

*Consciousness, Color and Content.* BY MICHAEL TYE. (MIT Press, 2000. Pp. xiii + 198. Price £20.50.)

Tye's latest defence of his representationalist theory of phenomenal consciousness expands and clarifies the views of his previous book *Ten Problems of Consciousness* (MIT Press, 1995). It is written in a straightforward and accessible style. Tye's approach is distinguished by his taking seriously challenges of accounting for consciousness within a physicalist framework. Supporters and dissenters alike should consider this book an important contribution.

Phenomenal character is defined as the "immediate subjective 'feel'" of experiences (p. 45). Tye claims that for anyone who accepts physicalism, the best theory of phenomenal character is to be reached by identifying features of phenomenal states. The theory that best explains these features is the one we should accept. Tye identifies two central features: phenomenal states are *transparent* (the qualities that you seem to be aware of in experience appear to be qualities of the world around you rather than qualities of the experience itself) and talk of experiences is *intentional*, although not in quite the same way as talk of belief is.

Tye's theory is that phenomenal character is identical with representational content that is poised, abstract, non-conceptual and intentional. (Thus phenomenally conscious states are states with this type of content.) By 'intentional' here, he means simply that the content is representational. By 'abstract', he means that particulars do not enter into it. Particularly important, however, are the claims that it is poised and non-conceptual. Tye maintains that beliefs do not have phenomenal character. People suppose otherwise just to the extent to which various other states with phenomenal character (such as some memories and imaginings) accompany beliefs. (While this position seems fairly plausible, Tye presents no good arguments for it.) As beliefs are states with content, it is important that he does not claim that every state with content has phenomenal character. He thus distinguishes beliefs from phenomenal states by claiming that belief content is conceptual and not poised to interact with the cognitive system (it is part of that system), whereas experiential, phenomenal content is non-conceptual and is poised to interact with the cognitive system.

Tye regards experiential content as non-conceptual for two reasons. First, belief content involves modes of presentation. It involves concepts, and two concepts can have the same referent in all possible worlds, yet be different concepts because of their different modes of presentation (for example, 'water' and 'H<sub>2</sub>O'). However, experiential content, according to Tye, does not involve modes of presentation. Secondly, there is the fine-grainedness of experience. For example, visual experience can represent more shades than people have colour concepts. Since to undergo an experience with a certain representational content one need not possess the concepts required to specify the content, experiential content is non-conceptual.

Experiences do seem to be different from beliefs in respect of fineness of grain. But the other alleged difference is more problematic. Suppose we accept that belief content involves modes of presentation: should we be convinced that this cannot hold of experiential content? Tye's causal co-variation theory of non-conceptual representation

may lead us to think that we should since the theory leaves no room for contents to have different modes of presentation. Tye claims that a state *S* represents that *P* =*df* *If optimal conditions were to obtain, S would be tokened in a creature c if and only if P were the case; moreover in these circumstances, S would be tokened in c because P is the case.* However, the theory would be called into question by any independent ground for holding that experiences can have content involving modes of presentation. Such ground is provided by certain ambiguous figures such as Mach's square/regular diamond. Looking at this, one can have two distinct experiences with different phenomenal characters. The experiences are best described by saying that in one something looks square shaped, in the other something looks regular-diamond shaped. By Tye's theory, these experiences must have different contents; but *prima facie* these contents are best described by concepts which share a referent but differ in mode of presentation ('square shaped' and 'regular diamond shaped'). That this problem can be overcome has never, in my opinion, been satisfactorily shown; showing that it can be overcome would take substantial work.

States with phenomenal character must also be differentiated from other non-doxastic representational states. Given Tye's causal co-variation theory of representation, many non-conscious non-phenomenal states could be states with non-conceptual content. The class plausibly includes some physiological states of the brain. The 'poisedness' criterion once again plays a role. Tye claims that only states with phenomenal character are poised, that is, 'arise at the interface of the non-conceptual and conceptual domains and ... stand ready and available to make a direct impact on beliefs and desires' (p. 62).

A *prima facie* counter-example occurs in subjects with blindsight. They deny that they have phenomenally conscious perceptual experiences, yet can accurately guess the nature of the object in front of them in a forced-choice paradigm; and some can point to its location. These subjects appear to lack the appropriate phenomenally conscious visual states, yet they are the subject of representations that meet the poisedness criterion. This is because some representations must be interacting with their cognitive system to influence their guesses and actions. Tye responds by specifying in more detail how phenomenally conscious states are poised. Being poised for having an impact on guessing or on action is inadequate for phenomenal consciousness; the representational states must be poised to make a direct impact on belief, and 'Blindsight subjects do not believe their guesses' (p. 63).

This seems inadequate. Certainly there have been no blindsighters who could guess for themselves about what is before them and in this way come to have beliefs about it (this would be so-called 'super-blindsight'). But this is no surprise, since there seems no way in which subjects could come up with the right terms in the forced-choice paradigm required for correct guessing. Yet in the absence of super-blindsight, one would think it plausible that blindsighters could come to know of their condition, and thereby believe their guesses in forced-choice paradigms. This objection is not decisive, but it does point to the need for a more precise specification of the particular belief forming processes, and what it is to be poised. For example, the question is not raised whether patients who suffer from unilateral neglect have suitably poised representations. Presumably Tye

would answer that they have, and would claim that although the representations are poised, these frequently do not interact. Indeed, there are many neurological deficits about which one would have to think carefully in this regard. It should be noted that the more detail that is required to specify the role of the relevant representations in the cognitive system, the further one moves from a pure representationalist account, and the nearer to a traditional functional explanation of phenomenal consciousness.

In the central portion of this book, Tye also defends his representationalism against different challenges, including versions of the inverted earth and absent *qualia* problems. His latest suggestion for refuting the former is better than that of *Ten Problems of Consciousness*. Inverted earth is an imaginary planet just like earth except that the colours of things, and the meanings of colour words, are inverted with respect to those on earth. A subject taken to inverted earth and given inverting lenses that compensate for the colour-inversion. The challenge is to account for the common inclination to say that he would notice no difference in his experience, however long he stays. For Tye, this thesis can be accommodated, because on his view, the subject's experiences of, say, the sky always represent blue. This is because Tye holds that optimal conditions for vision do not apply on inverted earth. Hence his causal co-variation theory of representation (see above) predicts that the subject's visual experiences of the sky continue to represent blue. Therefore these will continue to have the same phenomenal character.

One problem here is that an externalist like Tye holds that a subject's beliefs are individuated by his language community and by their typical causes. Tye, then, seems committed to holding that a subject's belief about the sky changes from the belief that it is blue to the belief that it is yellow. The subject's beliefs about his own experiences presumably alter too. He used to believe his experience was such that the sky looked blue, but he comes to believe his experience is such that it looks yellow. Such a subject comes to be radically in error about the nature of his own occurrent experience.

The penultimate chapter supports an objective account of colour. Tye must endorse such an account if his theory is not to be rendered viciously circular. The concluding chapter is about where on the phylogenetic scale consciousness arises. Tye claims that simple animals can be phenomenally conscious and can feel pain. However, he holds that this has no bearing on how we should treat them. Animals lack cognitive systems sufficiently sophisticated to be aware of their pain; therefore they cannot suffer. It is tempting to contradict Tye here and deny the intelligibility of the notion that feeling pain is not in itself suffering. One might suppose that if one thought that suffering only comes with cognitive awareness of pain, then feeling pain must require this cognitive awareness too. My own inclination is to say that simple animals can feel pain and thereby suffer.

Despite my criticisms, it should be plain from this discussion that Tye offers a detailed and sophisticated theory of consciousness. While I do not think that he has solved the problem of phenomenal consciousness, in its style his account is without question exemplary.

*Girton College, Cambridge*

FIONA MACPHERSON