

## FUNCTIONALISM AND THE QUALIA WARS

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### Abstract

The debate concerning the reality of qualia has stagnated. The dominant functionalist approach to qualia concentrates largely on the filter-strategy as applied to color experiences. The filter-strategy takes color experiences as material-to-be-functionally-filtered under the assumption that qualia as such cannot be filtered. However, despite the speculative efforts made in this direction, the debate between phenomenologists and representationalists remains unresolved. The main idea of this paper is to show that the lack of success settling “the qualia war” has to be understood as a result of the mischaracterization of colors as a material-to-be-functionally-filtered.

### Introduction

Put briefly, things in the qualia wars stand as follows. The representationalists maintain that chromatic experiences are always intentional, i.e., are always about something. Indeed, contrary to what the ancient philosophers maintained, the chromatic experiences of every normal individual are objectively identifiable and their references ostensibly definable. The phenomenologists, on the other hand, are committed to the idea, supported by the cognitive sciences, that perceptive experiences are not merely operational. According to them, chromatic experiences always have a qualitative component that cannot be reduced to their representational content. They prove this fact through mental experiments designed to show the limits of the reductive functionalist program. In this state of things, both phenomenologists and representationalists resort to colors. All of them think that colors will provide the definitive proof they need to defeat the rival conclusively. However, they do not.

Rather than being grounded in the phenomenology of our experiences, the quest for the reality of qualia has been based on the success or failure of the functionalist mind reduction strategy. As I will argue, this strategy is insufficient and tends to confuse the issue. The negation of functionalism does not commit one necessarily to phenomenology or to realism with respect to qualia. The reason being that ‘representationalism’ and ‘phenomenology’ are not the only possible options. We may take an intermediate position that accepts the phenomenal character of chromatic experiences, characterized as intentional (unlike qualia), but which does not consider them completely reducible to their representational content. This approach is, therefore, eliminativist as regards (chromatic) qualia but is not representationalist in the usual sense.

The purpose of this paper is to show that the lack of success in settling “the qualia wars” is explained as a result of the mischaracterization of colors as a material-to-be-functionally-filtered. In line with the chosen strategy, the first two sections describe how the phenomenologists defend the existence of qualia. This description will be relevant because it highlights the essential assumption shared by phenomenologists and representationalists alike: that all perceptive content that is not representational content must be non-intentional content. Sections III and IV attack this shared assumption. In section III I claim that the consideration of chromatic experiences as non-intentional lacks ‘phenomenological’ grounding. Section IV establishes the analytical distinction between the qualitative nature of the visual field (the phenomenal character) and its attributive or representational content. My purpose is to show that a distinction must be made between the conditions facilitating the ostensive definition of colors and conditions that facilitate the attributive use of such ostensively defined colors because, if one accepts this distinction, one must also accept that colors are intentional, even when they lack representational, functional or cognitive content. This undermines the assumption shared by phenomenologists and representationalists and opens up the possibility of exploring a third, intermediate position that denies the existence of qualia without obliging us to assume that all perceptive content is representational content.

### **I. Qualia do not filter**

Qualia can be characterized in such a way (for example, as qualitative contents or in first person perceptive experiences) as to make it very difficult to deny their existence. By characterizing them in such a way, we would intuitively accept that they exist. However, according to the same characterization, qualia mark one of the limits of current science: they are not scientifically analyzable. This is what causes qualia to be conceived as specters, mere appearances that lack any reality. So, although we have ‘phenomenal’ reasons to think they exist, we also have ‘scientific’ reason to think they do not exist. Ned Block<sup>1</sup> distinguished two bands, calling believers in qualia phenomenologists and non-believers representationalists. What might tip the balance in favor of one side or the other?

The phenomenologist answer to this question is that the proof of the existence of qualia is the failure of the functionalist program designed to reduce all the content of perceptive experience<sup>2</sup>. Phenomenologists try to show that functionalism — the reductive program with the

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<sup>1</sup> 1996 (1995): 20 & 30.

<sup>2</sup> Block (1999 (1990): 487).

greatest outreach in the philosophy of mind — cannot reduce perceptive experiences completely (in particular, chromatic experiences). So, the most convincing maneuver for demonstrating the existence of qualia is what we shall call the filter strategy. This strategy establishes a parallelism between what is functionally detectable and the representational content of chromatic experiences so that, as all representational content is assumed to be functionally describable, that which is not functionally describable is taken as proof of the existence of qualia. Specifically, phenomenologists try to show that certain content in the chromatic experience is not representational, i.e., cannot be reduced to its functional description. Qualia do not filter and so, whatever cannot be reduced, what remains in the filter, are, in the phenomenologist interpretation of things, qualia.

Two examples should suffice to show how the filter strategy has worked. One is the inverted earth, the other mental color, both, in my view at least, highly representative of their kind. The inverted earth example involves an empirically impossible situation that has been analyzed, most extensively, by Harman<sup>3</sup> and Block<sup>4</sup>. The second example is an interpretation by MacPherson<sup>5</sup> of a real chromatic fact (although some controversy surrounds its recognition), discovered by Crane and Piantanida<sup>6</sup>: mental color.

The hypothetical inverted earth experiment recreates an impossible journey to a country where colors are symmetrically inverted with regard to our planet. The journey is undertaken by an astronaut who, during the voyage, has his chromatic spectrum — as well as the color of his body — inverted. The most intuitive result is then postulated: the astronaut-there-on-that-planet and we-here-on-this-planet have the same qualia despite the fact that in either case, comparatively, the qualia in question have different representational content. In other words, both the astronaut and we perceive, for example, that the sky is blue but with a fundamental difference: the perception of the astronaut is not true — in the phenomenologist interpretation — because on the inverted earth, according to the hypothesis, the sky is yellow. In this hypothesis there is something that is functionally undetectable (the two types of subjects being functionally equivalent) but which prevents us, if we share the phenomenologist intuitions, from considering the astronaut's perceptions to be true. That 'something' would be qualia.

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<sup>3</sup> 1996.

<sup>4</sup> 1996 (1995).

<sup>5</sup> 2003.

<sup>6</sup> 1983.

The second example, mental color, is the result of a reproducible empirical experiment. This laboratory experiment is based on a known psychological fill-in mechanism, where the brain ‘fills in’ on its own account what it perceives when the retinal information from that area does not arrive. A situation is created in which the brain has to fill a particular zone of the visual field but where the available chromatic information is contradictory. The result is that to fill the area of the visual field in question, the brain uses a color, which, according to the physiology of the perceptive system, could not be achieved through the usual channels, namely, by means of retinal stimulation. If one accepts the result of this experiment, the subject experiences a typically mental color, i.e., a color that is not perceptible by stimulating the eye, but which our mind can project. If we accept that this mental color is a color, then we must accept the existence of qualia. The reason being that such chromatic experiences — at least, as we are — cannot have any representational content. Phenomenalists conclude that mental colors are qualia.

According to the phenomenalist strategy, chromatic experiences are prepared to be passed through the filter. In this way a series of counter-examples is presented to the representationalist thesis that all perceptive content is (reducible to its) representational content. Phenomenalists try to show that perceptive experience is not transparent, that not everything gets through the filter. So the example of the inverted earth shows that sometimes some parts filter through and others don’t. The second example of mental color shows that sometimes its entire content remains in the filter.

But is this reiterated, multifarious strategy of the filter sufficient to demonstrate the existence of qualia? It would seem not. The only thing this strategy shows by itself —if we accept the respective results— is the correctness of the following conditional: if what does not get through the filter are qualia, then qualia exist. And how do phenomenalists justify that what does not get through the filter are qualia? In this point of the argument, what remains in need of support is the prior assumption that all content that is not representational content must be considered *quale*<sup>7</sup>. But why should we accept this assumption? The answer should come within the traditional debate between subjectivists and objectivists about the constitutional nature of color (which also explains why the perceptive experiences that are filtered are normally chromatic experiences). If one accepts that the objectivist and the subjectivist options are the only two possible ones available, then the most natural way of

understanding the failure of functionalism is by following the path of subjectivism. In other words, by accepting that whatever has not passed through the filter is projected sense data, or qualia. Indeed, phenomenologists present results favorable to the existence of qualia as results that also work in favor of the subjectivist position—or its dispositionalist variant—as regards color.

## II. They are intentional

As noted previously, phenomenology presupposes that what is retained in the filter are qualia. What exactly are qualia? Their negative characterization as non-representational contents of perceptive experience is not a sufficiently satisfactory definition, because stating that qualia are not representational contents is tantamount to saying that they are mental entities in a functionally non-reducible sense, which traps us in a vicious circle. But the intuitive characterization of qualia as qualitative or in first person, ‘what-it’s-like’ contents is not satisfactory either because it is not precise enough. At this point in the discussion a theoretical rather than a merely ostensive definition of qualia is needed. What is required is a precise definition to do away with the ambiguity associated with the multiple interpretations of what the ostensive definition points to. In short, we need a positive, much more precise definition of qualia. The sense data tradition has long conceived qualia as non-intentional features of experience that are projected into the external world. I shall accept, in principle, this characterization of qualia. Qualia are non-intentional features of perceptual experiences.

Intentionality, for its part, can be formalized as the arrow that links two milieus in an as yet unspecified relation. This relation is not one of inference, nor of consequence, nor strictly predicative. ‘He is a bachelor therefore he is not married’, ‘it is raining therefore the street gets wet’ or ‘the garden is green’ are not intentional relations. Intentionality should really be understood, in line with Brentano, as a certain property that some mental states and events have, according to which they are directed towards objects or states of things in the world. The arrow therefore symbolizes the intentional relationship that arises when something is ‘of’ or ‘about’ something else (for some subject). In this sense, paradigmatic examples are the so-called intentional contexts where a subject believes, thinks, suggests, desires or perceives any thing. Our propositional attitudes, like our perceptions, are *about* something: Ronaldo’s latest piece of soccer wizardry, for instance, or Picasso’s *Guernica*; that is why we

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<sup>7</sup> I define representational content by its function to allow color attributions, as any content of color experiences that could be employed by normal human agents to infer the color property of any given object, volume or light

consider our propositional attitudes to be intentional, because they normally have representational content:

$$Sf(x) \text{ where } x \rightarrow x$$

A subject S has a certain propositional attitude,  $f(x)$ , whose representational content,  $x$ , refers to something that is normally not intentional,  $x$ . The symbol of intentionality is the arrow itself. In other words, the predicate ‘I have heard that the hunchback of Paris is a meter tall’ is intentional in the sense that it refers to something that I have heard about a specific individual who is to be found in Paris.

Let us go back to the strategy of the filter. Phenomenalists state that what remains in the filter are qualia, non-intentional features or components of perceptual experiences. Accordingly, the perception of mental colors are described as

$$S\text{perceives}(q)$$

where  $q$  is a quale —the particular ‘impossible’ color that the subject is experiencing. In this context,  $S\text{perceives}(q)$ , that which should act as representational content,  $q$ , is not intentional, i.e., it does not refer to another thing  $q$  and is therefore not considered to be representational content. For this reason, according to the phenomenalists, the mental color is not functionally reducible and is retained in the filter.

It is worth asking whether phenomenalists offer any additional argument supporting the notion that everything left in the filter, everything not representational content, is non-intentional. The answer is that they have. Indeed, the strategy of the filter is normally combined with the non-existent intentional argument (after-images, hallucinations, phosphene phenomena, mental colors, etc.), to demonstrate that anything that is not filtered is the non-intentional component of experience. This series of chromatic phenomena would show that, in these cases at least, colors are not intentional in the sense that they do not refer to any region of the physical world. The force of the argument lies in the phenomenology of the perceptive case mentioned previously. Contrary to the intentionality thesis, this type of color is not located in the exterior, does not represent any external localization and, therefore, is perceived without corresponding to anything external, without it being *about* anything (the dagger Macbeth thinks he sees is an hallucination; it never really existed). In such cases, according to the phenomenalist interpretation, qualia are perceived as they are, without them having been projected by the mind onto any surface. Non-existent intentional entities are then, say phenomenalists, proof that, in a pre-perceptive state, qualia are non-intentional entities,

which, in a subsequent state, the mind projects onto external reality. These chromatic phenomena show that projection, which is merely a metaphorical way we have of referring to intentionality, is something that qualia acquire at a later stage and which, therefore, is not constitutive of their identity.

In short, phenomenologists prove the existence of qualia, non-intentional contents of perceptive experience, by combining the strategy of the filter with a non-intentional interpretation of non-existent intentional entities. Unfortunately for the phenomenologists, all this effort made to show the limits of functionalism and the non-intentionality of our most basic chromatic experiences has still not managed to end the debate on the existence of qualia. Representationalists counter each aspect of the argument — the supposed limits of functionalism and the non-intentional characterization of chromatic experiences.

### **III. Referring without representing**

Thus far I have presented the strategy used by the phenomenologists to defend their realism concerning qualia. This strategy, in its broadest terms, combines a functional filter with the subjectivist conception of colors. I have avoided presenting and assessing the representationalist counterargument because it is not my present business to analyze particular arguments for or against the existence of qualia, arguments that now are sufficiently well known. My purpose is to analyze the legitimacy of the actual terms used in the course of the debate. The idea is to question the legitimacy of the prior assumption of the debate. If the argument is reasonable, it poses a serious problem for phenomenologists and representationalists alike. Let's consider the following stipulation:

- (A) There are certain circumstances in which chromatic experiences are referred from a certain space-time location, without them representing chromatically that to which they refer<sup>8</sup>.

In my view, (A) cannot be assumed either by phenomenologists or representationalists, at least not in the format in which the debate has progressed until now. Contrary to the representationalist view, (A) maintains that there may be circumstances in which chromatic experiences lack representational content. Contrary to the phenomenologist view, however, (A) maintains that what is retained in the filter are not qualia, because they are intentional even in

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<sup>8</sup> Whitehead had another way to formulate this idea, according to which colors can be mere sense-objects not being attributes of any physical object (Whitehead (1964 (1920): 149-52 & 156)). I don't use his terminology because to call them 'objects' might be misleading.

the cases where they lack representational content. Indeed, chromatic experiences are said to refer to a certain space-time localization (surface, volume, light-source, etc.). In other words, by accepting (A) one is stating that there is something in chromatic experiences, which from now on I shall call the ‘phenomenal character’, that is intentional but not necessarily representational. More specifically, I mean that there are certain contexts in which the phenomenal character is not representational, but that there is no reason to suppose that in such contexts the phenomenal character is not intentional either, not even in contexts formulated by cases of non-existent intentional entities. These contexts hint at the possibility of a different stance between ‘phenomenalism’ — which is realist in respect of the non-intentional component of perceptual experiences — and ‘representationalism’ — which considers all perceptive content to be representational, one in which not all perceptive content is representational (and, therefore, not reducible to the most basic contents) and in which the non-representational residue is not necessarily non-intentional.

I shall use two strategies to justify (A). The first, presented in the following section, is based on a representationalist concept of the nature of color and justifies (A) as part of a general concept of color. The second strategy, presented below, is simpler. It just requires phenomenologists to provide another, more solid proof. This second strategy consists in not giving credit to the non-existent intentional argument as anti-intentionalist proof, thereby putting the pressure of proof back on the phenomenologists.

Indeed, a more thorough analysis of the phenomenology of non-existent intentional entities ought to lead to a conclusion contrary to the one arrived at by phenomenologists. The conclusion ought to be that intentionality is an essential note of chromatic experiences. The crucial point of my interpretation is that these non-intentional chromatic experiences have a certain ‘air of falsity’ that makes them genuine. Which explains why these ‘projected’ colors are not strictly speaking colors. Their phenomenology is not chromatic in the usual sense. The phenomenology is different in both cases. If we suffer hallucinations, for example, by addressing the phenomenology of the experience we can determine the difference between our hallucinating and our perceiving. And the difference resides in that ‘wanting and not being able to’ of the non-existent intentional entities. Cases of hallucination or of after-images cannot be true of any object. In the case of after-images, to give another example, if we shift our gaze this type of ‘color’ moves too. Non-existent intentional entities are illusory with respect to intention, and not just in respect to representation, because they do not refer to any space-time region. They are intentional entities with nothing to be about; which accounts for

that air of falsity. So we can prove that the intentional character is the basic component of the phenomenal character by the fact that when the latter disappears, the colors immediately acquire an air of falsity. The metaphor of projection favored by phenomenologists serves to suggest that intentionality is a second state, the state where qualia are used to represent certain properties of objects. However, projection is just a metaphor. In the case of after-images it works, as it also does for hallucinations, but in general it does not work when applied to chromatic experiences because the colors are not projected externally. At least not in the previous sense according to which projection is an extrinsic action of the identity of that which it projects. It does not therefore seem reasonable to assume that the projector is the most convenient metaphor to analyze habitual chromatic experiences, which, as I say, are at all times intentional. When the referential efficiency of chromatic experiences declines, their identity *qua* chromatic experiences also declines. Intentionality is, surely, not something added to qualia when they are projected, most probably being an essential feature of the identity of the phenomenal character of chromatic experiences.

Clearly (A) is not justified by this second strategy. A further step is required for that. To justify (A) intentionality needs to be dissociated from representation in the frame of chromatic experiences.

#### **IV. Intention and representation**

The distinction assumed by philosophers of mind between qualia and representational (or intentional) contents is habitually presented as exhaustive. All experiential components not of one category belong to the other category. What I maintain, however, is that qualia do not exist and that the distinction between ‘contents’ can only be established between intentional contents, which, at times, are also representational. Chromatic experiences are always about the world as we see it, although not always about any particular object. That is why intentional states or events, like the perceptual act of ‘seeing colors’ in certain circumstances also acquire representational content. To justify this distinction an etiology of chromatic perception is required.

Chromatic concepts are most frequently put to attributive rather than referential uses. Rather than signal or identify a color, a chromatic concept is normally used to attribute a color to an object. The most usual expressions to include chromatic concepts are of the type: ‘this object is such a color’, or ‘the object seems to be such a color’, or ‘x is the same color as y’. Indeed, one of the important aspects of any analysis of colors should involve emphasizing the

idea that chromatic experiences are presentational or representational in character. In other words, chromatic experiences are not merely intentional, in the sense that they refer to a certain phenomenal character to be found at some distance from 'here', which is similar to another phenomenal character to be found at its side, and so forth. Chromatic experiences present or represent the thing which colors are parasitical on. If the specific phenomenal character referred to by the ostensibly defined concept 'red' is localized, for example, on the surface of a tomato<sup>9</sup>, what we perceive is that 'the tomato is red'. And this is how we perceive virtually all the elements in our environment: ripe bananas are yellow, the sky is blue, fire is multicolor, the snow is white, etc. Any analysis of color should elucidate the relationship between the phenomenal character and the presentational content of the chromatic experience.

Thus, the ostensibly defined color red, for example, is part of the phenomenology of vision but, in some cases, lacks presentational content, i.e., the ostensive definition by itself does not explain that attributive use. There is undoubtedly a leap from the ostensive definition of the concept red ("red' is this →") to the attributive use of the concept ("this → is red"). In what follows I will try to show what condition should be complied with to facilitate the leap from the ostensive definition of the color to its attributive use.

Intuitively we can state that phenomenal stability is a requisite for defining colors in an ostensible way. However, phenomenal stability responds to the relative stability of colors in relation to objects. In fact, there is in our visual field a regular correlation between objects and colors: if the conditions of perception do not vary, then the color (defined as phenomenal character) of the object does not vary either. Normally, the phenomenal character associated with each object is stable (apart from well known exceptions such as iridescent objects, the chameleon or fire) and, as I will argue, this stability of the phenomenal character relative to objects (to their surfaces or volumes) is a prerequisite for the attributive use of chromatic concepts. Several mental experiments do in fact indicate that in some possible worlds the phenomenal character cannot be used in a representational way, that is, in a way that justifies its attribution. These experiments show cases of worlds that are unstable with regard to color. The conclusion to be drawn from these experiments is that for the phenomenal character to have representational content, the phenomenal character must be in compliance with the stability requirement. By stability I understand the following: when the circumstances of the

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<sup>9</sup> The intentionality of color experiences does not necessarily require surfaces, could also refer to volumes or light sources.

perceptive act remain stable the phenomenal character of the surface remains stable, i.e., there are no phenomenological differences between phenomenal characters at different times.

Let us imagine, for instance, a world that is unstable as regards color. The characteristic of this world is that the same individual, in the same or similar circumstances, does not perceive that the apple is the same color. Every so often the apple changes color without a specific reason. And this occurs with all objects: objects and colors relate spontaneously and arbitrarily. In this world, would the attributive use of ostensibly defined chromatic concepts be possible? It would be possible, but this way of speaking would be of little interest. In other words, the statement “this  $\rightarrow$  is red” would not be an attribution of ‘color’ but of ‘color in time  $t$ ’. Objects would not have a determined color, in the sense that if we closed our eyes we wouldn’t know what color the object was. There would be no way of assuring that the color in time  $t$  (before we closed our eyes) would continue to be the color in time  $t^i$  (after closing our eyes). The conclusion is that in this world one could define “‘red’ is this  $\rightarrow$ ” but, unlike the world in which we live, the statement “this  $\rightarrow$  is red” would be meaningless. Even in the case where the statement were considered true, because it was understood that it implies the exact moment the statement is made, the attribution “this  $\rightarrow$  is red” would lack the practical value that in our world makes it a common and interesting statement, since, for example, the use of expressions of the “Red Delicious apples are red” or “bring me the red apples” or “I like red apples” type would be meaningless. The only class of objects distinguishable by means of the concept ‘red’ would be the class of objects that at a particular time  $t^i$  seem to be red. The class of ‘red objects’ would be an arbitrarily determined class from which no ulterior characterization of the chromatic behavior of objects could be inferred. The class of ‘red objects’ would be like the class of ‘objects that were snowed on a particular day’ or the class of ‘objects that received a kick at such-and-such point in time’. In other words, there would be no sense in saying that ‘red objects’ chromatically resemble ‘orange objects’ more than they do ‘blue objects’ because this statement would also be dependent on the moment of enunciation. There may always be a time  $t^i$  when the blue objects look red — now according to the ostensive definition — and coincide with the ‘red objects’ that at time  $t^i$  continue being red. This type of statement would therefore have a truth value variable between classes of arbitrarily defined objects, while in our world the same statement, ‘red objects chromatically resemble orange objects more than they do blue objects’, possesses a truth value that we commonly consider necessary, as it accounts for an internal relation of colors (I am still resorting to the phenomenal character of the ostensive definition) which is

timeless, i.e., inherent to the chromatic space in which colors register. Both the chromatic attribution and the corresponding chromatic resemblance depend, in part, on our world not being unstable as regards color.

Now let us imagine a completely transparent world, one where objects are colored only in certain, specific circumstances. Thus apples are transparent except, for instance, when they come to within 10 centimeters of the eye, at which distance they appear red. The closer they get to the eye, the redder the apples appear. When someone brings an apple close to his eyes, he perceives that the apple is red, while anyone looking at the apple from farther off will continue to think it is transparent. Furthermore, in this particular world one does not know what color the object in question appears to be until it is placed at the minimum distance required. There might even be objects that remained transparent when placed at the minimum distance, because in this world not all objects have to appear a particular color when brought close to the eye. In such a world, would we still continue to attribute colors to objects? Surely not. The most plausible hypothesis, I believe, is that we would say the apples are transparent and that whoever gets too close to them cannot perceive their transparent nature. The color of the apple would not be considered a property of the apple that appears and disappears depending on the distance between the object and our perceptive system. The apple would not be described as red at the distance  $d$  from the eye. A comparison would surely be made between the phenomenon of the ‘redness’ of the apple and the type of optical illusion that occurs when a finger held at that distance from the eye is seen double. Just as there seem to be two fingers when there is really only one, one would say that the apple appears to be ‘red’ when it is really transparent. ‘Red’ would be a property of experience, not of the apple. The chromatic experience would be introspective rather than perceptive, i.e., colors would be mere sensations — like pain — that we feel when objects get too close to the open eye. In short, if colors corresponded to objects in a way analogous to the way pain does, i.e., appearing together with the objects only in certain circumstances (a pin only pricks if we bring the point close enough to our skin, fire burns only if we ... and so on) then we would not use chromatic concepts in an attributive way. The idea is that in the case of the transparent world, as in the previous case of the unstable world, we wouldn’t say that ‘the apple is red’ or that ‘the garden is green’.

It should however be noted that this mental experiment of the transparent world is the reverse of the one suggested by Wittgenstein<sup>10</sup>. While we imagine a situation where colors correlate with objects the way the sensation of pain relates, Wittgenstein speculates with the reverse hypothesis. How would we talk about the sensation of pain if it related to objects with the same regularity as colors do? Wittgenstein's hypothesis seems simple. When we come into contact with a certain kind of surface, it causes us pain. Wittgenstein concludes that if this were the case we would talk about pain as we do now about color, i.e., attributively. His statement runs as follows: if the appearance of the sensation of pain together with a class of objects were as regular as the appearance of colors, then "*in this case we should talk of spots-of-pain on the leaves of plants exactly as we speak of red spots*".<sup>11</sup> According to Wittgenstein, in this case pain would be attributed to the object, i.e., we would say that 'that surface is pain'. His thesis appears to be that regularity is sufficient to allow the attributive use of concepts referring to the phenomenal character. If pain were as regular as colors are, as both color and pain have a phenomenal character that can be referred (exhibited) by the appropriate definitions, then the principal use of the concept 'pain' would also be attributive. In other words, instead of attributing pain to the individuals who suffer it, pain would be attributed to whatever it is (external but which may also be some part of the body) that produces that sensation in the individual. This is too forceful, as there are probably other differences between the sensations of pain and the phenomenal character of colors that hamper this statement. Indeed, Boghossian and Velleman deny that regularity in the association with objects or external events is what differentiates colors from the sensation of pain<sup>12</sup>.

The thesis that stability is a sufficient condition to property ascription, which Wittgenstein tries to defend, is thus overly compromised. If we accept Boghossian and Velleman's objection to the example of pain regularly associated with certain situations, then the condition of stability is not sufficient to justify an attributive use of concepts that refer to some type of phenomenal character. However, the two foregoing mental experiments do seem to bear out Wittgenstein's preliminary intuition, that an interesting attributive use of these concepts is not possible without regularity. Stability or regularity does not seem to be a sufficient condition to justify that concepts that refer to some phenomenal character can be used attributively; but it certainly is a necessary condition to allow such attributive use. We can therefore conclude that chromatic experiences have representational content, in the sense

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<sup>10</sup> 2000 (1953): 312.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

that we attribute colors to objects, owing (at least in part) to the stable correlation existing between the phenomenal character of colors and the surfaces of the objects that come into our visual field.

This argument thus enables us to establish the first analytical distinction between the qualitative nature of the visual field (the phenomenal character) and its attributive or representational content. Unlike the ostensive definition, the purpose of the attributive use is not to characterize a quality but to characterize the object. The ostensive definition of chromatic concepts identifies (signals, names, exhibits and so on) a quality of the visual field, while the attributive use of chromatic concepts presents the object in a particular way. And this difference is also inferred in the logic of the enunciations themselves. Unlike the definition ‘red is this  $\rightarrow$  color’ (whose significance, in this first stage, was merely as a fixer of reference with no truth value), attributive expressions of color such as ‘this object  $\rightarrow$  is red’ acquires truth-value. Indeed, chromatic experiences are also of this attributive type. From the psychological point of view we can even state that we are not conscious of perceiving a color; we simply perceive that a particular thing is a particular color. The representational content of an object that looks red is that the object is red. The color red is conceived as a property of the objects that look red in their visual field. From the viewpoint of the subject with normal chromatic experiences, colors are closely linked to their material grounds. Redness is considered a property of the objects and chromatic experiences are considered to be attributive of such a property (i.e., they represent that property).

To sum up, what these mental experiments demonstrate is the need to distinguish between the conditions that facilitate the ostensive definition of colors and the conditions that facilitate the attributive use of such ostensively defined colors. Colors are intentional even when they lack representational, functional or cognitive content. Thus (A) is justified. There are circumstances, such as when an individual is aware that he does not know in what circumstances he is in, where chromatic experiences lack representational content despite the fact that they refer, or are directed to some space-time region. Thus (A) authorizes our distancing from phenomenologists — who maintain that color experiences bear a non-intentional feature — and representationalists — who maintain that all experiential content is representational content — alike. The fact is that both phenomenologists and representationalists assume that ‘representation’ and ‘intentionality’ imply each other: intentional content is representational content and vice versa. This explains why they also assume the following

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<sup>12</sup> Boghossian & Velleman (1991: 99)

conditional: if there really is something in chromatic experiences that cannot be reduced to its representational content (or to its functional description), that something must be qualia. But such assumptions originate in the philosophy of mind and not from the analysis of the phenomenology of chromatic experiences. Rather than being grounded in the phenomenology of our experiences, the existence or the lack of existence of qualia is based on the success or failure of the functionalist reduction strategy of the mind. As I have pointed out, this strategy is insufficient. Now I shall add that it also tends to confuse the issue. Guaranteeing the existence of qualia by expecting the functionalist failure is confusing because the existence of different types of contents in chromatic experiences does not depend on the failure of any known reductive program. Consider simply the case where science progresses in such a way as to be capable of naturalizing all contents to a series of scientific principles, without chromatic experiences modifying their contents or without stopping having certain contents. This scientific result would not imply that our chromatic experiences only have one type of content, the representational. Indeed, the legitimate objective of completely naturalizing chromatic experiences should not commit us to a determined vision of what types of contents such experiences contain. And this is the essential difference between the functionalist approach and the one presented in this paper. It is a mistake to establish parallelism between that which is functionally detectable and representational content. For something to be, or not be, functionally detectable does not necessarily imply that that something must be of a particular category, whether representational content, phenomenal character, qualia or any other.

As noted earlier, the qualia wars continue because the debate about their reality is founded on the philosophy of mind and not on an interest in chromatic experiences. We need to start by finding out what type of entities chromatic experiences are, and not, as usually happens, by asking whether functionalism is a complete theory of the mind. They are two different problems. The latter, concerning the limits of functionalism, only has two possible proposals, yes or no, while the former is much less emphatic in its solutions. The first problem focuses above all on an ontological question about mental states or contents (whether a person perceives a specific representational content, phenomenal character or qualia). The latter problem, however, formulates an epistemic question about our ability in a set of given circumstances to detect such mental states or contents in third parties. The powerlessness of functionalism does not, in short, bring us up against qualia.

## V. Conclusion

As I have already stated, the most relevant contemporary analyses of colors are based on a reductionist attitude of the mind. Such analyses conceive chromatic experiences as material ready to be filtered. This material admits two types of components only, the type that can be filtered and the type that cannot be filtered: representational contents and qualia. I have also argued that this result is inseparable from the strategy of the filter because it starts from the functionalist analysis of the mind. Starting from functionalism means there are only two possible options, the complete reduction of chromatic experiences or their partial reduction. Both phenomenologists and representationalists alike have assumed that partial reduction would imply the existence of a certain type of specific entities, qualia. Despite this, however, none of the proofs presented by either side has served to bring the debate on qualia to an end. However interesting or productive the analyses of chromatic experiments and hypotheses might have been, the strategy of the filter has not only not served to bring the debate to an end, it has also become the reason behind the debate not having been resolved. This is because, as I have argued, the failure of functionalism in filtering color experiences does not imply qualia; and hence the analysis of colors as if they were filtrate material is not the right methodology to pursue to settle in the controversy about the reality of qualia.

So it is that the latest reports from the war present a fairly dramatic situation: phenomenologists and representationalists alike need to revise some of their assumptions. The need is clear when we consider that, as we have justified via two different channels, chromatic experiences are always intentional, despite them only having representational contents in certain circumstances. By accepting this, one may develop an intermediate approach between phenomenologists and representationalists that combines two hitherto incompatible ideas. Contrary to what the representationalists uphold, such an approach would maintain that not all experiential content is representational content; and contrary to the phenomenologist view, it would state that perceptive experiences are at all times intentional, thereby excluding the possibility of finding qualia in perceptive experiences. But to arrive at this solution, we need to veer away from the “highroad” of contemporary philosophy of mind, which, owing to its bias towards functionalism, takes for granted that the intentionality of colors depends on their representational, functional or cognitive content.

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