficult question to answer. Further, how do token mental states disclose the subjects who enjoy them? McGinn has invoked the subject of experience in order to say something about the phenomenally conscious intentionality. In particular, he thinks that the presence of the subject in the phenomenal character of perceptual intentionality is what differentiates phenomenally conscious states from their unconscious counterparts. This view goes one step further than Levine's by giving an explanation of subjectivity in terms of the presence of the subject of experience in the phenomenal character of perceptual experience. However, McGinn's view is again similar to Levine's strategy, in that it invokes the notion of a subject of experience to explain some feature of consciousness — in this case, phenomenal intentionality — without explaining what the relation between the subject and its experiences is, or indeed, what the subject is.

1.4 Subjectivity as Mineness

Philosophers concerned with subjectivity have tried to account for this relation between subjects and their experiences in terms of subjects having a certain kind of ownership over their experiences. For example, Dan Zahavi (2005) has argued that the mark of subjectivity is that phenomenally conscious mental states are owned, presumably by the subject of experience (cf. Ganeri 2012; Strawson 1975/1990). Our experiences are present

to us as subjects in a way that the objects represented by our states are not. In the case of our perception of objects, there is a subject-object distinction in the intentional relation, in the case of our acquaintance with our experience, there is no such distinction.⁷ In this way our token mental states exhibit a sense of belonging to us as the subjects of experience. My mental states are *mine* because they are given first-personally in a distinctive way. This view is thus importantly different from (MoP) as discussed above. For the proponent of (MoP), what is distinctive about our subjective character is the way that qualitative characters show up in experience; it is the way that the content of experience is manifest to us. The view under discussion here however says something more: it says that the experiences themselves are present in some way over and above their content.

One might rightly ask why they should take on this more phenomenologically suspect view of what is present in experience. In what follows, I will try to make this view clear. Additionally, I will also distinguish two senses of phenomenal ownership, one strong and one minimal. After explaining why the strong sense is not a tenable candidate for a constitutive feature of subjectivity, I will introduce the minimal sense (Zahavi 2005). In the following subsection, I will then develop my analysis of the minimal phenomenal ownership view in terms of the notion of ‘for-me-ness’.

1.4.1 A Positive Argument for Phenomenal Ownership

⁷ At the level of metacognition it is possible to take one’s experiences as objects because at the cognitive level, our experiences are the thoughts we are having. When we engage in metacognition, we think about those thoughts as objects. However, at the level of pre-reflective perceptual experience, it is held that there is no such subject-object structure.

Here is a reconstruction of Zahavi's argument for subjectivity being explained by an invariant acquaintance relation of phenomenal ownership or mineness (2005, 15-6):

ZM1. There is something it is like for a subject to have an experience.

Zahavi takes this to be a widely agreed upon phenomenological datum. I read (ZM1) as a re-statement of Nagel's (1974) view that there is something it is like to be a conscious organism. It's just that in this formulation Zahavi has substituted 'subject' for 'organism'.⁸

ZM2. If there is something it is like for a subject to have an experience, then the subject must be somehow acquainted with its experience.

This claim begins to differentiate Zahavi's approach from those that we have looked at thus far. Consider (SO) by way of contrast. For (SO) experience discloses both some subsection of the world and the subject itself. It is the mutual disclosure of both in perception that constitutes the phenomenal character of a given token perceptual state. By contrast, in the current case, the claim is that there being something it is like to be a subject of experience entails that in addition to being aware of the content of our experiences, we are aware of those very experiences. Zahavi here is trying to make good

⁸ This is not an insignificant substitution as the notion of a 'subject' often carries with it the connotation of mysteriousness. Subjects may or may not exist. Organisms on the other hand certainly exist.

on the need to explain what the relation is exactly between the subject and its experiences.⁹

If (ZM1) and (ZM2) both hold, then the conclusion plainly follows. Namely:

ZM-C1. The subject is acquainted with its experiences.

Specifying the nature of this acquaintance is very difficult. Every view we have canvassed so far agrees on this. One negative claim that seems to have some plausibility is that, if one maintains that the subject is acquainted with its experiences, one should not qualify that relation in intentional language. Namely, to say that we are aware *of* our experiences is already to incorporate a tacit subject-object distinction. Such a distinction may be appropriate for characterizing the relation between a perceptual state and the object or state of affairs it purports to represent, but this sort of relation is not appropriate for characterizing the basic acquaintance or ownership relation that a subject has to its own states. This latter relation is importantly different from the former.

One reason for this difference is the following:

ZM3. The phenomenal characters of token perceptual experiences differ according to the qualitative intentional contents of those states.

Zahavi's example is that there is a phenomenal difference between watching the sunset

⁹ At this juncture, Zahavi's fully developed theory of subjectivity is beyond the scope of my analysis. As it turns out, Zahavi will equate subjectivity with a kind of minimal self.

and listening to a symphony. The contribution to the phenomenal character of our experience made by token perceptual states varies with the kind of perceptual state one is in and also with how such a state represents the world to be. However, the basic acquaintance relation that a subject has to its own experiences will obtain regardless of what experience they happen to be having.

We can now formulate the fourth premise as follows:

ZM4. If the phenomenal characters of token conscious perceptual states differ according to the qualitative intentional content of those states, and the subject is acquainted with each state, then each token perceptual state shares something with the others beyond their all having a particular qualitative intentional content, namely, they all share an acquaintance relation to the subject.

Zahavi's proposal is that this sameness consists in an acquaintance relation defined by the subject's ownership of its experiences, or that the subject's experiences have a quality of *mineness* to them. In his words: "One commonality is the quality of *mineness*, the fact that the experiences are characterized by first-personal givenness" (Zahavi 2005, 16). Because experiences share this characterization, we can conclude that:

ZM-C2. Each conscious perceptual state shares something with the others that goes beyond their differing qualitative intentional contents, namely, the subject's acquaintance relation to them.

This notion of ‘first-personal givenness’ is meant to articulate the intimate relation that a subject has to its own experiences. In perceiving an apple on the table, I pre-reflectively live through the act of that perception. This makes it *mine* in a way that it could never be yours. Thus, my experience of the apple is given to me first-personally. This kind of ownership can be had by any phenomenally conscious subject. Insofar as *mineness* is a quality of experience, then it can be shared across distinct experiences and subjects. In this way, *mineness* is a structural feature of consciousness as such, rather than an idiosyncratic feature of a particular subject.

There are three points that need to be kept in mind. The first is that Zahavi has introduced the idea that subjectivity is to be accounted for in terms of a subject being acquainted with its own experiences in addition to those things in the world that the experiences are about. The second is that this special kind of acquaintance with one’s experience is to be understood as those experiences being owned by the subject. Third, ownership or *mineness* is equated with a kind of first-personal givenness of experiences to the subject. I will address the first and third points in §3.

1.4.2 Two Senses of Phenomenal Ownership

Here I want to consider some important qualifications concerning the second of these points. It is important to distinguish two senses of phenomenal ownership, both of which are important, but only one of which could plausibly be construed as constitutive of subjective character.

The first sense of mineness is one of robust agency and authorship over one’s experiences. On this view of mineness, there is an explicit sense of possessing one’s experiences as a kind of mental property (in both senses of ‘property’); experiences are

mine. One of the problems with accounting for subjectivity in terms of this robust sense of *mineness* is that there can be experiences that don't seem like they are owned in this way by the subjects having them. For example, in thought and memory insertion cases, subjects experience thoughts and memories that do not seem as if they are their own. Such subjects do not feel agency over or authorship of such experiences (Zahavi 2005; Zahavi and Kriegel 2015; Guillot 2016). Additionally, the Buddhist philosophical tradition, generally speaking, holds that one can be intimately acquainted with experiences through the practice of mindfulness while at the same time the tradition recommends that one should not in any way identify with or appropriate those experiences as one's own (Analayo 2003). Miri Albahari (2006) construes the relevant difference here in terms of a robust sense of selfhood, which, she argues, is illusory, and a more minimal perspectival subjectivity, which, she maintains, is a constitutive property of phenomenal consciousness. Thus, there is the possibility of both pathological and attentionally refined forms of experience that challenge the idea that what experiences all share by way of being had by a subject is that they are experienced by that subject as *mine* in the robust sense. Therefore, if we are to salvage the notion of phenomenal ownership as a way of characterizing the subject's relation to its experiences, then such cases will need to be taken into account. As we will see, Zahavi has a compelling response to this challenge.

To explain his response, it will help to have is a more formal presentation of the argument against phenomenal mineness:

AM1. It is possible for subjects to experience thoughts and memories as if they are not their own.

AM2. If it is possible for subjects to experience thoughts and memories as if they are not their own, then ownership cannot be a constitutive feature of subjectivity.

AM-C. Ownership cannot be a constitutive feature of subjectivity.

First, it's important to note that even if this argument is sound, it is not an argument against the claim that we are often and for the most part acquainted with our own experiences by way of their seeming to be ours in the strong sense outlined above. In our ordinary dealings we tend to take a very strong position of ownership over our feelings and thoughts. When people say or do things we do not like, we are often outraged because they are not respecting *our* thoughts and feelings where *our* is a very robust form of ownership. Nonetheless, even if there is mineness often and for the most part, if (AM) is sound, then mineness cannot function as a minimal or essential constitutive feature of subjectivity.

One might respond to this argument by denying that organisms in pathological or attentionally refined conditions — where the robust phenomenal ownership relation does not obtain between subjects and their experiences — are subjects. Specifically, one might claim that when subjectivity breaks down in the above mentioned ways, we can no longer speak of subjectivity even though some phenomenality remains. However, it is in virtue of an organism having an embodied perspective on the world that it experiences that world subjectively from a first-personal point of view. Such pathological states would still seem to count as embodying a phenomenal subjectivity in virtue of their having a unified perspectival access to the world. Therefore, such views as would deny subjectivity to organisms on the basis of pathological and attentionally refined cases seem too strong.

Thus, the proponent of phenomenal mineness being a constitutive feature of subjectivity needs a different strategy for arguing against (AM).

Zahavi's response to this argument is to deny the inference to (AM-C) on the grounds of equivocation in the use of the term 'ownership' in the antecedent and consequent of (AM2). Zahavi (2005; Zahavi and Kriegel 2015) argues that there are two different ways in which experiences can be said to be owned by a subject.¹⁰ Subjects can be said to lack ownership of their states insofar as they lack an explicit recognition of their being the 'agent or author' of those experiences. This robust sense of mineness is lacking in those special kinds of experiences, both pathological and attentionally refined, where experiences do not seem to be the mental property of their subjects. Thus, this sense of mineness is operative in the antecedent of (AM2). However, there is a more primitive sense of ownership as well. Even in pathological and attentionally refined cases of non-ownership, such experiences, "...cannot lack minimal ownership altogether, since the afflicted subject is aware that it is she herself rather than somebody else who is experiencing them" (Zahavi and Kriegel 2015, 10).¹¹ If one is speaking of ownership in this more minimal sense in the consequent of (AM2), then there is equivocation because that is not the sense being deployed in the antecedent. If, on the other hand, one maintains a more robust definition of ownership in order to preserve the consistency of the conditional in (AM2), then (AM-C) follows, but not in the sense that the objector wishes to press. Either (AM) fails because of equivocation and the objection to (ZM) fails, or it is

¹⁰ See also, Campbell (1999).

¹¹ See also Zahavi (2005), Gallagher and Zahavi (2012).

consistent to hold that (AM) is sound and to claim that minimal ownership is a constitutive feature of subjectivity.¹²

A little more terminological book keeping is in order here. If we read ‘phenomenal ownership’ in the more minimal sense, then its sole purpose is to home in on an invariant feature that all experiences share in virtue of their being experiences at all. This is what Zahavi means when he talks of mineness in terms of first-personal givenness. What remains in pathological and attentionally refined cases of non-ownership is that foreign experiences, of whatever sort, are still happening to perspectival subjects who have first-personal access to the contents of those experiences and no others. Acquaintance with experience remains in the absence of an explicit sense of authorship and agency. Yet, when you strip away this more substantive notion of possession and authorship, something important to our ordinary experience is lost. As I said before, it is plausible that we often and for the most part relate to our experiences by taking ourselves to own them in the stronger sense. In order to keep these two notions of ownership clear, I will qualify my usage of ‘mineness’ and ‘phenomenal ownership’ with ‘minimal’ or ‘substantial’ as required.¹³

¹² However, there is a risk of construing the minimal conception of ownership with knowing that one is having an experience. If one were to go that far, then animals will not have minimal ownership. It is highly plausible that animals possess minimal ownership. Therefore, it is better to talk about the presence-to-mind of experience, which enables knowledge in organisms like us who are capable of it. My thanks to Bill Seager for discussion of this point.

¹³ The distinction between minimal and substantial ownership still implies a kind of duality between subject and experience. It is possible that this kind of implied duality is impossible to fully overcome without ignoring subjectivity altogether. That is, if we were to confine our analysis of phenomenal character merely to the way in which qualitative character is manifest while ignoring what it is manifest *to*, then we might avoid this tacit dualism. However, to do so would be to throw away the baby with the bath water. Thus, we shall have to take care to analyze this feature of

1.5 Subjectivity as *For-me-ness*

I will now shift my analysis to another way that philosophers have discussed subjective character, one that is co-extensive with minimal phenomenal ownership, that is, the notion of ‘for-me-ness’. Some philosophers who agree with this approach regarding subjectivity being constituted by acquaintance with, or minimal ownership of, one’s experience have chosen a different way to describe the nature of this relation. Specifically, subjectivity is defined in terms of experiences being *for me*; the subjective character of experience can be explained in terms of *for-me-ness*. This approach is adopted by Kriegel (2009) and more recently by Zahavi (Zahavi and Kriegel 2015).¹⁴

1.5.1 Self-Representationalism about Subjective Character

Kriegel agrees with Zahavi that subjects enjoy an especially intimate relation with their own experiences and that this relation accounts for subjective character. While Kriegel and Zahavi are at times at odds over what to call it (mineness, for-me-ness), they seem to be in agreement that for-me-ness is the proper way to characterize subjectivity (Zahavi and Kriegel 2015). However, there is a substantial question about how to characterize the kind of intimate relationship we have with our own experiences. Thus far, I have spoken of this relation only in terms of acquaintance. However, there are at least three different

phenomenality carefully without reifying it into a subject or self that is problematically distinct from the flow of experience in which it lives.

¹⁴ In *Subjectivity and Selfhood*, Zahavi qualifies his analysis of subjective character by describing experiences as being *for me* (cf. 2005; 45). However, he doesn’t turn this qualification into a neologistic noun for the constitutive property of subjective character (i.e. *for-me-ness*). Nevertheless, this language has been popularized in its contemporary usage mostly because of Zahavi’s work on Husserl.

ways of characterizing this relation. One way is that for-me-ness is the result of token perceptual states representing themselves in the right way (Kriegel 2009). Additionally, there is also what Kriegel calls ‘the intrinsic glow view’ (Kriegel 2009; Zahavi 2005; Husserl 1928/2008). Lastly there are acquaintance views of subjectivity (Hellie 2007). Intrinsic glow and acquaintance views are non-representational accounts of subjectivity. Being a (self-)representationalist, Kriegel argues against both of these non-representational ways of explaining for-me-ness.

Kriegel attributes the intrinsic glow view of for-me-ness to Husserl (1928/2008), but Zahavi (2005, 2006) is a more recent proponent of the view. This view claims that the special relation subjects have to their own experiences is unlike any other relation in the world; it is *sui generis*. Therefore, on the intrinsic glow view, the relation a subject has to its experiences is primitive and cannot be analyzed in terms of other relations. Kriegel thinks that if we are related to our experiences, then the relation must be some kind of awareness-*of* relation. If there is an awareness-*of* relation, then there is intentionality. Since there is intentionality, there is no reason to think that the relation is anything other than a representational one (Kriegel 2009, 103-4).

Another view is the acquaintance view, which models the relation of a subject to its own experiences on Russell’s distinction between knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance (Russell 1912/1999; Hellie 2007). The acquaintance view says that perceptual acquaintance is a better model for the relation that a subject has to its experiences. The acquaintance relation is the superior model because there is a degree of immediacy and intimacy embodied in this relation that representational accounts seem unable to address. This inability stems from the fact that representations are often non-veridical. A representation is a token mental state, usually conceived of as having either a

propositional or imagistic form, that purports to tell us something about how the world is. A representation can be veridical or not. The world will correspond to the content of a representation, thus making it veridical, or it won't, thus making it non-veridical.

The relation a subject has to its own experiences does not seem to be representational in this way. It is true that we can mis-represent our experiences in all kinds of ways. For example, it might seem to me that *everything is fine* and I might tell you so in a very angry way, believing whole-heartily that nothing is the matter even though I am obviously quite agitated. While dreaming, I represent myself as being in a real world (rather than a dreamed or imagined one). However, in spite of such possibilities, there is a sense in which one's experiences are immune from being mis-represented insofar as these experiences all happen to or for me, from a first-personal point of view, in a way that they don't happen for you. For example, even though I am sleeping while representing myself as present in an actual world within the dream, the content of that self-representation is still for-me in a way that it is not for you. Specifically, even though my dream experience is non-veridical — in virtue of its representing me as being awake — that does not change the fact that it *seems* to me as if I am awake *and* that there is something it is like for the content of my dream state to seem this way to me. Galen Strawson puts this point in terms of knowledge, where in virtue of having an experience, the subject knows what it is like to have it in a way analogous to the way subjects endure pain: "*The having is the knowing*" (2015, 11). It might be the case that what my experience tells me about the world is non-veridical, but that does not mean that it doesn't seem to me that the world is a certain way. Experiences transpire for me in a mode of first-personal givenness that entails that I am the only one who has access to the contents of these experiences. Because experiences have a first-personal mode of givenness, some

philosophers have tried to theorize about this relation in terms of a Neo-Russellian model of acquaintance (e.g. Hellie 2007). This way of approaching this relation is unmysterious as it models itself on certain ways of thinking about perception (*pace* the intrinsic glow view) but is also sufficiently primitive to avoid problems that come with the self-representational account.

Kriegel's response to these accounts is two-fold. First he provides an account of self-representation designed to assuage the phenomenological worry that a representational approach to the mind is not equipped to adequately account for the intimacy with which subjects are related to their own experiences. According to Kriegel, it is not just that for-me-ness is to be accounted for in terms of token mental states representing themselves; it's that token mental states necessarily, non-derivatively, specifically, and essentially represent themselves (Kriegel 2009). In brief, a representation necessarily represents itself in the sense that it is not possible for it not to represent itself. Such a state non-derivatively represents itself by doing so without the aid of any interpretation by any subject, including the subject whose state it is. Self-representation is specific in the sense that the state represents itself as a particular state rather than as something generic. A self-representing state represents itself essentially just in case that in so doing it represents itself as itself and not just accidentally.¹⁵ Kriegel's claim then is that our token mental states can represent in these different ways, and those token states that self-represent essentially serve as the representational vehicles of the

¹⁵ Kriegel explains this point about essential representation in terms of a distinction between epistemic contingency and necessity. In saying that my father's sister's second eldest nephew is struggling to articulate a philosophical point, I am representing myself accidentally, or under an epistemically contingent mode of presentation. In saying that *I* am struggling to articulate myself, I self-represent essentially, in an epistemically necessary way.

subjective character of experience. Obviously, more could be said here, but this is enough to explain Kriegel's view that his account of self-representation can address the intimacy concerns of intrinsic glow and acquaintance theorists.

Second, Kriegel thinks that if the phenomenological concerns about intimacy can be assuaged by his account of self-representation, then the representational view is to be preferred because intrinsic glow and acquaintance views of subjective character are less plausible candidates for psycho-physical reduction. Both of these non-representational approaches posit primitive epistemic relations that cannot be further analyzed into physical or functional relations. Since, on Kriegel's view, reductive explanation is the best form of explanation, he is skeptical of both of these analyses of for-me-ness.

Here is a reconstruction of his argument:

SR1. Reductive explanations of the special relation subjects have to their own experiences are to be preferred over non-reductive explanations.

This first premise is a kind of methodological presupposition borne of the conviction that *ceteris paribus*, we should desire simpler and more straightforward explanations of phenomena — especially mental kinds — than otherwise. Physical and functional explanations do not make use of phenomenal concepts and therefore meet such preferences.

SR2. Acquaintance and Intrinsic Glow views posit epistemically primitive accounts of how we are related to our own experiences.

These accounts are epistemically primitive in the sense that the relation posited by them cannot be reductively analyzed into other sorts of relations that are straightforwardly physical or functional.

The third premise fleshes out the contrast between Kriegel's view and those he criticizes. Specifically:

SR3. Self-representationalism is not an epistemically primitive account of how we are related to our own experiences.

Representations can be physically explained. This is usually done in terms of some appropriate co-variation relation between neurophysiological activity and the sensory properties of objects. However, in the case of trying to explain subjective character, reductive representational analysis must be carried out in terms of a token state representing itself.

SR-C. Self-representationalism is a preferred means of explaining how we are related to our own experiences.

There are two difficulties with this argument. The first concerns (SR1) And the second concerns (SR3).

Concerning (SR1), this premise is, to an extent, question begging when applied to consciousness. The problem of consciousness is precisely that all things are not equal with respect to it, at least epistemically, if not metaphysically. We should not build in metaphysical or methodological commitments to the kinds of explanations we prefer

before exploring the phenomenon under investigation, thoroughly, and on its own terms. If a non-physical explanation better suits the nature of the phenomenon, then this is the explanation we should prefer. Kriegel reasons from an absolute conviction that not only are physical explanations to be preferred but that such explanations are the only option. Any view that does not lead in that direction is to be abandoned. Those convictions speak against the *ceteris paribus* condition embodied in (SR1). Therefore, it's not obvious that the reductive respectability of representation is left intact. This leads to the second more substantial difficulty.

In essence, the objection is that the reductive advantage of self-representation over its competitors is actually an explanatory weakness. The objection can be put in the form of a question the self-representationalist has a difficult time answering: why would more representations make any explanatory headway on reductively solving the problem of consciousness? The reason the self-representationalist has a difficult time answering this question is that self-representation looks to be merely self-related rather than genuinely significance conferring.¹⁶

1.5.2 On the Nature of Phenomenal Significance

At this point I need to explain what I mean by 'phenomenal significance'. In doing so we will leave our specific treatment of Kriegel aside for a while and then return to it once I have fully developed this point. Such a digression is necessary for two reasons. First, once I fully explain this idea of phenomenal significance, it will become clear that self-

¹⁶ Joseph Levine (2006) has pressed this point with considerable force to the point of acquiescence from Kriegel (2015).

representational accounts of subjective character fail. Secondly, I will rely heavily on this idea of phenomenal significance in the remainder of this paper.

The term ‘significance’ is a term that I wish to use in order to analyse the ‘for’ in ‘for-me-ness’. For-me-ness is a property that experiences have for the subjects living through them. Experiences are *for me* because the world that experiences represent shows up in experience in a particular way. Namely, the qualitative character of our experience presents the world to us as being determinate and substantive (MPQ) (Levine 2004). Another way of putting this is to say that an experience presents the world first-personally in a way that is present *to* or *for* a subject who is having that experience.

There is an important contrast between experiences merely being present to or in us and being significant for us (Levine 2006, 194). Since Levine is an internalist about qualitative characters, for him the contrast amounts to a distinction between a mental state being merely present within the system and its being significant for the system because that state is in an acquaintance relation with the subject whose state it is. In Zahavi’s (2005) language, the token experience is available to the subject from the subject’s perspective first-personally. There are all kinds of token mental states that are present in the system but are not phenomenally conscious. What it is to be phenomenally conscious is for experiences to be given in a first-personal way to the subject having them. So the language of significance is here meant to further elaborate on what it means for experiences to be given to the subject having them first-personally.

Stated baldly, consciousness is important to us. The fact that we have it, live through it, is existentially significant to us. Suppose I were to tell you that by undergoing a surgical procedure we could perfect the representational capacities of your sensory systems so that every subsequent representation you had would be veridical. The only

catch is that after the procedure, you would lose all phenomenal consciousness. There will be nothing it is like for you to live through your perceptions, but they will be entirely accurate (Siewert 1997). You would of course reject the offer in horror. Why? Because your experiences matter to you. Indeed, I submit that your conscious experiences are the most important aspects of your mental life. Without them nothing would matter to you; you would simply be a zombie.¹⁷ Subjectivity being at least partially constituted by the organization of an organism's sensory apparatus (Nagel 1974). This apparatus is not inert, but *sensitive* in that it is interested in and poised with respect to its environment in such a way that its various experiences hedonically perturb it. Thus, an organism's experiences are significant for it by *affecting* it.

1.5.3 Against Self-Representationalism about Subjective Character

We are now in a position to return to our criticism of Kriegel. If you try to explain for-me-ness in a way that leaves out that which it is posited to explain (the conferring of phenomenal significance), then you have missed the explanandum in search of a reductive explanans. The self-representational theorist has no answer to the question of why non-conscious self-representations would lack for-me-ness, but conscious ones have it. Kriegel (2015, 67) cites Levine helpfully: "Subjectivity...is that feature of a mental state by virtue of which it is of significance for the subject; not merely something happening within her, but 'for her'" (Levine 2006, 194). The ability of an experience to confer

¹⁷ Strawson (2015) goes one step further and says that conscious awareness is the most important phenomenon in the universe.

significance to its subject is what phenomenally conscious experiences have that their unconscious counterparts do not.

We need something to fill the gap between substantial ownership or *mineness*, which, on the one hand, claims too much, and the mere occurrence of a token state representing itself, which doesn't claim enough. The self-representational account leaves out a proper analysis of the 'for' in 'for-me-ness', reducing it merely to a representation of an occurrent token state. The philosophically interesting sense of for-me-ness is a relation that a conscious subject has to its own experience, such that the experience being present for the subject is significant in some way to the subject. Once self-representationalism abandons any pretense to metaphysical reduction, it seems no more or less preferable to its competitors. Indeed, there is a sense in which the simplicity of the other views over Kriegel's self-representationalism looks more elegant and straight forward.

Regardless of what version of the for-me-ness account of subjectivity one prefers, they all share a certain feature that should be kept in mind as we go forward. Galen Strawson (2015) calls this feature 'self-intimation'. Whichever view of for-me-ness one chooses, one is committed to the view that subjectivity can be explained by a special property had by conscious experiences, namely, that they are aware of themselves in addition to whatever content they represent. Self-representation, acquaintance, and intrinsic glow views all offer different accounts of what this self-intimating relation a token state bears to itself amounts to. It is in virtue of each state being aware of itself in one of these ways that there is something it is like for a subject to be in that state. It is a further question whether this self-awareness relation that states bear to themselves is sufficient to explain subjective character or whether a subject is also required. I argue that we must answer this question in the negative.

The reason is that Levine's (2006) objection to Kriegel (2009; 2015) about the inability of self-representationalism to fully account for subjectivity seems to generalize. A mental state's being self-related can't explain subjectivity.¹⁸ This is because an explanation of the nature of subjectivity must account for the conferring of significance of experience to a subject. That is, a subject is that which apprehends a world such that there is something it is like to apprehend a world as seeming a certain way, i.e. as having a qualitative character. It is in virtue of there being something it is like for a subject to apprehend the qualitative world that the latter is significant to the former. Significance

¹⁸ It is worth noting that Kriegel's account of subjectivity brings us full circle back to where I began my discussion at the beginning of this section. Specifically, Kriegel and Levine seem to agree that we should characterize subjectivity in terms of its having a quality of for-me-ness. However, these views are also importantly different. When Levine uses the term to explain subjectivity he is talking about the way in which qualitative characters are present. He is focusing on the fact that the world shows up as seeming a certain way to and for a subject. When Kriegel uses the term, he is talking about a special kind of awareness that we have of our own token states. Now, insofar as both Levine and Kriegel are internalists about qualitative character, they think qualitative characters are properties of token mental states. Thus, metaphysically, both authors share the same view, namely that subjectivity is constituted by an awareness of our own states. But the properties that ground that awareness are different in each case. Nevertheless, for Kriegel, for-me-ness is a different property from that of qualitative character. This is partially because Kriegel is reductive about qualitative characters and thinks there is nothing more to them than representations of the sensory properties of the objects of perception. However, Levine's and Kriegel's views about for-me-ness are different at the level of experience itself. For Levine, qualitative characters correspond to sensory properties in the world in a one-to-one relation. Thus, the presence of qualitative characters for me refers to the presence of a qualitative world. For Levine, subjective character is to be explained by the qualitative presence of the world. For Kriegel, things are somewhat different. On Kriegel's view, we have a special awareness of our own states *qua* states. Our mental states are phenomenally self-intimating (Strawson 2015). At the level of our experience, we are perceptually aware of the world with all of its qualitative characters and simultaneously aware of our experience of the world. So the views differ in their commitment to precisely what kinds of properties of mental states account for the subjective character of phenomenally conscious experience.

refers to the first-personal manner in which experiences are *for* the subjects who live through them. If one wishes to explain away the subject, then one will need to provide an account of the self-relatedness of mental states that makes good on the significance conferring relation. Doing so is difficult for two reasons. First, as we have seen, it is very easy to miss the explanandum by positing a self-representational relation that does not meet the significance constraint. By contrast, positing the appropriate mode of self-relation in a way that does not problematically stipulate a definitional identity between self-relation and significance conferring will require an analysis of the subject of experience (whether reductive or not). Such an analysis is required because it is the presence of experience *as significant* that is the explanandum of subjective character and we need to understand significance in terms of *for whom* such experiences are significant. Without an analysis of all the relata included in this significance relation, our philosophical understanding remains incomplete.

Finally, it is important to note that these different theses about subjectivity are not equivalent. They propose different points of emphasis in their analyses of subjective character. For example, (MPQ) claims that subjectivity is something to be explained by a particular way that the qualitative world appears. By contrast (FM) claims that subjectivity is a kind of internal relation that subjects have to their own experiences. The (SPO) thesis is a further specification of (FM) and (SO) goes even further to the claim that it is the subject itself that is also present in experience along with the experience's content.

The difficulty with all these approaches is that they flounder on one of two difficulties: one concerns a problematic assumption that we can explain subjectivity in terms of awareness of something other than the subject. Both (MPQ) and the version of (FM) that accounts for subjective character in terms of self-intimation are problematic in

this regard because these views purport to account for subjectivity in terms of a relation a subject has to their experiences, either the qualitative world (MPQ) or their token experiences (FM). The subject is left out of the account, even though it seems to play a central role as one of the relata that constitutes subjectivity, the other of course being the content of its experiences. Now, it might turn out that there is no subject over and above those experiences, but at this juncture, what is important to note is that *some* analysis of the subject is required in order to explain the nature of subjectivity, one that is lacking in the accounts canvassed so far.¹⁹ It is the presence of the experience that does the explaining here, not what they are present to. The other difficulty is that other accounts advert to the presence of the subject as being somehow constitutive of subjectivity but then omit any analysis of the subject of experience from the view (SO). A viable account of subjective character will overcome these problems.

2. Subjective Character and Creatures with Perspectives

The views I have analyzed thus far focus either on how the world appears or on phenomenal goings-on that are internal to the subject. Both are important. When trying to understand consciousness, we should take account of the fact that it grants us access to a world of qualities, and that this phenomenal access to the world is possible only because of the special relationship we have to our experiences. However, it is essential that a connection between these two facets of experience be made and that we conceive

¹⁹ Zahavi (2005) is one exception. He has a fully worked out view of the subject. However, I cannot address his view here as it would require a substantial analysis of the difference between subjectivity and selfhood.

of experiences in a way that allows us to take account of the organism's perspective on the world.

In forging such a connection, we must be careful not to construe subjective character as being too much 'out there' and thus missing the explanandum altogether. So also, we must be wary of construing subjective character as being a purely internal phenomenon; something that happens 'in here' within some kind of private skull-bound Cartesian theater. Such a view misses the way in which subjectivity offers a first-personal perspective on a meaningful world to an embodied organism. Only by including an analysis of the embodiment of the organism having the experience can we make good on this demand.

2.1 Embodiment Neglect

None of the views of subjective character that we have explored in this section are heedful of the connection between subjectivity and the perspective of the organism that has phenomenally conscious experience. In particular, (MPQ) refers only to what the organism's perspective is directed towards, not its perspective itself. (SO) makes reference to the subject but as it stands, the view doesn't tell us anything in particular about what a subject is or how that subject embodies a perspective on the world it perceives. Finally, (FM) defines subjective character in terms of an internal relation between a subject and their experience that doesn't address the issue of perspective. By refocusing the discussion on this connection between the organism's perspective and the environment on which it has a perspective, both of the aforementioned difficulties can be overcome. By understanding subjective character as an organism's perspectival relation

to its environment, we include the qualitative world without neglecting the subject of experience.

A view of subjectivity that is focused on the perspective of the organism is an important factor in a philosophical account of subjectivity. Such will be the argument of this section. At this point, I have pointed out that in order to provide an account of subjectivity or subjective character, we need to think more carefully about what the subject is. The subjective character of experience is at least partially constituted by the perspective of the organism, not just the content or self-relatedness or reflexivity of its token mental states, but by the embodiment of the organism in virtue of which the world shows up in the way it does for an organism. In this way the embodied first-personal perspective gives us a way of positively characterizing the subject of experience without reifying it into a metaphysically problematic self or homuncularizing the inner life of that subject.

Here is an argument based on a close reading of Nagel (1974) to the effect that there is a constitutive connection between the subjective character of phenomenally conscious experience and the point of view of the organism:

HB1. Humans and bats have different kinds of perceptual systems.

HB2. The nature and function of a perceptual system constitutes an organism's point of view on the world.

HB-C1. Human's and bats have different points of view on the world.

HB3. If two organisms have different perceptual systems (e.g. humans and bats), then any perceptual states enjoyed by those organisms will differ in their phenomenal characters because of the organizational differences in their perceptual systems.

HB-C2. Any perceptual states enjoyed by organisms of different species will differ in their phenomenal character because of the organizational differences in their perceptual systems.

HB-C3. Having different points of view makes a phenomenal difference in the mental states had by the respective organisms.

I now want to expand on this argument by linking the conception of a point of view to the embodiment of the organism. This connection between perspective and embodiment is already tacitly contained in (HB2), namely, that on account of an organism having the kind of evolved sensory apparatus it does, that organism enjoys a certain kind of phenomenal character.

We know from our consideration of Zahavi's (2005) argument (ZM) that there is an aspect of experience that obtains over and above the way the organism's changing states contribute to its overall phenomenal character. Recall, that the final conclusion of that argument was the following:

ZM-C2. Each conscious perceptual state shares something with the others that goes beyond their differing qualitative intentional contents, namely, the subject's acquaintance relation to them.

Recall also that Zahavi proposes that what various token phenomenal states share is a minimal kind of ownership by a subject for whom they are present. Such token states are for me (FM). However, this is not the entire story.

My preferred terminology for assessing the connection between an organism's perspective and its changing experiences is to say that it is in virtue of there being a phenomenal kind of 'creature consciousness', that a token state might be said to be phenomenally conscious at all.²⁰ I take the notion of 'creature consciousness' to refer to two important features that are necessary for any account of subjective character. The first is that creature consciousness is a general aspect of phenomenal character that is

²⁰ This distinction between 'creature' and 'state' consciousness is at the heart of some slightly orthogonal discussions in the philosophy of mind. One way this distinction is used is to make distinctions in the fineness of grain of our explanations of conscious states. More precisely, an organism can be said to be creature conscious if it is awake rather than asleep (Chalmers 2010; Searle 2000). Another way that this notion of 'creature consciousness' is used is to refer to the fact that when attributing consciousness to organisms, we can do so in an intransitive way. That is, in asking whether or not the ladybug is conscious, answering that question tells us nothing about whether the ladybug is conscious *of* anything in particular. Of course, an organism's token states can be said to be transitively conscious in virtue of their having content that purports to represent some part of the world as being thus and so. Call such states, 'state conscious' (Kriegel 2009). By contrast, the organism having that state can also be said to be conscious full-stop regardless of the content of their experiences (Bayne 2007). This is the second way philosophers use 'creature consciousness'. The distinction is also used as a way of thinking about what degree of detail neural explanations need to have in order to count as having provided some explanation of the mental states they physically realize. Thus, if there is a neural correlate of wakefulness, we could rightfully attribute to such a pattern of neural activation that it was sufficient for creature consciousness, that the organism is conscious at all. But this would not yet explain the patterns of neural activation necessary to account for the precise contents of a given state that the organism would be in on account of its being awake and in perceptual commerce with its environment. Thus, it is often thought that creature consciousness refers to an abstract structural feature of consciousness, while state consciousness refers to the rich and detailed contents of experience.

type-identified by the sort of organism which is having it. Different sorts of creatures enjoy different sorts of creature consciousness on account of the fact that the perspectival structure of their experience is constituted by the type of sensory apparatus they deploy in their perceptual commerce with the world (HB2). Thus, I use the notion of creature consciousness to refer to the fact that there is a contribution made to the phenomenal character of an organism's experience by the organization of that organism's perceptual perspective on the world, a perspective that is constituted by the evolved configuration of its sensory apparatus.²¹

The second feature of subjective character that 'creature consciousness' refers to is that the arising and passing away of token perceptual states takes place against a phenomenal background. One of the things we need to understand and explain about consciousness is the fact that we are conscious while the contents of our conscious experiences vary and change. In virtue of what can it be said that all of my individual phenomenally conscious experiences are phenomenally conscious? Whether I am smelling freshly baked bread, scratching my toe or listening to Beethoven, I am conscious in a way that cuts across the specific contents of these experiences. This generality of consciousness across specific contents is not just the fact that I am awake rather than sleeping (cf. Chalmers 2010, ch. 3). There is something it is like to be conscious in these various ways. These varieties give me epistemic access to different aspects of the world (sights, sounds, smells, etc), but all of them seem to participate in a general kind of

²¹ This usage is close to Bayne's usage in that in saying that an organism is creature conscious I am making a claim about the organism as a whole and not the content of any of its token mental states. It is different from Bayne's usage in that, following Nagel, being creature conscious makes a contribution to the phenomenal character of the organism's experience. As far as I can tell, Bayne is agnostic on this latter point.

consciousness that I call ‘creature consciousness’ (Searle 2000). What our token perceptual states share is that they are all had by an organism with a unified, embodied first-personal perspective on the world.

My way of talking about creature consciousness is closely related to discussions of consciousness in terms of a field structure within which token states are transient modulations. Talk of a phenomenal field is helpful as long as it does not neglect the organism’s embodied perspective by overemphasizing the phenomenal field’s overlap with the visual field (Searle 2000; Thompson 2007). Additionally, one might think that this field is to be accounted for in terms of some internal Cartesian theater of experience and that the phenomenal changes that happen as a result of changing perceptions, thoughts, and images all happen inside the organism, presumably somewhere in the brain, like actors moving on and off the stage. Such a view would commit us to a problematically internalist version of self-intimation and I have been trying to articulate a view of subjective character that goes beyond a necessary commitment to views that try to explain subjective character exhaustively in terms of self-intimation.

2.2 The Argument for the Embodied Perspectival View of Subjective Character

I am now in a position to state my positive argument for the constitutive connection that exists between the subjective character of phenomenal consciousness and the embodied perspective of the organism. The first premise takes us back to my reconstruction of Nagel’s view on consciousness:

MA1/HB-C3. Having a point of view or first-personal perspective makes a phenomenal difference to the experiences had by an organism.

As one's perceptual states arise and pass away one is given all kinds of varying information about one's environment. Further, one experiences that information in terms of a world of vivid qualities that are apprehended in experience. Yet, there is a contribution to one's overall phenomenal character made by the fact that all of one's token experiences are had from a first-personal perspective. This perspective provides a structural limit on how the world seems. The world would be visually very different if our eyes were in our knee-caps rather than the front of our faces. The evolved configuration of our sensory apparatus makes a contribution to what it is like to perceive the world regardless of what the world might be like when we perceive it.

Our sensory apparatus remains relatively stable across our varying experiences (barring injury or malfunction). This invariance of form creates a stable perspectival locus that remains constant across our varying experiences. Thus:

MA2. An organism's embodied perspective on the environment remains invariant across its changing states.

It is important to note that the structure of the organism's embodied perspective need not be unchanging. Invariance is a by-product of a meta-stable structure. After all, there are all kinds of changes that we undergo as subjects due to developments in our capacity to integrate sensorimotor information as we develop. There are also atypical experiences like dissociation and out-of-body experiences that affect the structure of our embodied perspective. The point is not that we do not change, but that there is a kind of meta-stable invariance around which the changes are organized.

The third premise comes from my consideration of Zahavi's argument for an invariant feature of phenomenal character. Namely:

MA3/ZM-C2. The phenomenal character of token perceptual states shares something that contributes positively to the phenomenal character of the subject's experience but is not exhausted by the differing qualitative characters embodied in those states. Namely, all these token states have a subjective character.

As we have seen, different philosophers want to give different accounts of what subjective character amounts to. My view is that subjective character is to be accounted for in terms of the perspective of the organism. I will have more to say about this below.

I now want to combine all three of these premises into a conjunctive antecedent condition for a conditional whose consequent should follow as a conclusion immediately. Here is the conditional:

MA4. If MA1, MA2, and MA3 are true, then an organism's embodied perspective plays a constitutive role in explaining the subjective character of that organism's experience.

Why think that the consequent follows from the antecedent? We are trying to articulate what it is that phenomenal states share over and above their differing qualitative characters. In virtue of what can we say that a token state is phenomenally conscious given that there are other tokens with completely different qualitative characters? What do they share? The straightforward answer is that they all happen to an organism with

an invariant embodied first-personal perspective. The organism's perspective plays the role of telling us what these token states all share. Therefore,

MA-C1. An organism's embodied perspective at least partially constitutes the subjective character of that organism's experience.

There is perhaps a triviality concern here that needs to be addressed. We can frame this concern in terms of the following questions: Who would object to this conclusion? Isn't it obviously true that an organism's embodied perspective is in some way constitutive of its phenomenal character? I think the answer is yes, and perhaps others do too, but if (MA-C1) is obviously true, it hasn't really shown up in the philosophical analyses of consciousness that have sprung up in response to Nagel (1974). Indeed, most of the views we have canvassed in the last section make scarcely any mention of it all.²²

At this point I need to differentiate my approach from some of the views I canvassed in the last section. Specifically, I want to make sure that my notion of an organism's perspective is not explained in terms of the presence of qualia or the organism's purported awareness of its own token mental states. In order to do this, I need to introduce two new premises:

MA5. The presence of qualia is not sufficient to explain subjective character.

²² Dan Zahavi's (2005) view is an exception here.

In the last section I gave some important reasons for thinking this premise is true. In particular, for those who try to analyze subjectivity just in terms of the way qualia appear, one is using subjectivity to account for qualitative character, but this does not tell us enough about subjective character itself (cf. MPQ). The more important premise at this juncture is this one:

MA6. Awareness of one's mental states is not sufficient to explain subjective character.

Views that focus only on subjective character being constituted by the organism's awareness of its own states (FM) or on the presence of the subject in experience (SO) face serious problems. Namely, they do not give any place to the organism's perspective. Subjective character becomes an internal relation that token mental states have to themselves (FM) or an unanalyzed homunculus (SO). Each of these neglects the way in which the organism's evolved perceptual system and embodied organization relate the organism to its environment in a way that has an immediate upshot in the organism's experience. This is why (MA-C1) needs to be stated explicitly and is *not* a trivial truth about phenomenal character. Additionally, by embracing the embodied perspectival conception of subjective character, we can make good on the positive aspects of both (FM) and (SO) by giving an account of how we are aware of our experiences and how the subject is present in experience.²³

I now combine the last two premises as well as (MA-C1) into a three-fold conjunct that will serve as the antecedent of a conditional that will yield my second conclusion,

²³ I will return to this point below when I consider some important objections.

effectively differentiating my approach from those that rely on analyzing subjective character in terms of the organism's awareness of its own token mental states:

MA7. If MA-C1, MA5, and MA6 are true, then an organism's embodied perspective plays a constitutive role in explaining an organism's subjective character regardless of how the qualitative world appears and whether or not that organism has an awareness of its states.

The embodied perspective of the organism is something that is left out by analyses of phenomenal character that focus only on the idiosyncratic way that qualia show up in experience and those that home in on the awareness that some subjects may have of their own token states. The organism's perspective is that in virtue of which it is related to its world of qualities regardless of the way in which it might be reflexively acquainted with its own mental states.

Therefore, it seems safe to derive the consequent of the conditional in (MA7) as the final conclusion to the argument. Namely:

MA-C2. An organism's embodied perspective plays a constitutive role in explaining an organism's subjective character whether or not that organism has an awareness of its states.

To be clear, I am not hostile to the notion that a subject's being aware of their token mental states might play a central role in explaining subjective character. Indeed, it might even be partially constitutive in some way, perhaps as a reliable epistemic means for allowing

a subject of experience to become self-acquainted. The point I am trying to make is that this cannot be whole story.

3. Two Important Objections

I have been articulating a view that accounts for the subject of experience in terms of an organism's embodied perspective on the world. In this section, I will consider two important objections that will help me to further substantiate the view.

In a recent paper by Marie Guillot (2016), a similar set of distinctions is made between different ways that philosophers have approached the question of subjectivity. Guillot differentiates between three different views: For-me-ness, Me-ness and Mineness. These notions line up pretty directly with the distinctions I made in §1. For-me-ness straightforwardly falls under (FM) and refers to the fact that subjects are acquainted with their own experiences in a special way. Me-ness refers to the idea that a subject is aware of herself as a subject in having a phenomenally conscious experience (SO). Mineness corresponds directly to (PO).²⁴

According to Guillot, philosophers who are interested in subjective character tend to conflate the three notions outlined above. This is especially the case when it comes to for-me-ness and me-ness. Guillot argues for a strong distinction between these two aspects of subjective character. Her explanation of that distinction can be summarized by the following two claims:

²⁴ I have already discussed phenomenal ownership at sufficient length and my analysis agrees with Guillot's. Guillot and I, however, disagree about the proper way to understand for-me-ness (FM) and me-ness (SO). It is to this dispute that I now turn.

i. One can be phenomenally aware of one's experiences without being aware of oneself as the subject of those experiences and,

ii. The first relation is more fundamental than the second.

I will argue against both claims.

Guillot's most forceful argument in favor of (i) and (ii) is a consideration of patients of Cotard syndrome. This is a disorder where patients report that they feel as if they are no longer present as selves or subjects of experience. This is a depersonalization disorder that can regress to the point that subjects no longer feel as if they exist at all.

Here are some representative reports from patients who suffer from this unfortunate disease (cited by Guillot 2016, 19): "I imagine myself seeing life as if it were played like a film in a cinema. But in that case where am I? Who is watching the film?" (Simeon and Abugel 2006, 15). In addition to the subject seeming to be absent where they were once present, subjects also report that they feel as if they are no longer alive: "It almost feels like I have died, but no one has thought to tell me. So, I'm left living in a shell that I don't recognize anymore" (Sierra 2009, 27). According to Guillot, these types of reports suggest that these patients, "...lack a phenomenal awareness of the presence of their own selves" (Guillot 2016, 20). If it's the case that some patients can lack a phenomenal awareness of themselves as the subjects of their experiences, then (SO) cannot be true, as (SO) claims that it is a constitutive feature of phenomenally conscious experience that both a subject of experience as well as some sub-section of the world is present in experience. So much for the argument in favor of (i).

In addition, Guillot claims that in Cotard cases, “...*something* of the subjective character of abnormal experiences does seem to be retained. Those experiences are ‘for’ the subjects undergoing them, given to them in a special way...” (ibid). The reasoning in favor of (ii) would then go like this. If the for-me-ness relation (FM) can obtain in the absence of a subject having a phenomenal awareness of itself (SO), then the for-me-ness relation is a more fundamental constituent of subjective character.

My response to the argument in favor of (i) is to deny that Guillot and I are talking about the same kind of subject of experience. Guillot seems to be talking about what Benj Hellie (2012) calls a ‘soul-pellet’. That is, a kind of internal homunculus that one introspects by turning one’s gaze inwards. Cotard patients report the absence of such homunculi; therefore, there is no subject present that is constitutive of phenomenally conscious experience. I would make a distinction between the soul-pellet conception of the subject or me-ness and the embodied perspective conception of the subject. Cotard patients do not lack this latter constituent. In spite of their reports to the effect that they are experiencing the world as if there was no self present, they are nevertheless experiencing the world from an embodied first-personal perspective. If Cotard patients still have embodied perspectival subjectivity, then there is a sense in which they do not lack me-ness in having their particular sort of experience. Therefore, the objection does not go through.

Herein also lies my response to Guillot’s argument in favor of (ii). It is only in virtue of living through and occupying an embodied first-person perspective that one comes to have a special relation to one’s own experiences (FM). The idea that for-me-ness is a more fundamental constituent of subjective character than me-ness is reliant upon a soul-pellet conception of the subject, one that can be either present or absent to the introspective

gaze. By denying this conception in favor of the embodied perspectival conception, it is possible to maintain the view that the presence of a subject is constitutive of subjective character (SO). Further, maintaining this view also allows me to claim that the obtaining of the (FM) relation is itself dependent upon the existence of an embodied first-person perspective. This latter claim is true because it is in virtue of us having access to the world from a limited perspective — one constituted by the evolved configuration of our sensory apparatus — that we come to have a special kind of relation to our experiences, the sort that lets us report, in a unique way, on the contents of our experiences.

The second objection is the following. I have been trying to distinguish my approach to subjectivity from those approaches that claim subjective character is exhausted by the organism's awareness of its own states. I have done so by arguing that there is a coherent notion of subjectivity that we can make sense of, one that has its roots in Nagel's influential treatment of consciousness, that can be true regardless of whether subjects are aware of their own mental states. The reason I have sought to make this distinction between the embodied perspectival approach and the self-intimation approach is because many views that take the self-intimation road often talk about this recursive relation in terms of a subject's phenomenal awareness of their own token mental states or indeed of a token mental state's awareness of itself. However, there is a way in which we might think of a subject being acquainted with its experiences that does not involve an inward turn, nor an awareness of token mental states. This view would instead conceive of the subject's awareness of its experience as a kind of attitude whereby its immediate experiential relation to the world was understood as experience itself. Experiences on this view are not in the head but are activities of consciousness (e.g. perception, imagination, memory, thought) that relate the embodied subject to the world

(cf. Thompson 2007). One might argue that this view could be a species of the self-intimation view and that such a view would still endorse a strong embodiment component to its analysis of subjectivity. If that's right, then the strong distinction I have been arguing for between self-intimation and embodied perspective would collapse.

I concede this objection, but I don't think it costs me anything. I take my approach to be friendly to such a view. I have no objection to conceiving of a subject's relation to their experience in this way. Such an approach makes good on (FM)'s commitment to conceiving of experiences in terms of perspectival relations between organisms and their environments but still retains the idea that we are acquainted with our experience and that this constitutes subjective character. This view also has the potential to fill out the missing pieces of the (SO) view by analyzing the presence of the subject of experience in terms of the embodied perspective of the organism. My only worry is that when we start to talk of subjectivity in terms of awareness *of* states whose contents represent the world as being a certain way, or in terms of a subject being present *in* experience, we lose track of a more basic perspectival organization of the organism. Phenomenal character is tied to a point of view, namely a finite, embodied point of a view that an organism has on its world. As long as this point is kept in mind, I see no reason to deny the centrality of *for-me-ness* to subjectivity.

The view of subjective character that I have defended is not subject to the dual worry I began with. Many other views of subjective character suffer from trying to analyze subjective character in terms of what awareness is aware of or in invoking the subject of experience, leaves the subject as an unanalysed homunculus. The embodied perspectival view avoids both of these pitfalls and is thus to be preferred over those views that succumb to one or both of the aforementioned worries.

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