SORITIC SERIES AND PHENOMENAL TYPES

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Uses of phenomenal predicates and phenomenal identity statements presuppose some form of phenomenal type-identity. But for phenomenal type-identity to be defended, an adequate response has to be found to the problem of non-transitive matching and the soritic arguments that non-transitivity can give rise to. One possible response to such soritic arguments is to question their assumption that "that there could be a sorites series of colour patches for which 'looking the same as' is not transitive" (Fara 2001). This would involve denying, for instance, that in a colour spectrum, small enough regions can look homogeneous.

However, it has not been established that there cannot be any such soritic phenomenal series; and if there are, then it remains in principle feasible that there is a collapse of phenomenal types. Moreover, the existence of soritic phenomenal series is supported by the existence of discrimination thresholds: given that there are phenomenally non-detectable objective differences, small enough regions of a colour spectrum (or property space) should be phenomenally homogeneous; and given that the cumulation of such objective differences can pass discrimination thresholds, the ordering of such regions into a series should lead to phenomenal differences, resulting in a sorites series.

I propose an alternative defence of uses of appearance predicates and phenomenal identity statements, which consists in arguing that phenomenal types can be defined notwithstanding the existence of soritic phenomenal series. My position is based on an examination of the relation between objective and phenomenal size types. A summary of my argument follows.

Following some preliminaries concerning the similarity orderings of objective and phenomenal sizes, and an argument to the effect that objective (super-determinate) sizes cannot be discriminated, I state my key argument: that Goodman's definition of the identity of phenomenal types (Goodman 1977, Clark 1985) amounts to a definition of objective, not phenomenal, types. Threewise matching tests detect sub-phenomenal differences, and the only objects which could pass *all* such tests (as required by Goodman) would be super-determinately identical in the objective sense. The only remaining criterion for phenomenal type-identity is indiscriminability. Therefore, if we want to uphold phenomenal types and identity, we have to interpret the non-transitive nature of indiscriminability as permitting an inference about the presence of an objective, not a phenomenal, difference. I also provide some new arguments against simply denying that there are phenomenal types. One involves showing that we can define and know, prior to any verification, groupings of objective sizes for which phenomenal identity *is* transitive; so it cannot be denied that there is such a thing as phenomenal type-identity.

Since the groupings described preserve transitivity, and since non transitivity emerges from three-wise matching tests with objective sizes from *outside* the groupings (in the way described by Goodman's definition), the groupings provide sufficient objective conditions for appurtenance to a phenomenal type. We can approximate necessary-and-sufficient objective conditions for phenomenal type-appurtenance with varying degrees of precision; this involves use of sub-phenomenal means to discriminate more highly determinate groupings of objective sizes. The increasingly precise types defined do not collapse because they preserve transitivity.

The extension of linguistic phenomenal predicates, however, is not precisified by using sub-phenomenal discrimination, and is therefore less precise. But this imprecision is subject to limitations which can be known phenomenally and defined objectively, and which suffice to sustain the use of phenomenal predicates. The reason for this is that discrimination thresholds prevent phenomenal types from being densely ordered (from being such that between any two types, however close in the ordering, there are always further types). On the definition described further up, phenomenal types are not densely ordered, but instead form overlapping types. This is borne out by an interpretation of the threewise matching test, under which both token experiences of *y* come under two phenomenal types, or are both in the overlap between two phenomenal types. On this account, there is no need to conclude (with Jackson and Pinkerton 1973) that *y* presents a different quale when compared to *x* and when compared to *z*: we do not *see* that (*x*,*y*) are different testing them threewise with *z*. This is because there are no further types between any two phenomenal types, and the ordering of phenomenal types is not dense.

Thus described, phenomenal predicates are not worse off than the familiar class of vague predicates which designate properties supervening on discrete objective orderings: 'is bald', 'is a heap', 'is expensive (in dollars for an *F*)'. Phenomenal predicates are substantially similar to those predicates because, although phenomenal types form continua in the sense that they overlap, they do not form continua in the sense required by density.

In another respect, phenomenal predicates are better off than other predicates for discretely ordered properties. Where there is phenomenal vagueness, it affects use of predicates for experience-types. But which experience-types we can have is a function of discrimination thresholds. In threewise matching, *y* is in the overlap of two fully determinate similarity groupings, P_n and P_{n+1} ; but it does not belong to P_{n-1} or P_{n+2} , because it is *disjoint* from such groupings. Discrimination thresholds ensure this disjointness: cumulated objective differences eventually pass the thresholds so that we can detect phenomenally – ie, without inference and threewise matching tests – the falsity of identity statements containing phenomenal predicates. In other words, phenomenal predicates, though vague, are already precisified as they stand, because of the lack of density in phenomenal similarity orderings. Beyond this, vagueness in the extension of phenomenal predicates can be limited by sub-phenomenal precisification. If there are contexts in which this is not required, this is because the extension of phenomenal predicates is already sufficiently precise for many of our purposes.

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