

# **Thin Phenomenality and Machine C**

tive conception – *thick* (or *deep*) phenomenality, taking some cues from enactive ways of thinking. I suspect that MC researchers may be rather resistant to the conclusions I come to for they imply that success

## 4 Absent qualia arguments and MC responses

Arguments against the strong MC programme include versions of the absent qualia (AQ) argument. AQ arguments suggest that, for any set of putative computational/functional conditions for phenomenal consciousness, one can always consistently imagine those conditions obtaining but with phenomenal feel absent. To take a classic example, in Ned Block's 'Chinese Nation' argument (Block, 1978), one imagines a scenario meeting our proposed conditions but where the requisite computational operations are performed by some vast population of human operators. Such a scenario

missed as confusion, or defused by showing how a rich enough information-processing story can capture all the 'specialness' that phenomenality seems to have.

However I would claim that these arguments in defence of strong MC actually buy into a certain view about phenomenal consciousness which is shared by those who reject strong MC. That is, both the anti-computationalist critiques of M

## 7 Lived embodiment

One source for developing a thick conception of phenomenality is, I suggest, to be found in the enactive approach developed by Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991). The enactive approach to mind centres around the idea of 'lived embodiment' mentioned earlier. Such a conception is derived from the writings of Husserl and of Merleau-Ponty, but is also inspired by writings in theoretical biology, particularly work by Maturana and Varela on t

provides a reasonable research objective. However even he seems to stop short of proclaiming the possibility of computationally-based consciousness, where the latter is understood in this context. Yet in my view, if any MC programme is to succeed in its goal of capturing a conception of consciousness compatible with a fully adequate picture of our own human lived experience, then it has to go down a path of this sort.

## 9 MC and moral status

This enactively inspired version of the ‘thick’ conception of consciousness has, I believe, important consequences for how one views the *moral* status of an individual (see Torrance, 2003, 2004). Autopoiesis applies to self-maintaining agents of even the most primitive kind, yet it provides an essential element of what is involved in an adequate conception of highly developed, intelligent autonomous moral agency. Viewing beings as autonomous centres of meaning and purpose, as living and embodied conscious agents that enact their own existence, is, I believe, an important ingredient of building up a moral picture of ourselves, and those we wish to create in our moral image. On this picture, an agent will be seen as an appropriate source of moral agency only because of that agent’s status as a self-enacting being that has its own intrinsic purposes, goals and interests. Such beings will be likely to be a source of intrinsic moral concern, as well as, per

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much more profound sense than is currently envisaged by most in the field.

Also, the considerations proposed here suggest  
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