

HOW DO WE DIFFER WHEN WE DIFFER IN TASTE?

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My partner loves the experiences she gets from eating olives. I, on the other hand, hate the experiences I get from eating olives. We differ in tastes. But how *exactly* do we differ? In particular: do our taste experiences differ *phenomenologically*—do my olive-experiences *feel different* than my partner’s olive-experiences? Some philosophers have assumed that the answer is “no,” and have advanced important arguments which turn on this assumption. I argue that, contrary to what these philosophers assume, ordinary taste differences *do* involve differences in phenomenology. My olive-experiences feel different than my partner’s olive-experiences. I argue for this *phenomenal thesis* in stages. First, I argue that there is a link between our attitudes and our pleasures; second, I argue that there is a link between our pleasures and our phenomenology. Together, my conclusions link our attitudes and phenomenology in a way that vindicates the phenomenal thesis. Along the way, I fend off various worries about what the phenomenal thesis might entail. I show that it does not entail any form of radical subjectivism, nor does it entail that there is a “distinctive feeling of pleasure.” I close by considering how opponents of the phenomenal thesis might retreat to a weaker thesis: one which concerns *extraordinary* taste differences, as opposed to ordinary taste differences. I argue that there are no obviously sound arguments for even this weaker thesis, which should make us all the more confident in the phenomenal thesis.

1. Introduction

Adrie likes to eat olives. Beiro, on the other hand, does not. Unlike Adrie, Beiro does not like the *experiences* he gets from eating olives. Cases like this are *differences in taste*, or *taste differences*. But what sorts of differences do such cases

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actually involve? In what way, or ways, do Adrie's olive-experiences differ from Beiro's?

I will defend the claim that Adrie and Beiro's olive-experiences differ *phenomenologically*. In other words, "what it is like" for Adrie to eat olives is not "what it is like" for Beiro to eat olives. There is some sort of difference in how their overall experiences feel for them "from the inside."¹ Call this the *phenomenal thesis*. My sense is that most people are inclined to reject the phenomenal thesis. Most people, I think, would claim that olives taste the same to both Adrie and Beiro. As we will see, this is not quite the same as claiming that Adrie and Beiro get the same kind of experience from eating olives. But it is easy to conflate the two claims. So I think that most people would reject the idea that Adrie and Beiro get different kinds of experience from eating olives.

However, this is not why I think that the phenomenal thesis is interesting, and it is not what motivates me to defend it. I defend it for two reasons. First, differences in taste are interesting in their own right, and the phenomenal thesis is interesting if true. Second, some philosophers assume that the phenomenal thesis is false, and advance important arguments which turn on this assumption. If the phenomenal thesis is true, then those arguments are inconclusive. This is why the phenomenal thesis has philosophical significance, whether or not most people reject it.

The paper proceeds as follows. In §2, I formulate the phenomenal thesis in more specific terms. I then highlight in §3 how the resulting thesis has been implicated in previous philosophical disputes. I focus in particular on a pair of arguments by Chris Heathwood and David Sobel, each of which turns on the falsity of the phenomenal thesis. In §4 I argue for two key claims: first, that there is a link between our attitudes and our pleasures; and second, that there is a link between our pleasures and our phenomenology. Together, my conclusions link our attitudes and phenomenology in a way that vindicates the phenomenal thesis. In §5 I explore a few ways in which Heathwood and Sobel might argue for a more modest claim about taste differences: the claim that there are *possible* taste differences which do not involve phenomenological differences. I argue

1. Daniel Dennett famously engages with this sort of position, although he focuses on *changes* in taste rather than *differences* in taste more generally. Dennett uses these cases to argue for anti-realism about phenomenology. On Dennett's view, experiences do not have phenomenological properties over and above our dispositional reactions to those experiences (1988). If Dennett is right, then, strictly speaking, the phenomenal thesis is true. If phenomenology must be understood in terms of our dispositional reactions to our experiences, then clearly there can be no differences in taste without differences in phenomenology. By definition, differences in taste are cases in which people are differently disposed with respect to their experiences. With that said, I do not share Dennett's anti-realism, and the anti-realist interpretation is contrary to the spirit of the phenomenal view as I understand it. I regard the phenomenal view as a substantive claim which is not settled by reflection on our words or concepts.

that even these more modest arguments are inconclusive. I close in §6 by taking stock of my conclusions.

2. The Phenomenal Thesis

The phenomenal thesis is a theory about taste differences. “*Taste difference*,” as I use the term, covers all cases with the following structure:

Taste Difference: A case in which, for some subjects s_1 and s_2 , and some activity A :

- A causes s_1 to have a certain type of overall experience E_1 ;
- A causes s_2 to have a certain type of overall experience E_2 ;
- s_1 is robustly disposed to intrinsically like experiences of type E_1 ;
- s_2 is robustly disposed to intrinsically dislike experiences of type E_2 .²

This definition captures the sorts of taste differences I have in mind: cases in which subjects’ attitudes towards their experiences play a prominent role in explaining their attitudes towards the activities which cause those experiences. The case of Adrie and Beiro is a case of this kind. Adrie intrinsically likes the experiences she gets from eating olives; Beiro intrinsically dislikes the experiences he gets from eating olives. This is why Adrie likes eating olives and Beiro dislikes eating olives. There are other cases which are sometimes called “differences in taste,” in which experiences do not play a prominent explanatory role. For example, we say that some people have a taste for collecting old photographs. Plausibly, this “taste” is not explained by their attitudes towards their experiences of photographs. I set such cases aside in what follows.

A few terms in my definition require clarification. First, my definition appeals to attitudes of *intrinsic liking* and *disliking*. These attitudes are not to be characterized decision-theoretically; they are not reducible to actual and counterfactual

2. I assume that ordinary people often like their experiences. So, for example, Adrie likes both the *activity* of eating olives, and the *experiences* she gets from eating olives. It might be objected that this is attributing too many attitudes to Adrie. If she is an ordinary subject, she will not like her own experiences *in addition to* the activities which cause those experiences. (Ben Bramble 2015 briefly develops this objection.) Although I am sympathetic to this concern, I am setting it aside in this paper. I do this for two reasons. First, I believe that ultimately, there is a sense in which we all take attitudes towards our own experiences. We do not—ordinarily—like or dislike our experiences in an intellectualized or concept-laden way. But we nevertheless bear psychological relations towards our experiences which are best construed as liking and disliking. Second, my opponents accept that ordinary subjects like and dislike their experiences. (This will come out in §3.) So I am happy to set the issue aside in this paper. I plan to address it elsewhere.

choices. Rather, they are psychological phenomena which underlie and explain (some of) our choices. Furthermore, our intrinsic likes and dislikes should be distinguished from *instrumental* or otherwise *extrinsic* forms of approval and disapproval. To see the difference, suppose I take some cold medicine because I have a sore throat. I like the medicine *extrinsically*—I like that it will alleviate my throat pain. But I do not intrinsically like taking medicine; I do not approve of it for its own sake. In contrast, Adrie intrinsically likes the experience she gets from eating olives; she approves of it for its own sake. Going forward, I will drop the “intrinsically” qualification. But whenever I refer to a subject’s likes and dislikes, I mean her *intrinsic* likes and dislikes.

My definition also appeals to *types* of overall experience. A subject’s overall experience is the totality of that subject’s experiences at a time. Types or kinds of experience are individuated by their phenomenologies; that is, they are individuated by “what it’s like” to experience them. To illustrate, consider Adrie and Beiro. Let E_A be the kind of overall experience Adrie has when she eats an olive, and let E_B be the kind of overall experience Beiro has when he eats an olive. E_A and E_B are different kinds of experience just in case there is a difference between “what it is like” to be Adrie as she eats her olive, and “what it is like” to be Beiro as he eats his olive.

This definition individuates kinds of experience in a highly fine-grained way. *Any* phenomenological differences make for a difference in kind. Supposing that Adrie’s vision is slightly blurrier than Beiro’s, it follows that E_A is a different kind of experience than E_B . Part of “what it is like” to instantiate E_A is to have a blurry visual field; but this is not part of “what it is like” to instantiate E_B . Intuitively, however, this difference is irrelevant to Adrie and Beiro’s difference in tastes. Adrie’s blurry vision has nothing in particular to do with the fact that she likes the overall experience she gets from eating olives. So I will make a simplifying assumption: I will assume that the case of Adrie and Beiro does not involve any such irrelevant differences. I assume that Adrie and Beiro are very similar people, eating very similar olives in very similar circumstances. Neither of them has blurry vision, or ringing ears, or a pain in their foot, or any other feature which would make for an irrelevant difference in their overall phenomenology. Nothing of philosophical significance turns on this assumption, but it does make the discussion go more smoothly.

Simplifying assumptions notwithstanding, the case of Adrie and Beiro is an ordinary sort of case. It is an ordinary difference in taste, involving ordinary people. Adrie is robustly disposed to like the kind of overall experience she gets from eating olives. Barring extraordinary circumstances, she likes experiences of that kind whenever she has them. Beiro is robustly disposed to dislike the kind of overall experience he gets from eating olives. Barring extraordinary circumstances, he dislikes experiences of that kind whenever he has them. Similarly, some ordinary people are robustly disposed to like the experiences they get from

eating durians, taking very hot showers, and getting deep Swedish massages. Other ordinary people are robustly disposed to dislike the experiences they get from those activities. The phenomenal thesis is a claim about these and all other ordinary differences in taste:

Phenomenal Thesis: All ordinary differences in taste involve phenomenological differences.

The phenomenal thesis says that, for example, E_A and E_B are different kinds of experience—Adrie’s overall experience differs phenomenologically from Beiro’s overall experience. Even if we abstract away from irrelevant differences having to do with blurry vision, ringing ears, and so on, we ought to believe that their experiences feel different.

Of course, we could formulate a stronger version of the phenomenal thesis, according to which *all* taste differences involve phenomenal differences. This strong phenomenal thesis would extend even to *extraordinary* cases, involving *extraordinary subjects* and *extraordinary circumstances*. For example, it would cover cases involving aliens, as well as humans subjected to neuroscientific tampering. But I will not defend the strong phenomenal thesis, for two reasons. First: nothing about these science fiction-style cases is intuitive, so it is hard to see how we could appeal to them to support a general claim about taste differences. Second: the weaker phenomenal thesis is philosophically significant in its own right. As I will show in the next section, nothing stronger is required for the philosophical significance of my arguments.

Before we move on, however, there is one more clarificatory point to be made. It is crucial that we distinguish between the following two claims:

Different Phenomenology: Adrie and Beiro get experiences of different phenomenal kinds from eating olives.

Tastes Different: Olives taste different to Adrie than they do to Beiro.

If *Tastes Different* is synonymous with *Different Phenomenology*, then the phenomenal theory entails that olives taste different to Adrie than they do to Beiro. In fact, however, the two claims are not synonymous, and the phenomenal theory does not entail that olives taste different to each of them.

To see why the claims are not synonymous, consider the following case:

Tinge of Disgust: Adrie eats one hundred olives in a row. Although Adrie likes olives quite a bit, even she has her limits—eventually, as she works her way through the one hundred olives, she becomes a bit disgusted with the taste. Let E_{A-t} be Adrie’s first olive-experience,

and let E_{A-100} be her hundredth olive-experience. E_{A-100} is tinged with disgust; E_{A-1} is not.

E_{A-1} differs phenomenologically from E_{A-100} , but nothing forces us to say that the hundredth olive literally *tastes different* to Adrie than the first olive. Perhaps the only difference between E_{A-1} and E_{A-100} is that E_{A-100} involves a disgust reaction, and perhaps this difference is not properly described as a way in which the olives taste to Adrie. Nothing forces us to accept this interpretation; but nothing forces us to deny it, either. Certainly it will sometimes be the most natural way to describe what is going on. To illustrate: imagine that Adrie is attending a dinner party, and the host is being somewhat pushy with the hors d'oeuvres. He offers Adrie plate after plate of olives, and eventually he notices her grimace slightly as she eats. "What's wrong?" he asks. "Is there something wrong with these olives? Do they taste different than the last batch?" Adrie might respond: "No, there's nothing wrong with them! They taste just the same. The trouble is I've had too many." This suggests that there can be phenomenological changes in the experiences that Adrie gets from eating olives, without changes in how olives taste to her.

Applying this general lesson to the case of Adrie and Beiro, we can accept that Adrie and Beiro get different kinds of experiences from eating olives, while denying that olives *taste different* to each of them.³ *Tastes Different* is not synonymous with *Different Phenomenology*.

A better interpretation of *Tastes Different* appeals to the *contents* of Adrie and Beiro's experiences:

Content Interpretation: Tastes Different means: Adrie and Beiro's experiences differ with respect to the qualities their experiences represent olives as having.⁴

On the Content Interpretation, *Tastes Different* says that Adrie and Beiro *detect* different *qualities of olives*, and do so by *tasting* them. In other words, it says that

3. It is worth mentioning that, even if one does accept that Adrie's hundredth olive tastes different than her first olive, one need not say that the olives taste *radically* different from one another. They might taste different in subtle respects, while tasting the same with respect to, say, bitterness and saltiness. So it would be a mistake to think that, if olives taste different to Adrie than they do to Beiro, that this would amount to some sort of radical subjectivism. It might amount to a mild form of subjectivism, according to which olives taste subtly different to Adrie than they do to Beiro.

4. The appeal to representational contents is intended to capture the intuitive, pre-theoretical sense in which at least some of our experiences are *about* things. It is not intended as an endorsement of *representationalism*, where this is construed as a metaphysical theory of experience. One does not have to be a representationalist—in this sense—to admit that there is an intuitive sense in which some experiences are about things. Even naive realists and sense-datum theorists can admit that much. For an instructive discussion, see Pautz (2009).

they are *tasting* different *tastes*. To see why this is a better interpretation of *Tastes Different*, consider another case:

Salty Taste: Beiro eats one hundred olives in a row. As Beiro works his way through the plate of one hundred olives, he contracts a rare disease which renders him incapable of detecting salt by taste. Let E_{B-1} be Beiro's first olive-experience, and let E_{B-100} be his hundredth olive-experience. In experiencing E_{B-1} , Beiro detects-by-taste the saltiness of an olive. In experiencing E_{B-100} , Beiro does not detect-by-taste the saltiness of an olive.

Most of us would certainly say that Beiro's first olive tastes different to him than his hundredth olive. The first olive *tastes salty* to Beiro; the hundredth olive does not. We can also put this point in terms of experiential contents: Beiro's experiences change with respect to the qualities they represent olives as having — E_{B-1} presents him with *saltiness*; E_{B-100} does not. The experiences differ in *qualitative content*.⁵

The Content Interpretation is fine as a first pass interpretation of *Tastes Different*. Talk of “the way olives taste” has something importantly to do with the qualities that olives are represented as having. However, I suspect that the best interpretation of *Tastes Different* will appeal to both phenomenology and qualitative contents. For example:

Phenomenology-in-Virtue-of-Content Interpretation: Tastes Different means:
Adrie and Beiro's overall experiences differ phenomenologically in virtue of differing with respect to the qualities those experiences represent olives as having.

This, I think, is a promising interpretation. It seems to capture the sense in which phenomenology is relevant to our evaluations of “how things taste,” while making room for the important role of contents. The upshot is that the best interpretations of *Tastes Different* will appeal to the *contents* of experiences, and not merely their phenomenology.

5. There may be contents of experience which are not qualitative contents. For example, many philosophers accept a Russellian view of experiential contents, according to which the contents of experience include particular objects. This view entails that Adrie and Beiro's experiences differ in content, because the contents of their experiences include different olives. It's hard to see why this sort of difference in contents should be relevant to differences in taste. Thus my focus on “qualitative contents,” rather than experiential contents more generally. (For an explanation and defense of the Russellian view, see Speaks 2009.)

Of course, the phenomenal thesis says nothing about the contents of experiences. It says that E_A and E_B differ phenomenologically, but it does not say whether or not they differ in qualitative content. For all the phenomenal thesis says, Adrie and Beiro's experiences may share some or all of their qualitative contents.⁶ So there is a very natural sense in which olives may taste the same to both Adrie and Beiro, even if the phenomenal thesis is true. It could be that Adrie and Beiro taste (in the sense of detecting-by-taste) the same tastes (construed as objective qualities of olives). As we will see, this is an important point. It is easy to conflate the topics of phenomenology and qualitative content, but this tends to obscure what is going on in discussions of differences in taste. We will need to keep the distinction close at hand.

Because it leaves open the possibility that E_A and E_B share qualitative contents, the phenomenal thesis is more plausible than it might appear at first glance. Indeed, one might worry that it's *so* plausible as to be uninteresting. In my experience, people tend to react to the phenomenal thesis in one of two ways: either they think that it is false (because it says that differences in taste involve differences in phenomenology), or they think that it is uninteresting (because it does *not* say that different foods taste different to different people). I think that, on the contrary, the thesis is both interesting and true. To show that it is interesting, I will rehearse a pair of arguments which appeal to differences in taste. Both arguments turn on the rejection of the phenomenal thesis as I have formulated it. Then in §4 I will make the case for the phenomenal thesis.

3. Two Arguments from Taste Differences

Both Chris Heathwood and David Sobel advance arguments which appeal to differences in taste. They both assume that the phenomenal thesis is false—indeed, that it is *obviously* false. They assume that there are many cases in which subjects differ in their likes and dislikes towards a particular (phenomenal) kind of experience. This assumption plays an important role in each of Heathwood and Sobel's arguments. However, the arguments differ importantly in

6. The phenomenal thesis does not take a stand, but many philosophers do. According to many philosophers of mind, there is some sort of systematic relationship between experiential content and phenomenology. For example, *intentionalists* hold that phenomenology supervenes on intentional content. Insofar as intentionalists go in for the view that Adrie's experiences feel unlike Beiro's experiences, they cannot hold that their experiences share *all* of the same contents. But they can hold that their experiences share *some* of the same content. They could hold that both experiences represent the same qualities of olives, or represent those qualities which deserve to be called "the taste of olives." In this way, the intentionalist can avoid the worry that Adrie and Beiro are tasting different tastes. This strategy is consistent with existing intentionalist theories of pleasure and pain—see for example David Bain (2013; 2017), and Brian Cutter and Michael Tye (2014).

subject matter: whereas Heathwood argues for a thesis in the philosophy of mind, Sobel argues for a thesis in value theory. I will consider Heathwood's argument first.

Heathwood argues for **externalism about pleasure**: the thesis that pleasant experiences are pleasant in virtue of their *extrinsic properties*.⁷ In contrast, **internalism about pleasure** is the thesis that pleasant experiences are pleasant in virtue of their *intrinsic properties*—and usually the relevant intrinsic properties are assumed to be *phenomenal properties*.⁸ Heathwood's preferred theory of pleasure is a paradigm form of externalism. His theory tells us that "a sensation *S*, occurring at time *t*, is a sensory pleasure at *t* iff the subject of *S* desires, intrinsically and *de re*, at *t*, of *S*, that it be occurring at *t*" (2007b: 32). The upshot is that when I have a pleasurable experience of sipping coffee—for example—the experience is pleasurable for me in virtue of a certain *extrinsic* property—namely, its being desired in a certain way—rather than its *intrinsic* phenomenal character.

Heathwood defends externalism about pleasure, and argues against internalism about pleasure, by appealing to differences in taste. He tells us that:

The cases that most clearly support externalism involve sensations that some people like and others don't (especially gustatory sensations), or sensations that bother some people but not others. The sound of fingernails scratching on a chalkboard is extremely unpleasant to many people, but not at all unpleasant to others. If unpleasantness is intrinsic to sensations, then one of these groups has to be *mistaken*. If this sound really is intrinsically unpleasant, then those whom it doesn't bother and who therefore judge it to be not at all unpleasant, are wrong. That is hard to swallow. (2007a)

Internalists about pleasure have an obvious response to Heathwood's worry. They can claim (and have claimed, see Smuts 2011) that those who differ in tastes have different types of experiences. Suppose that Beiro, but not Adrie, is bothered by the sound of fingernails scratching on a chalkboard. The internalist may claim that Adrie's experiences differ phenomenologically from Beiro's experiences, and that this intrinsic difference explains the difference in their experiences' unpleasantness. Thus, both Adrie and Beiro are correct—Beiro's experience really is unpleasant; Adrie's experience really isn't unpleasant. Neither Adrie nor Beiro is mistaken.

7. Other externalists about pleasure include William Alston (1967), Fred Feldman (1988), and Derek Parfit (2011: 52–53).

8. Internalists about pleasure include Shelly Kagan (1992), Roger Crisp (2006), and Ben Bramble (2013).

Heathwood addresses this line of thought indirectly. He considers *changes* in taste, which he takes to also support externalism. He tells us:

Flowers and perfume initially smell nice, but can begin to nauseate after a while. One way this may happen is that the sensation itself somehow transforms after prolonged exposure—you start getting a different smell. But surely another way this happens is that the smell stays the same while our feelings about it change. What we once liked, we now dislike. [. . .] Internalists could respond by insisting that such cases always involve intrinsic changes in the sensation. But this seems like a desperate move, akin to the desperate strategies used to defend views like psychological egoism. (2007a)

Importantly, Heathwood is not merely claiming that some changes in taste do not involve phenomenological changes.⁹ Rather, he claims this is so obvious that it would be a “desperate move” to deny it. This gives some context to Heathwood’s earlier remarks regarding differences in taste. Clearly, he would have the same reaction to the internalist’s suggestion that all differences in taste involve differences in phenomenology. He would regard this, too, as a “desperate move.”

If Heathwood is right that differences in taste do not involve differences in phenomenology, then it would indeed appear that internalism about pleasure has a worrisome result—viz., that some people are thoroughly mistaken about the pleasantness of their experiences. Take Adrie and Beiro, for example. Adrie and Beiro differ in tastes. Thus, by my definition, Adrie is robustly disposed to like E_A , and Beiro is robustly disposed to dislike E_B . Presumably, then, Adrie will judge that E_A is pleasant, and Beiro will judge that E_B is unpleasant. If Heathwood is right about differences in taste, then E_A and E_B are the same kind of experience. So, if internalism about pleasure is true, then Adrie and Beiro’s experiences do not differ with respect to pleasantness. Either both experiences are pleasant—in which case Beiro is mistaken—or they are both unpleasant—in which case Adrie is mistaken.

Suppose that the experiences *are* pleasant, and Beiro is mistaken. It’s not that he is confused, distracted, or somehow “out of touch” with his own experiences. He is fully aware of what those experiences are like, and he says with great confidence that they are unpleasant. Nevertheless, he is *mistaken*—he is *wrong* about the pleasantness of his experiences. Heathwood regards this as a deeply implausible result, and I tend to agree.¹⁰

9. Richard Hall makes this same point, and he, too, makes this point in service of externalism about pleasure. See Hall (1989: 646).

10. Unsurprisingly, some internalists have challenged this claim. Stuart Rachels argues that mistakes in experiential preferences strike us as strange, not because such mistakes are impossible

We can reconstruct Heathwood's argument as follows:

Heathwood's Argument from Taste Differences:

- (P₁) There is a difference in taste which does not involve phenomenal differences. (*The Existence Claim*)
- (P₂) If P₁, then if internalism is true, there is a difference in taste which does not involve a difference in pleasurable content.
- (P₃) If internalism is true, and if there is a difference in taste which does not involve a difference in pleasurable content, then at least one person is thoroughly mistaken in their judgments about the pleasurable content of their experiences.

Conclusion: If internalism is true, then at least one person is thoroughly mistaken in their judgments about the pleasurable content of their experiences.

P₁ says that there is at least one difference in taste which do not involve phenomenological differences. That is, there is at least one case with the following structure: for some kind of experience *E*, and some subjects *s*₁ and *s*₂, *s*₁ is robustly disposed to like her experiences of *E*, and *s*₂ is robustly disposed to dislike his experiences of *E*. Going forward, I will call this the *Existence Claim*. It seems clear that Heathwood believes that there are *lots* of cases with this structure. However, he only needs the weaker Existence Claim for this particular argument to go through.

Still, it might be tempting to interpret Heathwood as adopting a premise that is *weaker* than the Existence Claim. Returning to our distinction between phenomenology and content, we might be tempted to interpret Heathwood as making a point about the qualitative contents of our experiences. We might interpret him as saying that prolonged exposure to perfume *does not* cause us to *detect different qualities* of the perfume. This interpretation might be suggested by Heathwood's remark that, on the view he rejects, "you start *getting a different smell*" (emphasis mine). But this cannot be the right way to interpret Heathwood. To make a case against internalism, Heathwood cannot be satisfied with claiming that there is no change *in content*. He needs to claim that there is no change in *phenomenology*.

To see this, suppose we endorse a rather naive theory of pleasure: we think that pleasure is a simple, contentless tingling sensation. With this theory of pleasure at hand, we give a simple treatment of Heathwood's perfume case. We say

CITE, but because they are nakedly irrational or imprudent (2000: 201). More recently, Ben Bramble has made the same claims (2013).

that as one smells perfume continuously, one feels less and less of the pleasant tingles. This does not amount to a change in the *content* of one's experiences, since the tingles have no content. If Heathwood were merely arguing that the perfume case does not involve a change in contents, then he would have to allow this treatment of the case. But he would *not* allow this treatment of the case. The naive theory of pleasure is exactly the sort of internalist theory which Heathwood is arguing against. So Heathwood cannot be satisfied with denying that cases like the perfume case involve differences in content. He has to deny that such cases involve phenomenal differences. He has to accept the Existence Claim.

Similarly, Heathwood cannot be satisfied with claiming that some *part* of one's phenomenology remains constant in the perfume case. This interpretation is suggested by Heathwood's claims that, on the view he accepts, the smell of perfume "begin[s] to nauseate after a while," and "our feelings about it change." Here, Heathwood seems to suggest that our *overall* experiences change over time. So it's natural to read him as claiming that the *core olfactory experience* remains constant, not that the overall experience remains constant. But again, this cannot be the right way to interpret Heathwood, because this interpretation is consistent with internalism. The internalist can claim that our core olfactory experience remains constant, but our overall experience becomes unpleasant because we feel less and less of the pleasant tingles (or more and more of the unpleasant nausea).¹¹ Again, this is exactly the kind of naive internalist theory that Heathwood rejects. So Heathwood must deny that the case involves phenomenal differences—*any* phenomenal differences. This interpretation is mandatory to establish the Existence Claim, and nothing weaker than the Existence Claim will suffice for Heathwood's purposes.

Strictly speaking, the Existence Claim is consistent with the phenomenal thesis. Heathwood could grant that all *ordinary* cases involve phenomenal differences, while also insisting that some *extraordinary*, science fiction style cases do not involve phenomenal differences. In this way, Heathwood could accept his Existence Claim while also making room for the phenomenal thesis. But Heathwood is not in a position to make this concession. Heathwood does not *argue* for the Existence Claim; rather, he regards it as an obvious piece of common sense. He regards it as obvious that cases like the perfume case do not involve phenomenological differences. This attitude towards the Existence Claim is deeply in tension the phenomenal thesis. If we accept that all *ordinary* taste differences involve phenomenal differences, we will not assume that some *extraordinary*

11. Of course, it is open to Heathwood to deny this interpretation. He could insist that the core olfactory experience—as opposed to the *overall* experience—becomes unpleasant, despite remaining constant phenomenologically. But this would be to simply insist upon an interpretation of the case which is consistent with externalism about pleasure. It is not an *argument* for externalism.

cases do not involve such differences. So, if Heathwood were to concede the phenomenal thesis, he would need to argue that there are extraordinary cases of the kind he describes. I will consider some arguments of this kind in §5; for now, it's enough to note that Heathwood himself does not provide any such arguments.

So much for the argument for externalism about pleasure. David Sobel gives a similar argument with the same structure—and he, too, assumes the falsity of the phenomenal thesis. Sobel appeals to taste differences in an argument against **strong objectivism**. This is the thesis that none of our reasons (or almost none of our reasons) are grounded in our desires. To illustrate: suppose I have a reason to finish writing this paper, and a desire to finish it. The strong objectivist will deny, *contra* subjectivism, that my reason to finish my paper is grounded in my desire to finish my paper (or in any of my other desires). The strong objectivist will instead offer some other grounds for my reason. They might claim (very charitably) that finishing my paper is objectively worthwhile, and *this* is what grounds my reason to finish it.

Sobel introduces taste differences as posing a *prima facie* problem for strong objectivism. He says:

An immediate worry one might have about strong objectivism is how such a view can account for the irresistible thought that some people have more reason to taste this chocolate ice cream rather than that strawberry ice cream and other people have more reason to taste the strawberry where such reasons stem from the taste of the desert (rather than, say, health concerns) and one's reaction to it. (2005: 438)

To explain this “irresistible thought,” an objectivist could adopt the same strategy which I offered on behalf of internalists about pleasure. They can claim (and have claimed, see Scanlon 1998: 42) that the “irresistible thought” is explained by *phenomenological* differences. Supposing that Adrie but not Beiro likes to eat strawberry ice cream, the objectivist may claim that Adrie's overall experience differs phenomenologically from Beiro's overall experience, and that furthermore this phenomenological difference grounds a difference in pleasurable-ness. On the resulting picture, Adrie has more reason than Beiro to eat strawberry ice cream.

Sobel anticipates this line of thought, and his response is familiar. He tells us that:

It must be metaphysically possible, on this [phenomenological] conception of pleasure, that someone not like it. We would perhaps be similarly surprised if we learned that someone did not like the taste of chocolate or did like the taste of dirt—we would in the first instance reach for

explanations that do not entail that they really do not like what we find so easy to like or that they really do like what we find so disgusting. But eventually, surely, there could be evidence that these surprising tastes are really theirs. We could, of course, always plead inverse qualia in cases like this, but that will often seem an unwarrantedly drastic understanding of what is going on. [. . .] So let it be that we finally find someone who really does not like the flavor of sensation of pleasure. Should we think that this person is necessarily making some sort of mistake? Well what mistake would it be? I myself do not understand what sort of mistake could be thought to be necessarily involved in a failure to like this or that phenomenological state. (2005: 444–45)

Sobel clearly holds that some taste differences do not involve phenomenal differences. Indeed, he thinks that denying this would amount to “plead[ing] inverse qualia” and would “often seem like an unwarrantedly drastic understanding of what is going on.” This is why Sobel thinks that strong objectivism implausibly entails that some people are mistaken about their experiences.¹² Take Beiro, for example. He would judge that he has little or no reason to eat olives, since he does not like the experiences he gets from eating olives. But if those experiences are objectively pleasurable, then in fact he is mistaken—he has a fairly weighty reason to eat olives.

Putting these points together, we can reconstruct a familiar argument:

Sobel’s Argument from Taste Differences:

(P4) There is a difference in taste which does not involve phenomenal differences. (*The Existence Claim*)

(P5) If P4, then if strong objectivism is true, some people are thoroughly mistaken in their judgments about their reasons for having certain experiences.

Conclusion: If strong objectivism is true, some people are thoroughly mistaken in their judgments about their reasons for having certain experiences

To reiterate, the Existence Claim is the claim that there is at least one case with the following structure: for some kind of experience E , and some subjects s_1 and s_2 , s_1 is robustly disposed to like her experiences of E , and s_2 is robustly disposed to dislike his experiences of E . With respect to this Existence Claim, Sobel

12. Heathwood dissents with Sobel on this point—*contra* Sobel, he holds that objectivists can avail themselves of externalism about pleasure. In this way, he claims, the objectivist can avoid saying that there are mistakes in experiential preferences (Heathwood 2011).

is in essentially the same dialectical situation as Heathwood. Like Heathwood, he cannot settle for a weaker claim. Also like Heathwood, he does not argue for it—rather, he assumes that it is true. He cannot maintain this attitude while at the same time conceding the phenomenal thesis. For if Sobel were to grant the phenomenal thesis, he would need to argue for the Existence Claim. And he does not give any such arguments.¹³

In the remainder of this paper, I will make the case for the phenomenal thesis. If the phenomenal thesis is true, then that would constitute an interesting result in its own right. But it would also be dialectically significant, in that it would send the ball back into Sobel and Heathwood's court. For if the phenomenal thesis is true, then the onus is on them to show that there are taste differences of the kind they describe.

4. From Attitudes to Phenomenology

According to my definition, differences in taste are differences in attitudes. Subject s_1 is robustly disposed to *like* the experiences she gets from a certain activity; subject s_2 is robustly disposed to *dislike* the experiences he gets from that same activity. According to the phenomenal thesis, ordinary differences in taste involve phenomenal differences—those who differ in taste are getting experiences of different (phenomenal) kinds. So, according to the phenomenal thesis, there is a link between our attitudes and our phenomenology. I will argue for this link in two stages. First, I will argue that there is a link between our *attitudes* and our *pleasures*. Second, I will argue that there is a link between our *pleasures* and our *phenomenology*. Together, these claims link our attitudes to our phenomenology in a way that vindicates the phenomenal thesis.

4.1. Linking Attitudes and Pleasure

I claim that there is a link between the attitudes we take towards our experiences, and the pleasantness of our experiences. This link is at least strong enough to validate the following principle:

13. Sobel comes close to giving an argument for P1 when he says that “*It must be metaphysically possible, on this [phenomenological] conception of pleasure, that someone not like it*” (2005: 444, emphasis mine). Here, Sobel could be interpreted as appealing to a general combinatorial principle. If so, this would constitute an independent argument for P3—a highly controversial one. I return to this point in §5.

Attitude-Pleasure Principle (At-Ples): For any ordinary subject *s* and any type of experience *E*:

- if *s* likes her experience of *E*, and *s* is robustly disposed to like her experiences of *E*, then that experience is pleasant for *s*;
- if *s* dislikes her experience of *E*, and *s* is robustly disposed to dislike her experiences of *E*, then that experience is unpleasant for *s*.

To deny At-Ples would be to claim that the pleasantness of our experiences can come radically apart from our attitudes towards those experiences. And it is deeply implausible that our pleasures and attitudes can come radically apart in this way.

To start to get a grip on At-Ples, it's useful to contrast it with Heathwood's desire theory of pleasure. According to the desire theory, it is *impossible* for our pleasures to come apart from our attitudes. The theory says that necessarily, pleasurable experiences are intrinsically desired by the subjects that experience them. At-Ples is a comparatively modest thesis. It allows that in some extraordinary circumstances, our pleasures can come apart from our attitudes. For an example of the extraordinary circumstances I have in mind, consider the following case:

Hot Tub Monster: Clairra falls asleep in her hot tub. While she is asleep, the lights go out, and she has a nightmare in which she's being digested in the stomach of a huge monster. She wakes up in total darkness, partially submerged in hot water, still half-believing that she is in a monster's stomach. For a few seconds she believes that the hot water is stomach acid, and she strongly dislikes the feeling of being submerged. But once the moment has passed, her attitudes change. She realizes she is in her hot tub, and she begins to like her experience. She recognizes that it is actually quite pleasant—indeed, that it has been pleasant all along.

Now consider two possible interpretations of this case:

Pleasure Change: Clairra's experience was unpleasant when she disliked it, and became pleasant when she began to like it.

Pleasure Constancy: Clairra's experience was pleasant all along, even when she disliked it.¹⁴

14. It's crucial to this description of the case that Clairra bears an attitude of *intrinsic disapproval* towards the feeling of being submerged. The desire theory can accommodate the view that

The desire theory is inconsistent with Pleasure Constancy, since it entails that subjects *never* dislike their own pleasant experiences—not even in extraordinary circumstances. At-Ples is a comparatively modest thesis. It does not entail that subjects never dislike their own pleasant experiences. It entails something much weaker: an ordinary subject never dislikes her own pleasant experience, *provided* that the relevant experience is a member of a (phenomenal) kind which that subject is robustly disposed to dislike. Thus, At-Ples does not entail that Clairra's experience is not pleasant. For it might be that Clairra is not robustly disposed to dislike the (phenomenal) kind of experience she has in Hot Tub Monster. Perhaps on another day, or even a few moments after she shakes off her nightmare, she will like that same kind of experience. So At-Ples allows that, in this extraordinary case, Clairra's experience might have been pleasant all along. At-Ples does not *force* us to say this—it is consistent with *both* Pleasure Change *and* Pleasure Constancy. It is simply neutral about the case.

By comparison, consider the following case:

Hot Tub Monster Pathology: Clairra has a bizarre pathology related to hot water, perhaps as a result of past trauma or neuroscientific tampering. During any interval in which she feels as though she is submerged in hot water, she also believes that she is being digested in a monster's stomach. As a result, she is disposed to dislike experiences of that (phenomenal) kind whenever she has them, and for as long as she has them.

Although At-Ples is neutral regarding the original Hot Tub Monster case, it is not neutral about this case. It tells us that *either* (i) Clairra's experiences of the relevant (phenomenal) kind are unpleasant, *or* (ii) Clairra is not an "ordinary" subject, and is therefore outside the scope of At-Ples. This verdict is, I think, extremely plausible.

Although At-Ples is not an epistemological claim, it is helpful to put the point in epistemological terms—in terms of what we *should believe* about the pleasantness of subjects' experiences. If a subject is robustly disposed to dislike experiences of a given (phenomenal) kind, then we should believe that those experiences are unpleasant for her, *or* that she is in some way extraordinary. In at least the vast majority of cases, we will reach the former conclusion. If all we

she *instrumentally* or otherwise *extrinsically* disapproves of that experience. This would likely be Heathwood's response—it's not that Clairra dislikes the feeling of being submerged *as such*; rather, she dislikes it because she takes it to be a sign that she is being digested by a monster. I do not think that this is the most plausible treatment of the case. Clearly, Clairra dislikes the experience because she thinks she is being digested. But to my mind, this "because" is most plausibly construed as a causal relation, rather than signaling that Clairra's desire is extrinsic.

know about Clairia is that she is robustly disposed to dislike the kind of experience she gets from being submerged in hot water, then it would be very strange to deny that those experiences are unpleasant for her. Common sense dictates that ordinary subjects tend to dislike their unpleasant experiences, and tend to like their pleasant experiences. So I think that, properly understood, At-Ples is extremely plausible.

At-Ples entails that the experiences Adrie gets from eating olives are pleasant, and the experiences Beiro gets from eating olives are unpleasant. Adrie is robustly disposed to like her experiences of E_A , and Beiro is robustly disposed to dislike his experiences of E_B . When Adrie and Beiro eat olives in ordinary circumstances, their dispositions manifest: Adrie likes her experience of E_A , and Beiro likes his experience of E_B . (If their dispositions did not manifest in such circumstances, we would not say that they are *robustly disposed* to like the relevant experiences.) By the first clause of At-Ples, Adrie's ordinary olive-experiences are pleasant. By the second clause of At-Ples, Beiro's ordinary olive-experiences are unpleasant.

So far so good. But At-Ples only gets us halfway to the phenomenal thesis. To get the rest of the way, we need an additional principle linking pleasantness and phenomenology.

4.2. *Linking Pleasure and Phenomenology*

The following principle can do the needed work:

Pleasure-Phenomenology Principle (Ples-Phen): For any ordinary subjects s_1 and s_2 , and experiences e_1 and e_2 :

- if e_1 is pleasant for s_1 , and e_2 is unpleasant for s_2 , then e_1 and e_2 are tokens of phenomenologically different types of experiences.

Properly understood, Ples-Phen is at least as plausible as At-Ples. The best way to see this is to consider a subject who gets *both* pleasant *and* unpleasant experiences from the same activity. With that in mind, consider the strange case of Diana. With each olive that Diana eats, she alternates between pleasant and unpleasant experiences. As she eats her first olive, she has a very pleasant experience. As she eats her second olive, she has a very unpleasant experience. And so on, back and forth, between pleasant and unpleasant experiences.

Suppose some scientists have caught wind of Diana's strange condition and have set upon researching it. As a preliminary test, they ask Diana to eat through a plate of olives while they observe her reactions. As per usual, Diana has an

overall pleasant experience upon biting into the first olive. She takes her time savoring the olive, just like Adrie does whenever Adrie eats an olive. Also as per usual, she has an overall *unpleasant* experience upon biting into the second olive. She grimaces and puckers her lips, just like Beiro does whenever Beiro eats an olive. This continues on, with Diana alternating back and forth between pleasant and unpleasant experiences, as the scientists observe and take notes.

The important question is this: do each of Diana's experiences feel alike? Or is there a difference in "what it is like" for Diana to eat odd- and even-numbered olives? All I have said about those experiences is that they differ in pleasantness. So, if we judge that those experiences feel different, then it must be because they differ in pleasantness. For parity's sake, we should also say that Adrie and Beiro's experiences feel different, since their experiences also differ in pleasantness.

I regard it as obvious that Diana's experiences feel different. I do not know how I could *demonstrate* that they feel different, but I can say a little to try and convince the unconvinced. As a preliminary exercise, it is helpful to imagine the perspective of the scientists. When they first observe Diana, she is savoring an olive with obvious pleasure. A minute later, they observe her grimacing with obvious displeasure. It's hard to imagine them doubting that there is some sort of change in Diana's experiences—some change in "what it is like" for her as she carries out the experiment. They might write in their notes that, upon eating an odd-numbered olive, Diana seems *satisfied*. And they might write that, upon eating an even-numbered olive, she seems mildly *disgusted* or *repulsed*. Could these differences obtain in the absence of any phenomenological difference? Speaking for myself, I cannot make anything of this suggestion. If the difference between satisfaction and disgust is not even partly a matter of phenomenology, then I do not know what it is.

One might push back by offering the following suggestions. The first suggestion is that it would be premature for the scientists to say anything about satisfaction and disgust. They could instead appeal to "thinner" attitudes of approval and disapproval—perhaps the attitudes of *liking* and *disliking*. The second suggestion is that our "thin" attitudes—for example, liking and disliking—make no difference whatsoever to our overall phenomenology. So there might be no change at all in Diana's experiences as she carries out the experiment. The third suggestion is that the pleasantness of Diana's experiences might have changed wholly in virtue of changes in her "thin" attitudes towards these experiences.

The second and third suggestions are interesting. In response, I think we ought to demand a more thorough characterization of the relevant "thin" attitudes. It is suggested that these attitudes have two important properties: (i) they make no difference to phenomenology; and (ii), they make a difference to the pleasantness of experiences. But one cannot simply *stipulate* that there are attitudes which satisfy (i) and (ii). Rather, one must argue that there are such

attitudes. And once we see that there is an argumentative burden to be met, it is far from clear that it *can* be met. For consider what sorts of attitudes satisfy (i). Not any kind of impassioned or emotional judgment or desire, since these attitudes make a difference to one's overall phenomenology. Rather, an attitude satisfying (i) must be something like a dispassionate judgment or disposition. Once we have such attitudes fully in view, it implausible is that they satisfy (ii). Supposing that Claira dispassionately judges "this experience is good" of some experiences, and "this experience is bad," of others, it is implausible that this change grounds a change in the pleasantness of her experiences. On the other hand, suppose that Diana's attitudes are better characterized as "Wow! How delicious!" and "Yuck! How horrible!" There is something to the idea that this change in attitudes might ground a change in pleasantness. But it is not at all plausible that this change could take place without a change in Diana's overall phenomenology.¹⁵

Suffice it to say that, at least *prima facie*, there are phenomenological differences between Diana's pleasant and unpleasant experiences. In other words: there are some changes in "what it is like" for Diana as she carries out the experiment, in addition to any changes in her attitudes. That much seems obvious, if not indisputable.

Accordingly, I am going to defend this conclusion by following Thomas Nagel's advice: I will try to "get rid of the obstacles to the admission of the obvious" (1980: 109). The obstacles, in this case, are worries about what Ples-Phen might entail. One worry is that if Adrie and Beiro's experiences feel different, then olives taste different to each of them. This might seem troublingly subjectivist. Crucially, however, Ples-Phen does not entail this subjectivist view. Recall the distinction between phenomenology and content: even if Adrie and Beiro's experiences feel different, those experiences might present them with the same medley of chemical, tactile, and olfactory qualities. Their experiences might both present them with *the taste of olives*, where "the taste of olives" is construed as some objective property of olives. In that case, there is a genuine sense in which olives taste the same to each of them: they each taste the same medley of qualities.

15. One might go about the argument in a different way. If one accepts a theory which entails that there are attitudes satisfying (i) and (ii), one might simply appeal to that theory. Chris Heathwood's desire theory of pleasure might provide one example. The desire theorist might claim that even if it is pre-theoretically implausible that there are attitudes satisfying (i) and (ii), the desire theory entails that there are such attitudes, and the theory is sufficiently attractive that we should follow its lead in this case. This is fine as far as it goes. But if the proponent of the desire theory invokes their theory to account for what is going on in differences in taste, they cannot invoke differences in taste—as Heathwood does—to lend support to the desire theory. So the dialectical point from §3 remains the same: differences in taste cannot be leveraged in an argument for the desire theory.

Nevertheless, their overall experiences differ phenomenologically. Beiro finds that *taste* repulsive, and this makes for a difference in his overall experience.

Another worry is that, if we accept that pleasant experiences feel different than unpleasant experiences, this would entail that there must be a “distinctive feeling of pleasantness” or a “distinctive feeling of unpleasantness.” And it has seemed implausible to many that there are such *distinctive feelings*.¹⁶ But Ples-Phen does not entail that there are any such feelings. Ples-Phen is a supervenience claim—it says that within the sphere of ordinary cases, certain sorts of differences in pleasurableness are underwritten by differences in phenomenology. As a rule, supervenience claims do not commit us to the existence of particular properties within the supervenience base. And Ples-Phen is no exception. It does not commit us to the existence of any particular phenomenal properties, including “distinctive feelings” of pleasantness or unpleasantness.

To see this general point, it is helpful to consider a better-known supervenience claim. According to a certain kind of physicalist, mental properties supervene on fundamental physical properties. In particular, then, the property of *having a belief* supervenes on fundamental physical properties. But that does not mean that among the fundamental physical properties is the property of *having a belief*. Physicalists need not claim that the supervenient mental properties stand in a one-to-one relation with the subvening physical properties. They more often claim that mental properties are *multiply* realizable. That is, there are lots of ways in which beliefs can be realized by different sets of physical properties. Physicalists do not have to claim that there is a “distinctive fundamental physical property of belief.”

The same considerations apply in the present case. Ples-Phen says that within the sphere of ordinary cases, certain sorts of differences in pleasantness are underwritten by differences in phenomenology. But this is emphatically not to say that the supervenient properties of pleasantness and unpleasantness stand in a one-to-one relation with the subvening phenomenal properties. It is not to say that there is a distinctive phenomenal property of *pleasantness*. We can claim that pleasure is *multiply realizable*: there are lots of ways in which pleasures can be realized by different sets of phenomenal properties. The upshot is that Ples-Phen alone does not commit us to the existence of specific phenomenal properties, including a “distinctive feeling of pleasure.”

Indeed, Ples-Phen does not tell us much at all about the relationship between phenomenology and pleasure. It only tells us that—in ordinary cases—phenomenology and pleasantness do not float free from one another. This supervenience

16. The idea that there are such distinctive feelings is unpopular, but it has been defended recently by Ben Bramble (2013). Bramble admits that the view is “perennially unfashionable” (2013: 201).

relation might be underwritten by any number of more specific relations between phenomenology and pleasure. Ples-Phen is all the more attractive for restricting itself to the plausible, general claim, and leaving open the specific nature of the relationship.

I conclude that Ples-Phen, like At-Ples, is highly plausible. And these two principles can get us to the phenomenal thesis. At-Ples tells us that Adrie's experience is pleasant, and Beiro's experience is unpleasant. Ples-Phen tells us that experiences which differ in this way are of different (phenomenal) kinds. Thus, Adrie and Beiro's experiences are of different (phenomenal) kinds. The same reasoning generalizes to other ordinary differences in taste, so we ought to conclude all ordinary differences in taste involve phenomenal differences. As a full argument:

Argument for the Phenomenal Thesis:

Assumption: The case of Adrie and Beiro is an ordinary difference in taste.

(Adrie is an ordinary subject, she has an experience of E_A in ordinary circumstances, and she is robustly disposed to like experiences of E_A . Beiro is an ordinary subject, he has an experience of E_B in ordinary circumstances, and he is robustly disposed to dislike experiences of E_B .)

(P6) When Adrie has an experience of E_A in ordinary circumstances, she likes it.

(P7) When Beiro has an experience of E_B in ordinary circumstances, he dislikes it.

(P8) If Adrie likes her experience of E_A , and Adrie is robustly disposed to like experiences of E_A , then that experience is pleasant for Adrie.

(P9) If Beiro dislikes his experience of E_B , and Beiro is robustly disposed to dislike experiences of E_B , then that experience is unpleasant for Beiro.

(P10) If Adrie's experience of E_A is unpleasant for Adrie, and Beiro's experience of E_B is unpleasant for Beiro, then E_A and E_B are different phenomenal types of experience.

(P11) Adrie's experience of E_A is unpleasant for Adrie, and Beiro's experience of E_B is unpleasant for Beiro.

(P12) E_A and E_B are different phenomenological types of experience.

(P13) If Adrie and Beiro are ordinary subjects who differ in tastes, their experiences differ phenomenologically.

Conclusion: For any ordinary subjects who differ in taste, those subjects' experiences differ phenomenologically.

P6 and P7 follow from the fact that Adrie and Beiro have *robust dispositions* to like experiences of E_A and dislike experiences of E_B , respectively. If those dispositions did not manifest in ordinary circumstances, we would not call them “robust.” P8 and P9 are applications of At-Ples, and P10 is an application of Ples-Phen. P11–P13 follow straightforwardly from the preceding premises, and the conclusion is a generalization of P13. There is nothing special about the case of Adrie and Beiro, so, if we conclude that their case involves phenomenal differences, then we should conclude that all ordinary cases involve phenomenal differences. We should accept the phenomenal thesis.

At-Ples and Ples-Phen are doing all the heavy lifting in this argument; and as I have argued, both principles are highly plausible. So, unless there are strong independent reasons to reject the phenomenal thesis, we ought to accept it. We ought to think that ordinary taste differences do involve phenomenal differences.

What about extraordinary cases—should we say that they, too, involve phenomenal differences? This is a difficult question. The more extraordinary the subjects and circumstances, the harder to say what is and is not plausible. But we certainly should not *assume*, with Heathwood and Sobel, that there exist some strange cases which do not involve phenomenal differences. Rather, we should expect them to *argue* for this Existence Claim.

5. The Existence Claim Revisited

In this section, I will consider a few arguments for the Existence Claim. To reiterate, this is the claim that there exists at least one case with the following structure: for some (phenomenal) kind of experience E , and some subjects s_1 and s_2 , s_1 is robustly disposed to like her experiences of E , and s_2 is robustly disposed to dislike his experiences of E . Strictly speaking, such arguments are irrelevant to the truth of the phenomenal thesis. We can accept the phenomenal thesis, while granting that some *extraordinary* taste differences do not involve phenomenal differences. But it is nevertheless instructive to consider the arguments. If it’s hard to find conclusive arguments for the Existence Claim, then this should make us all the more confident in the phenomenal thesis.

5.1. Arguments from Empirical Results

One strategy for defending the Existence Claim is to go looking for some empirical data which supports it. And indeed, there is some empirical data which might appear promising. According to some empirical studies on wine tasting, most people converge on similar judgments regarding the odors of wine. This might

seem to suggest that, for the most part, we are all smelling the same odors.¹⁷ Olfaction is a crucial component of wine tasting, and many of us differ in taste with respect to wines. So this might appear to be a case in which the empirical data supports the Existence Claim.

In fact, however, the empirical data is equivocal on this point. What it suggests is that most of us smell the same qualities of wine; that is, we are alike with respect to *detecting-by-smelling* those qualities. The data does not suggest that our experiences are exactly alike phenomenologically. The distinction is crucial, because there are clearly cases in which our experiences share contents while differing phenomenologically. Remember the case of Tinge of Disgust, in which Adrie eats one hundred olives in a row. Plausibly, her overall experiences change phenomenologically: they become repulsive, even nauseating. But also plausibly, they remain constant with respect to at least some of their contents. They all present her with some of the same qualities of the olives: their bitterness and saltiness, for example. Even if she blindfolded, she would be able to tell that she was eating something bitter and salty.

Something similar might easily be going on in the wine tasting case. Suppose a pair of experts are commenting on a bottle of dessert wine. One of them likes it; the other does not. They both detect notes of red fruit, honey, and spice. But their experiences differ phenomenologically: one of the tasters finds the honey a bit overwhelming, and her experience is tinged with disgust.¹⁸ This treatment of the wine tasting case is consistent with the relevant empirical data. So that data does not tell in favor of the Existence Claim. It does not suggest that there are differences in taste without phenomenal differences.

Another set of data concerns cases of a more dramatic kind. These are certain anomalous cases in which a subject feels pain, but reports that her pain is not unpleasant.¹⁹ One way this can happen is if the subject is on strong painkillers. Another way it can happen is if the subject has a rare brain condition: *pain asymbolia*.²⁰ According to one interpretation of these cases, the anomalous subject's

17. For an overview of the relevant literature on wine odor detection, see Honoré-Chedozeau, Desmas, Ballester, Parr, and Chollet (2019). The results of the literature are decidedly mixed. Some studies seem to show that wine experts are superior to non-experts with respect to odor detection (Tempere, Hamtat, de Revel, & Sicard 2016; Bende & Nordin 1997). Other studies suggest that experts are superior only with respect to *describing* the odors they detect (Poupon, Fernandez, & Frasnelli 2019). See also Smith (2007; 2011).

18. It would be a mistake to think that, if this interpretation is correct, it would lead to some sort of aesthetic subjectivism. For it is open to the objectivist to claim that there is a fact of the matter about whether or not the wine *warrants* pleasure or disgust. Proposals along these lines have been quite common in the aesthetics literature—for a recent example, see Gorodeisky (2019).

19. According to one interpretation of these cases, the relevant experience is not really *pain* at all (Park 2019). For ease of discussion, I am setting this view aside. I assume that anomalous pains can still be described as “pains.”

20. For an especially thorough treatment of the pain asymbolia cases, see Bain (2014).

pain feels the same as any normal subject's pain. The only difference is in their attitudes: whereas ordinary subjects dislike their pains, the anomalous subjects are indifferent. This interpretation is endorsed by Richard Brandt (1979: 37–38), Derek Parfit (1984: 501), and Richard Hall (1989). If these philosophers are correct, then the anomalous pain cases would constitute a dramatic demonstration of the Existence Claim.

In fact, however, the relevant cases are highly controversial. The above interpretation is not obviously false, but neither is it the only available interpretation. It might be that unpleasant pain feels different than pain which is not unpleasant, despite the fact that both kinds of experience are recognizably painful. Perhaps they feel similar, but different, and this phenomenological difference accounts for the difference in unpleasantness. Perhaps both ordinary and anomalous pains represent certain sorts of bodily damage, and this is what makes them both recognizably painful.²¹ On their face, these interpretations are at least as plausible as the claim that anomalous pains feel just like ordinary pains. So the anomalous cases do not constitute a demonstration of the Existence Claim. In the absence of some evidence which decides between the competing interpretations—and especially given the truth of the phenomenal thesis—the anomalous cases cannot provide a quick and easy route to the Existence Claim.

5.2. Arguments from Combinatorial Principles

Is there some other quick and easy route available? One strategy would be to call upon some sort of general combinatorial principle. For example:

Phenomenology-Attitude Combination (PAC): For any type of experience E :

- there is a possible subject s_1 that is robustly disposed to like their experiences of E ,
- there is a possible subject s_2 that is robustly disposed to dislike their experiences of E .

If PAC is true, then there are possible taste differences which do not involve phenomenal differences. There are cases in which subject s_1 is robustly disposed to like a certain kind of experience, and subject s_2 is robustly disposed to dislike the very same kind of experience.

21. Interpretations along these lines are advanced by Stuart Rachels (2000), Hedda Mørch (2014), and by David Bain (2014). Rachels specifically considers cases involving strong painkillers; Bain specifically considers cases of pain asymbolia. In each case, they conclude that there is no strong reason to believe that abnormal pains feel like ordinary pains.

Of course, general principles like PAC are controversial—and PAC itself is no exception. Many philosophers of mind endorse the view that mental types—in particular *experiential* types—have a causal or dispositional essence. This view is endorsed by functionalists, and functionalism is probably the most popular view in the metaphysics of mind. But it is also endorsed by some identity theorists (Taylor 2018; Heil & Robb 2003), and some Russellian monists (Mørch 2017, Coleman 2015). So this view's appeal cuts across very different views in the metaphysics of mind.

Philosophers have various reasons for adopting the view that mental properties have a dispositional essence. It would be a mistake to wade too deep into the literature, but the following passage from John Hawthorne is instructive:

Consider the trio: phenomenal red, phenomenal orange, phenomenal blue. It is certainly true that when a subject enjoys all three phenomenal states simultaneously and is invited to judge which pair is most similar, she will judge that phenomenal red and orange are most similar. Phenomenal colors are thus disposed to produce certain similarity verdicts. These dispositions are causal powers of the phenomenal colors. And they seem to be causal powers that the phenomenal colors possess essentially. A possible world where a trio of phenomenal states *R*, *O* and *B* are not disposed to evoke the judgment that *R* and *O* are most similar could not be a world where the *R*, *O* and *B* are identical to phenomenal red, orange and blue, respectively. (2004: 355)

Here is another way to put the point. Intuitively, it's *no accident* that phenomenal red and phenomenal orange dispose us to report that they are similar. There is nothing *arbitrary* about the fact that we judge that they are similar. Rather, this judgment stems from the natures of the experiences themselves. This is just the sort of intuition motivating the view that experiential types have causal or dispositional essences.

Clearly, this view has nothing in particular to do with differences in taste. But the intuitions apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to paradigmatically pleasant and unpleasant experiences. Intuitively, it's no accident that feelings of disgust dispose us to avoidance behavior. Rather, they dispose us in this way because of what those experiences are like. This is not an argument against PAC, nor is it intended as one. The point is rather that there are general grounds for rejecting combinatorial principles like PAC, and those general grounds do not make an exception for the kinds of experiences which feature in differences in taste. Thus, PAC should be regarded as at best controversial. It is a heavyweight metaphysical principle, many philosophers of mind reject it, and indeed there are intuitive grounds for rejecting it. It is not a piece of common sense, and it does not provide a quick and easy route to the Existence Claim.

I cannot claim to have canvassed all possible routes to the Existence Claim. But I think that, in light of the foregoing considerations, we ought to at least regard it as tendentious. The Existence Claim is not supported by independently plausible arguments—none that I can find, at any rate—and there are intuitive considerations which count against it. This should make us all the more confident in the phenomenal thesis, and all the more wary of arguments which turn on the Existence Claim.

6. Conclusion

It is striking that, in recent years, much has been written about taste *disputes*—the sorts of things people *say* when they differ in taste. See for example Egan (2010), Sundell (2011), Palmira (2015), Capraru (2016), Ferrari (2016), Zeman (2016), Wyatt (2018), and Beddor (2019). But much less attention has been paid to taste differences *themselves*—that is, the differences that obtain between people who differ in tastes. This, I hope to have shown, is an important oversight. There is much to be learned from thinking about how we differ when we differ in tastes.

It can be natural to suppose that olives taste pretty much the same to everyone, and this can make it natural to think that we all get the same *kind of experience* from eating olives. But however natural this thought may be, it ought to be rejected. We ought to think that those who love olives have different experiences than those who hate olives—and we ought to reject arguments that assume otherwise.

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