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**Papineau's Conceptual Dualism
and the Distinctness Intuition**

Abstract

As part of a defense of a physicalist view of experiences, David Papineau (2002) has offered an explanation for the intuition that properties found in experiences are distinct from neural properties. After providing some necessary background, I argue that Papineau's explanation is not the best explanation of the distinctness intuition. An alternative explanation that is compatible with dualism is offered. Unlike Papineau's explanation, this alternative does not require us to suppose that the distinctness intuition rests on fallacious reasoning. Relations of the alternative explanation to representationalism and to cases of genuine property identity are discussed.

Keywords

consciousness, phenomenal concepts, physicalism, representationalism, secondary qualities

My aim in this paper is to address a serious challenge to a dualistic view of sensory consciousness. This challenge arises from David Papineau's (2002) explanation of why there is resistance to accepting the physicalist, non-dualistic view that he holds. Dispute about such an explanation may at first sight seem to be a mere skirmish that could not affect the outcome of the battle between physicalists and dualists. I agree with Papineau, however, in believing that the issue is important.

I shall begin by giving a fairly extensive set of preliminary comments, designed to show just how Papineau's explanation for the implausibility of physicalism fits into the dialectic surrounding the debate between physicalists and dualists, and why it needs to be taken very seriously. These introductory comments will also introduce issues and points of terminology that are essential for understanding Papineau's proposed explanation and my discussion of it.

1. Consciousness and experiences

We can properly be said to be conscious of many different kinds of items. These include:

pains, itches, and other bodily sensations
feelings of anger, elation, or remorse

secondary qualities such as colors, pitches, timbres, taste qualities (such as sweetness or bitterness), fragrances, and so on

seeing colors, hearing sounds, tasting tastes; in general, perceiving secondary qualities

ordinary things such as tables and chairs
perceptions of ordinary things

abstract facts such as the state of the economy (e.g., that it is booming) or
the incompleteness of consistent systems for arithmetic (i.e., we can be
conscious *that* such systems cannot be complete)

The last three entries on this list seem to depend on the first four in a way in which the first four do not depend on the last three. In that sense, the first four entries are more fundamental for understanding consciousness, and in what follows I shall say nothing more about the last three items. Papineau's discussion also concerns the earlier items on our list, so this restriction will not leave anything out that is relevant to his argument.

Following Papineau, I shall understand "being conscious of perceiving secondary qualities" in a way that does not commit us to veridicality. For example, we can be properly said to be conscious of seeing red, even if we are only having a red afterimage, or staring at a white thing in a strong red light. We can be properly said to be conscious of hearing a certain kind of sound, even if we are only suffering from tinnitus in a silent room.

Despite the complexity of the phrases just used, the examples just given are not examples of introspection. They are states in which it is seeing red or hearing a certain kind of sound that is conscious. In contrast, introspective knowledge would be, for example, knowledge *that* one is consciously seeing red or consciously hearing a certain kind of sound.

Bodily sensations, emotional feelings, instances of afterimaging, instances of being conscious of a secondary quality, and instances of being conscious of perceiving a secondary quality either are or require episodes in one's conscious life. In other work, I have called such episodes "qualitative events". Here, however, I will follow tradition, and Papineau, in calling them "experiences". Experiences are all conscious; to be an experience is to be an episode in a person's (or an animal's) consciousness.

2. Secondary qualities

Let E1 be an experience that you have while looking at a ripe strawberry in normal conditions, and let E2 be an experience that you have while looking at a leaf in normal conditions in the summertime. These experiences may be different in many ways, but if we repeat the comparison on many different occasions, there will be one quality that is involved in all the experiences we have while looking at strawberries and that is saliently different from a quality that is involved in all the experiences we have while looking at summer leaves – namely, red will be involved in the first set of experiences, and green in the second. On the view I have defended elsewhere, this color difference is literally a difference in the qualities of conscious episodes. (That is part of the explanation of my preferred term, "qualitative event".) E1 is different from E2, and the proper, direct description of the difference is that it is a color difference: E1 is red and E2 is green. For me, "red experience" and "green experience" are not only grammatically correct expressions, but refer to items that have the structure that the surface grammar of these phrases suggests.

This, however, is a point on which Papineau and I diverge. Although he uses "pain" (rather than "having a pain") in some of his examples, he is very consistent in using "seeing red" rather than "red" in referring to experiences such as E1 and E2. This terminological difference is at least suggestive of a sub-

stantive difference. To prepare for further discussion of this complication, it will be helpful to look into some of the historical background concerning secondary qualities.

Interpretation of Locke's view of secondary qualities is somewhat controversial but, on one interpretation, I believe Locke's understanding was essentially correct – provided we are allowed to update his science.¹ According to this interpretation, a strawberry is red – but only in the derived sense that it causes red experiences when viewed in normal conditions. In the basic, non-derived sense, what is red is the experiences that ripe strawberries normally cause. A strawberry is an ordinary thing that has a surface composed of molecules with certain resonance frequencies. In consequence of this surface composition, it has a certain *reflectance profile*, i.e., a characteristic pattern of reflectance and absorption percentages for various wavelengths of light. In virtue of this reflectance profile, viewing a ripe strawberry causes characteristic events in normal human retinas, which in turn cause characteristic events in the optic nerve, and characteristic kinds of neural events in the visual systems in the brain. These latter events cause experiences that are systematically different from experiences caused by viewing summer leaves. This difference is the difference between a red experience and a green experience, i.e., the difference between items that are red or green in the primary sense. This kind of account, of course, is intended to generalize to all the secondary qualities.

Ever since Wittgenstein, this view has been under attack from philosophers.² (Many scientists, on the other hand, seem quite happy with it.) In our times, it is often stigmatized as an “error theory”. Current dogma has it that red is a property of ordinary things such as strawberries and flags, and of ordinary things alone. This view is often elaborated by holding that experiences like E1 and E2 do not differ in redness or greenness: they differ only in that one *represents* redness and the other represents greenness – where these represented properties are the redness or greenness of ordinary things.

Lockeans (or, if you prefer, quasi-Lockeans) like me can respond to the “error theory” accusation by pointing out that their view does not imply that ordinary remarks involving color predicates are ordinary mistakes. They can hold that, for example, people who say that summer leaves are green are not mistaken; instead they are making a perfectly correct remark, using “green” in its frequent, derivative sense. They may have a mistaken theory about how color perception works, but such theoretical mistakes are not generally taken to imply that everyday remarks are mistaken. Here, we may compare the famous twentieth century discussion of Eddington's two tables. The resolution that I favor allows that many people who have not studied science may hold the mistaken theory that solidity requires literal continuity of matter. But that does not show that they are making any ordinary mistake when they place glass among the solids at room temperature, and mercury among the liquids.

Let us return to Papineau. Papineau avoids committing himself to representationalism. Nonetheless, his characteristic examples of experiences use the phrase “seeing red” rather than simply “red”. So, it seems that there is some difference between his conception of experiences and mine. Fortunately, the points I need to make can be made on both understandings of experiences. In what follows, I will, so far as possible, follow Papineau in considering experi-

¹ Locke (1689, II, viii). See, e.g., Stuart (2003) and Jacovides (2007) for discussion.

² I have discussed what Wittgenstein (1953) did and did not show in Robinson (2004; forthcoming (b)).

ences that are properly described as “seeing red”, “seeing green” and so on. But there will be some places where our difference of preferred description will require further attention.

3. Physicalism and Two Dualisms

We have already seen that on a Lockean view, redness in the basic sense is not a property of ordinary things such as strawberries. This claim implies that redness in the basic sense is not identical with any property or set of properties that strawberries have. We have also seen that, on a properly updated Lockean view, the obvious candidates for the causes of red experiences are neural events. There has, however, been nothing in the account that provides any ground for supposing that redness, in the basic sense, could be the same property as any of the neural properties that are involved in the causation of red experiences. Now, there do not seem to be any other physical properties that are correlated with red experiences, and that might thus provide candidates for physical properties that could be identified with redness in the basic sense. It thus natural to think that redness, in the basic sense, is not identical with any physical property at all. Or, in traditional terms, it seems that dualism is a natural development from a Lockean view.

Dualism is now widely rejected. A central reason is that development of the view requires one to make a choice between two commitments, and both of these commitments are regarded as problematic. To understand these commitments, and why we are forced to make a choice between them, we have only to ask the question: Do experiences have any effects? (Or, more carefully and explicitly, “Do experiences have any effects in virtue of their experiential properties? E.g., does anything happen *because* of a conscious event’s being red in the basic sense?”)

(A) Interactionism answers, “Yes”. When, for example, people report the color of what they see, they have a conscious event of, say, the red kind, and it is in virtue of this property that the conscious event causes neural events that, eventually, lead to contractions of muscles in the vocal apparatus that produce the sound “red”. Similarly, when people pick out a piece of fruit because they take a certain color to indicate ripeness, their action is a result of a train of neural events that is initiated by an experience that has a certain color property.

The unwelcome consequence of this way of developing dualism is that it violates the completeness of physical science. It says that some physical events in neurons – motions of neurotransmitter molecules, or of ions across cell membranes, or some such events – are caused by instantiations of nonphysical properties. This implies that, even in a fully developed science of the brain, there would be neural firings that are exceptions to electro-chemical laws that hold everywhere else in our sciences.

(B) Epiphenomenalism answers, “No”. It says that neural events have completely adequate physical causes. It says that the entire causal story of what happens between light falling on our retinas and actions such as reporting a color of what is seen, or selecting a piece of fruit, can be told, in principle, in terms of neural firings which, in turn, are caused by the action of neurotransmitters on neural surfaces, motions of ions within and across the membranes of neural cells, and so on; and it holds that all of these transactions conform to electro-chemical laws that apply everywhere.³

The unwelcome consequence of this way of developing dualism is that it contradicts an intuition that seems compelling; namely, the intuition that our reports and other actions are *caused by* our experiences and, indeed, caused by such properties of our experiences as the colors that are involved in them. For example, it seems that I pick out *this* strawberry to eat, *because* of the particularly rich redness that I experience when I look at it, and I say that it is red *because* of the character of the experience I have when I look at it.

(C) Physicalism says, “Both of these unwelcome consequences can be avoided simply by denying dualism”. The properties that are involved in experiences *are identical with* neural properties. We can have the completeness of physics *and* causation by the properties of experiences just by holding that the properties of experiences *are* the neural properties that do the causing.

This view too has an unwelcome consequence. Namely, it must say that the difference between the visual experience you have when looking at a ripe strawberry and the visual experience you have when looking at a leaf in summertime *is the very same thing* as the difference between a set of neural firings of one kind (e.g., having certain ratios of firing rates in a group of neurons that are connected in certain ways) and a set of neural firings of another kind. But the salient difference between these experiences is a difference in *colors*; and a color difference does not seem to be remotely like a difference in sets of neural firing properties.

In order to focus on Papineau's version of physicalism, we must make a little refinement of these remarks. Recall that Papineau's way of talking about properties of visual experiences characteristically uses “seeing red” rather than “red”. So, in discussing his view, we must take the properties to be identified with neural properties not to be colors, but to be the seeing of colors – always remembering, however, that seeing colors in the intended sense does not require there to actually be anything of that color before one's eyes.

However, Papineau also makes clear that seeing red (for example) is an *experience*. Seeing red is an episode of consciousness – indeed, Papineau sometimes refers to seeing red as a “conscious property”. Seeing red is a conscious event of a kind that occurs when you look at a ripe strawberry in normal conditions. Seeing green is a conscious event of a kind that occurs when you see summer leaves in normal conditions. The difference between these experiences is the difference between seeing red and seeing green. And it is this very difference that Papineau's view must hold to be identical with the difference between one set of neural properties and another set of neural properties. But a difference in seeing colors does not seem to be remotely like a difference in sets of neural firing properties.

4. Our Dialectical Situation

Whether we use my preferred way of describing experiences or Papineau's, we have come to essentially the same reason for doubting physicalism, namely, the implausibility of physicalism's commitment to the view that differences in experiential properties are identically the same as differences in sets of neural properties. Let us call this reason for doubt about physicalism “the distinct-

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At longer time scales, previous learning and hormonal influences must be added to the strictly neural account.

ness intuition". Let us call the intuition that experiential properties causally contribute to our actions "the causal intuition". Finally, let us call the view that neural events have completely adequate physical causes "the completeness of physics". Then we can say that interactionism gives up completeness of physics while retaining both intuitions. Epiphenomenalism gives up the causal intuition while retaining the distinctness intuition and completeness of physics. Physicalism gives up the distinctness intuition while retaining completeness of physics and the causal intuition.

Our dialectical situation today is that it seems that one of these three views must be correct, but each has to either deny the implications of our best science or give up an extremely powerful intuition. In this situation, any argument that makes it easier to give up one of these commitments holds promise of resolving this dialectical impasse. Papineau's conceptual dualism is designed to help us be comfortable in giving up the distinctness intuition, and that is why it is of central importance in philosophizing about consciousness.

My own view is that the causal intuition is the most vulnerable of these commitments, and in other work I have tried to ease the way for its abandonment. The resulting epiphenomenalist view draws many objections, and I have given several responses to them.⁴ I will not repeat any of those efforts here. The focus of this paper is entirely on the understanding and evaluation of Papineau's proposed way out of the impasse. Before I begin to state his proposal, however, I want to make sure that the key issue is clear.

To this end, let us consider an example of an ordinary thing that has two distinctive properties; namely, a harp, which has a distinctive sound when plucked and a distinctive shape. The shape property and the characteristic timbre property are properties of the same individual thing. They are, however, two properties. As we enter the discussion of Papineau's view, we must be clear that the identity he is claiming is not this weak sort of "identity", which is merely the identity of the *possessor* of two distinct properties. He is saying that the experiential property, *seeing red* is the same *property* as a property that can alternatively be referred to by a description that is stated entirely in neural terms. Neither Papineau nor I claim to know exactly what neural property would be appropriate here, but it is the kind of property that would be indicated by such descriptors as neural firing rates, patterns of neural connectivity, patterns of time intervals between arrivals of neurotransmitter molecules at neural surfaces, ratios of rates and intervals, and, perhaps, other properties of the same general kind.

Papineau also thinks that we can think of neural properties in terms of their causal roles. Pain is a leading example: pain is commonly supposed to be what causes pain behavior, such as withdrawal or protection of a damaged body part. But, of course, the property *being something that causes X* cannot be the property in virtue of which a thing causes X – famously, the ability of opium to cause sleep cannot be the property in virtue of which it causes sleep. And although Papineau emphasizes role concepts at certain points in his discussion, he explicitly includes physical, non-role properties as the properties that are supposed to be identical with, for example, pains.

So, the physicalist claim that we are to have in mind in our discussion is that pain, or seeing red, is the very same property as N1 or N2, where N1 and N2 are neurally specifiable properties. This claim seems to me to be no more plausible than the claim that the shape of a harp is the same property as its timbre. Now, interestingly, Papineau shares this intuition. He describes it this way: "How can *pain* (which hurts so) possibly be the same thing as insensate

molecules running around in nerve fibres?" (p. 161). And he says, of what I have called the distinctness intuition,

"I know that in my own case it continues to press, despite any amount of immersion in the arguments of the previous chapters" (p. 161).

This is a second reason why it is important to consider Papineau's argument; for it is evident from these quotations and many other statements in his book, that he fully appreciates the force of the problem and is facing it directly.

5. Conceptual Dualism

In brief, Papineau's proposal is that we have two very different kinds of concepts – material and phenomenal – through which we can think one and the same property. We have a misleading intuition because we mistake a difference in kinds of concept for a difference in what those concepts apply to. Of course, there is something very special about the concepts involved, and clarifying their special nature is centrally important in understanding Papineau's attempt to escape the attraction of the distinctness intuition.

"Material concepts are those which pick out conscious properties *as* items in the third-personal, causal world" (p. 48).

It is these concepts that we use in our sciences. When we describe an event in terms of firing rates, neurotransmitter releases, patterns of synaptic connectivity and so on, we are thinking about experiences and their properties by applying material concepts. Or, we may also say, we "use" or "deploy" material concepts when we think about experiences in ways that we can learn by observing other people.

Phenomenal concepts are distinctively different from material concepts, and may be understood from the following passage.

"[Phenomenal concepts] can be used *imaginatively* or *introspectively*. Both these exercises of phenomenal concepts have the unusual feature that we *use* versions of the experiences being referred to in the act of referring to them. When we deploy a phenomenal concept imaginatively, we activate a 'faint copy' of the experience referred to. And when we deploy a phenomenal concept introspectively, we amplify the experience referred to into a 'vivid copy' of itself." (p. 170; emphases in original.)

Two additional remarks may be helpful in understanding "phenomenal concepts". First, using a version of the experience being referred to is *constitutive* of a use of a phenomenal concept's being a use of a *phenomenal* concept. I cannot use a phenomenal concept of an experience if I have not had an experience of that kind, or something very like it. (See also p. 123.)

Second, in the philosophical literature on consciousness, there are occurrences of expressions like "phenomenal red" (or, "phenomenal redness") that are used to indicate properties of experiences, and to distinguish properties of experiences from properties that have the same name, but are properties of ordinary things. That is, "phenomenal red(ness)" is sometimes used to denote what I have called "red, in the basic sense" earlier in this paper. Experiences caused by ripe strawberries in normal conditions would, on this usage, be phenomenally red; the strawberries themselves would be red, but not phe-

nomenally red. Now, if one is in a context in which “phenomenal red(ness)” is used in this way, it would be natural to think of a “phenomenal concept” as the concept of a phenomenal property. If one were thinking in this way, then one could consistently allow that people use phenomenal concepts without imagining or introspecting any experience. And this might happen in two kinds of case. (a) One might think about how one’s own pains feel, or what it is like to see something red, but without having those experiences at the moment when one is thinking of them, and without stopping to form an image of them. (b) One might think about the properties of a bat’s experience during an episode of echolocation; and, of course, one would not be either having or imagining experiences with those properties.

But it is clear that Papineau’s use of “phenomenal concept” excludes these possibilities. If you are not either imagining an experience that is at least very like one that you have had, or introspecting a current experience, you are not “using (or, deploying) a phenomenal concept” in Papineau’s sense of this phrase. In the remainder of this paper, “phenomenal concept” is always to be understood in this specifically stipulated way.

Let us have one further passage that will illustrate the key contrast on which Papineau’s explanation of the distinctness intuition relies.

“Consider what happens when the dentist’s drill slips and hits the nerve in your tooth. You can think of this materially, in terms of nerve messages, brain activity, bodily flinching, facial grimaces, and so on. Or you can think of it in terms of what it would be *like*, of how it would *feel* if it happened to you” (p. 48; emphases in original.)

We are now in a position to understand Papineau’s explanation of why we have the distinctness intuition.

(P1) When we deploy a phenomenal concept, we “use versions of the experiences being referred to in the act of referring to them” (p. 170).

(P2) When we deploy a material concept, we do not use versions of the experiences being referred to in the act of referring to them.

In view of (P1),

(P3) “[E]xercising a phenomenal concept will *feel* like having the experience itself” (p. 170; emphasis in original).

In view of (P2),

(P4) Exercising a material concept will not feel like having the experience itself.

So,

(P5) Exercising a material concept leaves something out (relative to exercising a phenomenal concept of the same property).

So,

(P6) It is easy to slide from (P3) and (P4) to the conclusion that, in exercising a material concept we are not thinking of the experience itself.

Of course, Papineau does not think this slide is actually a valid inference. He thinks that material concepts refer to the same properties as phenomenal concepts. But since the application of a phenomenal concept involves using a version of the experience itself, one could easily think of the contrast between uses of phenomenal and material concepts as a contrast between thinking of the experience and thinking of something other than the experience. We can thus continue Papineau’s argument as follows.

(P7) The slide from (P3) and (P4) to the conclusion mentioned in (P6) is a fallacious inference. (He calls it “the antipathetic fallacy”.)

So,

(P8) We ought not to accept the distinctness intuition, because its attractiveness rests on a fallacy.

6. Reflections on Papineau's Explanation

I believe that it is possible to think about properties of experiences that are distinct from neural properties without using phenomenal concepts, i.e., without either imagining or introspecting one's experiences. But I agree that there are uses of phenomenal concepts (in, of course, Papineau's sense); and I do think that when one is thinking about the issues in this paper, there will be many uses of phenomenal concepts. So, I think that Papineau's suggestion is a plausible one that focuses upon a frame of mind that philosophers are often in when they are thinking about the question of identity or distinctness of experiential properties and neural properties.

I do not, however, think that Papineau has provided a successful explanation of the distinctness intuition. The reasons are, first, that there is an additional fact for which Papineau's account has no explanation, but for which a dualistic view can give a quite natural explanation. Second, the dualistic alternative does not imply that the distinctness intuition rests on a fallacy; and, other things being equal, explanations that preserve attributions of cognitive correctness are to be preferred to those that imply cognitive impropriety. The next few paragraphs introduce the relevant additional fact, and explain the advantages I have just claimed for a dualistic view.

(R1) Use of our material concepts shows us that the relevant neural properties of our brain events are highly complex.

By “relevant neural properties”, I mean neural properties of events that an identity theorist would propose as being identical with the properties of our experiences that we are held to refer to when we deploy phenomenal concepts. These neural properties, on my view, are the same as the neural properties of events that *cause* our experiences and their properties. So, there is no difference between Papineau's conception of relevant neural properties and mine. Papineau raises a number of difficulties for the project of actually identifying which properties these are. It is nonetheless clear that his view requires that (in the case of the pain example) there be some sort of “activation of nociceptive-specific neurons, or of some-physical-state-which-arises-from-damage-and-causes-avoidance-desires” (p. 170). Our science – i.e., our uses of material concepts – shows us that these events will have to involve some large number of neurons, with distinctive patterns of firing rates, timing intervals, and so forth; i.e., it shows us that the relevant neural properties are highly complex.

(R2) Use of our phenomenal concepts does not show us that the relevant properties of our experiences are highly complex.

The difference between seeing red and seeing green seems most saliently to be a difference in the color qualities that are involved in these experiences. There is nothing in our use of phenomenal concepts that so much as suggests that *this* difference is a difference that has the high degree of complexity that

occurs in the difference between one set of patterns of firing rates or timing intervals and another such set.

Now, it would, of course, be fallacious to reason from (R1) and (R2) to the conclusion that the properties involved in our uses of phenomenal concepts are distinct from the relevant neural properties. That is because, at least abstractly, it seems that:

(R3) It is possible that the same property appears in one way to third-person observation and appears in another way when thought of by using a phenomenal concept.

So, it might be thought, a complex neural property can appear as non-complex when we are using a phenomenal concept. There is, however, a problem in this line of thought: appearing in some way is appearing to exemplify a property. For example, if a blue shirt appears green because the lighting is bad, it appears to be green, but will appear to be blue when viewed in better light. Now, this explanation would be incoherent unless blue and green were taken to be distinct properties.

But, according to Papineau's view, pain, or seeing red is the *same property* as N1 or N2 (where N1 and N2 are the relevant neural properties for pain experiences or experiences of seeing red, respectively). It would therefore be incoherent to explain the difference identified by (R1) and (R2) – i.e., the difference to which comparing (R1) and (R2) calls our attention – by appealing to the way our neural events appear to us in our experiences. In short,

(R4) It is incoherent to accept an identity view and also use the possibility outlined in (R3) to explain the difference identified by (R1) and (R2).

I cannot give an argument that shows that there is no other possible explanation for the difference identified by (R1) and (R2). But it seems evident that if we cannot appeal to diverging appearances, we cannot explain how a use of a phenomenal concept could fail to show us pain or seeing red as what they are claimed to actually be, namely, highly complex; for, on the identity view, pain or seeing red *are* highly complex neural properties. In short,

(R5) An identity view has no explanation other than (R3) for the difference identified by (R1) and (R2).

(R6) A non-identity view can coherently account for the difference identified by (R1) and (R2) by saying that the property involved in uses of phenomenal concepts is a different property from the relevant neural property.

So,

(R7) A non-identity view gives a better explanation of the difference identified by (R1) and (R2) than an identity view.

So, taking (R1) through (R7) together,

(R8) We have a non-fallacious reason that gives some support to the distinctness intuition.

Two comments will round out this argument. First, since I have no way of demonstrating (R5), this argument is not a proof of dualism.⁵ So, one can still hold out for an identity view. However, so long as physicalism is unable to provide an *actual* alternative explanation, dualism gives an account of the distinctness intuition that is better than Papineau's account – better, because it explains an additional fact and because it explains the distinctness intuition

in a way that does not make it rest on a fallacy. In this dialectical situation, it would be a merely arbitrary piece of ideology to positively affirm either physicalism, or Papineau's view that the distinctness intuition rests on a fallacy.

Second, the critique I have offered is not likely to be convincing unless we can say where and how Papineau's proposal has gone wrong. To help us to identify what I regard as Papineau's mistake, it will be helpful to have the following diagram of the contrast between uses of material and phenomenal concepts.

(M) Use of a material concept: A thought that an F is occurring (or has occurred), where "F" is a material concept

[Nothing further required.]

(P) Use of a phenomenal concept: A thought that a G is occurring (or has occurred), where "G" is a phenomenal concept

plus either

(a) an imagined experience of type G

or

(b) a concurrent experience of type G.

Now, Papineau is correct to say that there is an interesting difference between (M) and (P), and he is correct in much of what he says about that difference. But his focus distracts him from giving a proper account of the items listed in (a) and (b). In particular, he gives no proper account of the difference of what I will call "character", in cases where different predicates – such as "pain", "itch", "seeing red", or "seeing green" – are substituted for "G". In my view, however, it is a fact about these differences of character of imaginings or experiences – namely, their (relative) simplicity – that provide the real motivation for the distinctness intuition. Thus, from my point of view, Papineau's focus on the difference between (M) and (P), genuine though this difference is, distracts his attention from the actual source of the distinctness intuition.

7. A Complication Concerning Representation

I remarked earlier that Papineau does not commit himself to representationalism, although his repeated use of "seeing red" as an example suggests that view. But perhaps there will be others who think it would be a helpful amendment to Papineau's approach to add a firm commitment to representationalism.

The reason representationalism may look helpful is that it appears to offer a way of deflecting my concern with what I have called the "character" of experiences. For, according to representationalism, it is not red or green (for example) that is involved in experiences, but only representing red and representing green. And while the difference between red and green may be conceded to have a kind of simplicity, it is less evident that the difference between representing red and representing green has that same kind of simplicity. For suppose there is a brain event in a normally sighted person that systematically co-varies with presence or absence of red things in normal viewing condi-

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In Robinson (2004: Ch. 3), I have explained why I do not think it is possible to provide a demonstrative argument for dualism.

tions. That description of the event allows for it to be as neurally complex as one pleases. So, if we could take “seeing red” to be such a brain event, the fact that our experience does not show us its complexity might be regarded as irrelevant to the question of the actual identity of the experience of seeing red (i.e., the occurring of a representation of red) with a complex brain event.

A difficulty in discussing this proposal is that “representation” is itself not a clear and unambiguous concept.⁶ There is, however, one way of explicating “representation” that is widely held to be either all or at least a substantial part of what one is committed to in using this term. This explication has been given a succinct formulation by Michael Tye, who puts the matter as follows (where “S” is a state in some object, *x*, and “P” is a proposition):

S represents that P = df If optimal conditions obtain, S is tokened in *x* if and only if P and because P.⁷

Following Tye, I shall call this a “tracking” account. For example, a neural event of a particular kind can represent the presence of red things if it tracks red things, i.e., if that kind of neural event is brought about by the presence of red things and not (if conditions are optimal) by things that are not red. If such events are to count as *perceptual*, further conditions must be satisfied; for example, they must be available to a cognitive system that can lead to actions appropriate to the presence of red things. But their representational status comes from their tracking.

If representation is tracking, it will not help Papineau's case to say that experiences are occurrences that represent. The reason is that such a view provides nothing that has the kind of simplicity that properties like red and green have. According to a tracking account, the redness in an ordinary thing is identical with a molecular surface constitution that causes a certain kind of reflectance profile, where, let us recall, a “reflectance profile” is a pattern of percentages of reflected light distributed across various wavelengths in the visible spectrum. The difference between a red ordinary thing and a green ordinary thing is thus the difference between two sets of molecular constitutions. The fact that there are neural events that track such differences gives us no explanation of that relatively simple kind of difference that distinguishes seeing red from seeing green. I have no doubt that there are neural events that track red things, and neural events that track green things, nor do I doubt that such events *cause* our different experiences. But the proposal that the difference between the experience of seeing red and the experience of seeing green *consists in* the difference between tracking one set of molecular constitutions and another has no plausibility whatsoever. And it evidently gives no account of why it should seem that there is the kind of simple difference that we find between the experiences we have when looking at ripe strawberries and those we have when looking at summer leaves.

But perhaps there is some non-tracking account of representation that can do better.⁸ One difficulty here is that no such account has yet actually been worked out. So, a physicalism that appeals to the possibility of such an account rests on a very large assumption that at present has no basis. Such an appeal seems even weaker when we notice that it is not clear that alternative accounts of representation will be *physicalistic* accounts.⁹

Physicalists gain some hope from two facts, (a) representation is at least closely allied with intentionality, and (b) physicalist accounts of intentionality have received treatments that represent real progress. It is now plausible that a physicalist account of the intentionality of our *thoughts* can be given.

We can, however, think of many things without having sensory experiences of what we are thinking about, and without forming images of what we are thinking about. So, sensory experience, even if it is in some sense representational, involves something additional to what is present when (mere) thoughts represent what they are about. The progress on physicalistic accounts of the intentionality of thoughts thus does not imply that a similar account can be given of the additional element present in sensory experiences. Physicalists will, no doubt, remain hopeful. Dualists are, however, fully entitled to note the absence of progress in actually explicating “representation” in a manner that will avoid the criticism of tracking accounts and yet be certifiably physicalistic.

8. Conclusion

The view I have been advancing does not deny that we sometimes discover that two of our concepts apply to just one property. A leading illustration is heat and mean kinetic energy. “Heat” and “mean kinetic energy” entered our vocabularies at different times (both for individuals and for the scientific community) and in very different ways, yet heat (in a body) really is nothing but mean kinetic energy of its molecules.

Papineau agrees that this identity is different from the (alleged) identity of experiential and neural properties. The difference he stresses is that once we have studied the relevant physics, any initial resistance we might have had to identifying heat with mean kinetic energy evaporates; whereas, even after we have learned all the relevant facts about neural systems and have accepted that there is (at least) a tight correlation between neural events and experiences, we still retain the distinctness intuition. It is this difference that Papineau's conceptual dualism is supposed to explain.

My stance has been that the difference that Papineau's explanation points to exists, but his explanation is not the best explanation of the distinctness intuition. I have not, however, explicitly said how the experiential property/neural property case differs from the heat/mean kinetic energy case. My account of this difference will reinforce what I have said so far, and will serve as a useful summary of the main point I am attempting to make in this paper.

In the cases on which we have focused in this paper, there is a character in our experiences that is simple relative to the complexity of the neural event properties that we discover in our sciences. This kind of difference is not present in the heat/mean kinetic energy case. That is because our concept of heat is open ended, i.e., it is plausibly equivalent to “whatever causes expansion, feelings of warmth, increases of evaporation rates, and so on”. Mean kinetic energy becomes a candidate for identification with heat the moment it is found to be the cause of the listed phenomena. But our concepts of pain or of seeing red are not open ended in this way. Even if we have a causal intuition

6
Papineau himself distinguishes broad and narrow accounts of representation, but leaves the latter notion largely unanalyzed. See: pp. 192–194.

7
Tye (1995), p. 101.

8
Some alternative accounts can be found in Dretske (1995) and Millikan (1984). While these add many interesting ideas to tracking, they remain subject to the same shortcoming I have pointed out for Tye's view.

9
For further explanation of this point, see Robinson (forthcoming (a)).

about pains and cases of seeing red, our concepts of these things are not simply “whatever has the relevant causal properties”. Pains and cases of seeing red have to have, in addition, certain experiential characters, and it is a second order property of pairs of these characters – namely, the relative simplicity of their differences – that, on my view, gives rise to the distinctness intuition.

This account might be disputed on the ground that the causal intuition is so strong that it will support an identity between pain, or seeing red, and whatever turns out to be the cause of associated behaviors. In response, I will outline a historical analogy, and then apply it to the present case.

In Spinoza's time, there was an already centuries-old tradition of claiming that God is a necessary being. This claim was accepted by both those who accepted the ontological argument and those who rejected it, and it was a deeply embedded theoretical commitment. Indeed, Aquinas, in his “Third Way” argument uses the premise that “This, all men call ‘God’” (referring to a non-derivatively necessary being). This premise is open ended, and appears on its face to be a commitment to the view that *anything* that is (non-derivatively) a necessary being is identical with God.

But, as we know, most 17th Century theologians did not actually accept such an open ended equivalence. Spinoza did: having argued that the whole of Nature is a necessary being, he concluded that God = Nature. But the majority of his contemporaries regarded him as an atheist.

The moral that I draw from this historical excursion is that even if a principle is exceedingly deeply connected with a concept, it does not follow that the concept is equivalent to “whatever satisfies <the relevant principle>”. So, even if one refuses to follow me in my epiphenomenalistic denial of causation by experiential properties, one will still not be entitled to treat *pain* or *seeing red* as concepts that have the open endedness of our concept of heat. And I think it is evident that they are not so open ended. I do not claim that it is equally evident that the simplicity of experiential character differences, relative to the complexity of neural property differences, is a strong, non-fallacious support of the distinctness intuition, but I do think that this is the right way to conceive of what is behind that intuition.¹⁰

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Papineaus konzeptueller Dualismus und die Intuition der Gewissheit

Zusammenfassung

Im Rahmen seiner Verteidigung der physikalistischen Sichtweise der Erfahrung bot David Papineau 2002 die Erklärung an, dass bei der Intuition die erfahrungsmäßigen Eigenschaften anders geartet seien als neuronale Eigenschaften. Nach einer Schilderung des notwendigen Kontextes vertritt der Autor die These, dass Papineaus Erklärung zur Intuition der Gewissheit nicht die beste sei. Angeboten wird eine alternative, mit dem Dualismus kompatible Erklärung. Im Unterschied zu Papineaus Standpunkt setzt diese Alternative nicht die Annahme voraus, dass die Intuition der Gewissheit auf trugschlüssigen Gedankengängen beruhe. Es wird das Verhältnis der angeführten alternativen Sichtweise zum Repräsentationalismus sowie zu Fällen erörtert, in denen eine Identität angeborener Eigenschaften vorliegt.

Schlüsselbegriffe

Bewusstsein, phänomenologische Konzepte, Physikalismus, Repräsentationalismus, sekundäre Qualitäten

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Le dualisme conceptuel et l'intuition de la distinction chez David Papineau

Résumé

Défendant le point de vue physicaliste de l'expérience, David Papineau (2002) propose une explication à l'intuition que les propriétés contenues dans les expériences se distinguent des propriétés nerveuses. Après avoir présenté quelques éléments de contexte, je soutiens que l'hypothèse de Papineau n'est pas la meilleure pour expliquer l'intuition de la distinction. Il existe une explication alternative, compatible avec le dualisme. A la différence de celle de Papineau, cette explication ne demande pas de supposer que l'intuition de la distinction soit fondée sur un raisonnement fallacieux. Le débat porte sur les rapports de cette explication alternative avec le représentationalisme et les cas de l'identité des propriétés innées.

Mots-clés

conscience, concepts de phénoménologie, physicalisme, représentationalisme, qualités secondaires