

David Rosenthal
Philosophy, New York University

"Two Concepts of Mental Quality."

Abstract:

I contrast two conceptions of the qualitative character of perceptions and other mental states. On the consciousness-based conception mental qualities are fixed by our first-person access to them, whereas perceptual-role theories fix the mental qualities by their role in perceiving. Theories that rely on the consciousness-based conception face difficulties that perceptual-role theories avoid, such as the hard problem, the explanatory gap, and undetectable quality inversion.

I argue that consciousness-based theories, however superficially appealing, are groundless and uninformative. I also argue that a particular perceptual-role theory, based on quality spaces constructed from just-noticeable differences among perceptible properties, does justice in an informative way to our commonsense notion of mental qualities and various empirical findings. Combining this quality-space theory with a higher-order theory of what it is for mental states to be conscious results in a satisfactory theory of qualitative consciousness that sidesteps the explanatory gap, hard problem, and undetectable quality inversion.