

Eliminativism about Phenomenology

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1. Introduction

I would like to defend eliminativism about phenomenology as follows. The characterization of conscious states as having a phenomenology is not one whose conceptual basis is sourced directly from introspection. Rather, it is introduced theoretically after reflection on what introspection tells us. This introduction is mistaken and the notion of phenomenology should therefore be eliminated. This type of view, in various forms, has had some prominent defenders, the most well-known of which is perhaps Dennett (1988, 1991) who argues the motivating “intuition pumps” adduced in favour of qualia, or phenomenological properties, are unsound. Similar views are advanced by other “Type A” materialists (e.g., Armstrong 1968, Dretske 1995, Lewis 1999, Ryle 1949, Wittgenstein 1953). Nevertheless, such a view remains unpopular and is regularly objected to on the grounds that it clashes with ordinary common sense (e.g., Balog 2016, Chalmers 1996, Nida-Rümelin 2016, Strawson 1994).

Recently, however, the theory of “illusionism” has revived a type of eliminativism about phenomenology in a different way (e.g., Frankish 2012, 2016; Graziano 2016; Humphrey 2011; Kammerer 2019, 2021; Pereboom 2011). Illusionists accept the phenomenological realist’s introspective claim that experiences seem to have a phenomenology, but they hold that this is merely an “illusion”. According to the illusionist, even though no phenomenological properties are exemplified by any conscious states, it still seems—in an illusory sense to be specified but which is not merely a theoretical error made about experience—as though some conscious states do have a phenomenology. Illusionists argue that it is introspection itself that is mistaken in this respect, not that we are mistaken

about what we introspect. The view, were it successful, could therefore provide an answer to the widespread intuitive scepticism regarding eliminativism while still eliminating the notion of phenomenology in any substantial sense.

I will raise some difficulties for illusionism and argue that eliminativism is the better view. After outlining the background in §2, in §3 I will discuss how to frame illusionism and argue against two formulations of the view according to which either: (a) introspection directly presents experience as having qualia as phenomenological realists also hold, only this is illusory in a sense modeled on perpetual illusion where non-exemplified properties are merely projected onto experiences in the sense of Locke's secondary qualities; or (b) introspection does not project qualia in this way but involves or triggers a disposition or other similar psychological mechanism that directly causes us to conceive of experiences as having qualia without support or interjection from theoretical argument. In contrast to these two views, however, introspection in fact provides no grounds for the introduction of the notion of phenomenology in either of the senses described in (a) and (b). The notion must therefore be introduced theoretically. In §4 I will argue that this introduction is fallacious and suggest a common, but fallacious, way in which the introduction is based on a comparison between perception and thought.

2. Background

Here is a traditional view with which everyone is familiar. There are two kinds of conscious states: those which have a phenomenology, i.e. those states which used to be called "sensations" and are now called "phenomenal" or "qualitative" states which have a "phenomenal character" that is accounted for by their "qualia" or "phenomenal properties", and those which do not. We can call the former "experiences" and the latter "thoughts". In Nagel's (1974) ubiquitous terms, there is "something it is like" to be undergo an experience but not to have a thought. To introduce more standard terminology from Block (1995), seeing a red square, for example, is "phenomenally conscious", whereas judging

that there is a red square in front of one is merely access conscious in that the judgement puts the subject in a position to immediately report, act on, and reason about its content. Unlike perceptual experience, thought has no qualitative, phenomenological nature. This phenomenological distinction between experiences and thoughts has long been common currency. It is assumed, for example, in Lewis' (1929) introduction of the notion of qualia, in Moore's (1903) discussions of transparency and sense-data, Russell's (1912) further distinction between acquaintance with sense-data in perception and universals in thought, and in Smart's (1959) identity theory.¹ In the contemporary debate, the underlying general notion is no less taken to be a pre-theoretical and neutral notion. Famously, in Block's case, for example: "You ask: What is it that philosophers have called qualitative states? I answer, only half in jest: As Louis Armstrong said when asked what jazz is, 'If you got to ask, you ain't never gonna get to know.'" (Block 1978: 281).²

A central debate in the philosophy of mind is between substantive and reductive realists about phenomenology. In contrast to substantive realists, reductive realists hold that, while experiences do have a phenomenology, these properties can be reduced to more fundamental (physical-functional) properties. While there is a significant metaphysical disagreement, therefore, on the nature of phenomenological properties, the reductive realist is in agreement with the substantive realist on the

¹ Smart, for example, holds that while sensations pose a problem for materialism, thoughts do not as they have no phenomenology and can therefore be handled behaviouristically. Moore contrasts perception with thought, which for Moore is the act of understanding and does not present its objects in the distinctive phenomenological way that perception presents its sense-data. This distinction is more vividly drawn by Russell. For Russell, the sense-data of perceptual acquaintance exemplify universals and therefore have colour, shape, and extension, thus bestowing a phenomenology on experiences of them. As thought, in contrast, acquaints us with universals and not their instances, they do not have such a phenomenology. Lewis describes the qualia given to us in experience as properties of experience which, although never presented without concurrent interpretation, are metaphysically independent from the conceptualization that is found in the concurrent thought. Lewis' intrinsic qualia are forerunners of the contemporary conception of qualia—irreducible, intrinsic, monadic, ineffable, qualitative properties of experience—although contemporary qualia are generally held to be experienced uninterpreted.

² This traditional view has recently been denied by some philosophers (e.g., Pitt 2004). Those who take this contrary position argue that all conscious states have a phenomenology. My reason for objecting to this view will become clear in §4. This view suffers from an extension of the fallacious introduction of phenomenology employed in characterization of experience: first the notion is fallaciously introduced through a comparison between perception and thought, and then once it has gained theoretical traction it is further mistakenly used to also characterize thought.

explanandum. Here, for example, is the opening passage from Tye (2002), a much-cited paper defending a functional-representational theory of experiences, where Tye introduces “phenomenal character” as the explanandum.

Representationalism is a thesis about the phenomenal character of experiences, about their immediate subjective ‘feel’. ... Strong or pure representationalism goes further. It aims to tell us what phenomenal character *is*. According to the theory developed in Tye 1995, phenomenal character is one and the same as representational content that meets further conditions (Tye 2002: 137).

There can be no doubt that such an intuitive acceptance of experiences as having a phenomenology is the standard view. And illusionists, unlike eliminativists, agree with this starting position. They are in agreement with both the substantive and reductive realist, and in opposition to the eliminativist, that experiences do seem to have a phenomenology. However, in contrast to the reductive and substantive realist, they argue that this is as far as we need to go: experiences *only seem* to have a phenomenology, when in fact they do not. This seeming is merely an illusion and there is therefore no question as to the nature of the phenomenological properties that experiences merely seem to have.

Frankish, for example, begins his paper *Illusionism as a Theory of Consciousness* by outlining illusionism as follows:

“introspection delivers a partial, distorted view of our experiences, misrepresenting complex physical features as simple phenomenal ones. Sensory states have complex chemical and biological properties, representational content, and cognitive, motivational, and emotional effects. We can introspectively recognize these states when they occur in us, but introspection doesn’t represent all their detail. Rather, it bundles them all together, representing it as a simple, intrinsic phenomenal feel” (2016: 17).

This shifts the focus from the nature of the properties which account for the phenomenology of experience, the question tackled by the substantive and reductive realists, to the “the illusion problem”, which is the main problem that illusionists seek to solve:

“Illusionists may hold that introspection issues directly in dispositions to make phenomenal judgments – judgments about the phenomenal character of particular experiences and about phenomenal consciousness in general. Or they may hold that introspection generates intermediate representations of sensory states, perhaps of a quasi-perceptual kind, which ground our phenomenal judgments. Whatever details, they must explain the content of the relevant states in broadly functional terms, and the challenge is to provide an account that explains how real and vivid phenomenal consciousness seems. This is the illusion problem.” (2016: 27).

Frankish is careful to contrast this version of illusionism with “eliminativism”, which is the view that:

“belief in phenomenal consciousness is simply a theoretical error, that rejection of phenomenal consciousness is part of a wider rejection of folk psychology, and that there is no role at all for talk of phenomenal properties – claims that are not essential to the approach” (2017: 14).

The illusionist therefore stakes out the following position.³ They are in agreement with substantive and reductive realists, and in opposition to eliminativists, that experiences do genuinely seem to have a

³ Frankish’s characterization of illusionism and the illusion problem and its contrast with eliminativism is shared by other illusionists such as Graziano, Humphrey, Kammerer, and Pereboom, even if they offer different answers to the illusion problem.

phenomenology. That is, they agree that the notion of phenomenology is genuinely sourced directly from introspection of experience. But in opposition to realists, they hold that introspection is mistaken in this respect about experience. However, they do not agree with eliminativists that the error involved is a “simply a theoretical error”, one that we make about what we introspect. Rather, the error is a pre-cognitive error made by introspection itself. Hence the “illusion problem” of explaining this illusion in non-cognitive, non-theoretical, terms. Illusionism therefore offers an attractive threading of the needle: acceptance of the intuitive characterization of experience as having a phenomenology, but without the attendant metaphysical difficulties involved in giving an account of phenomenological properties. However, as I will now argue, the “illusion problem” poses significant difficulties and eliminativism is the preferable view.

3. Two types of illusionism

Frankish (2012) asks whether there is a “theory-neutral explanandum” regarding the phenomenology of experience which would be acceptable to all parties (2012: 667). He proposes three different notions: classic qualia, diet qualia, and zero qualia. Classic qualia are the straightforward qualia that everyone knows well: intrinsic, ineffable, purely qualitative. Diet qualia are merely the “phenomenal characters (subjective feels, what-it-is-likeness, etc.) of experience” (2012: 668). Frankish argues that once diet qualia, presented as an intuitive theory-neutral or pre-theoretical conception of the phenomenology of experience, are stripped of the attributes that characterize classic qualia we are left only with “zero qualia”: “the properties of experiences that dispose us to judge that experiences have introspectible qualitative properties that are intrinsic, ineffable, and subjective” (2012: 669). As zero qualia are defined in terms of their cognitive effects and functional role, we can explain zero qualia and therefore describe how it is to undergo an experience with zero qualia without recourse to notions such as the qualitative, ineffable, intrinsic etc.—i.e. in non-phenomenological terms.

A robust notion of diet qualia would need to be, on the one hand, “weak enough to distinguish it from that of classic qualia, so that functional or representational theories of consciousness are not ruled out a priori. On the other hand, it needs to be strong enough to distinguish it from the concept of zero qualia, so that belief in diet qualia counts as realism about phenomenal consciousness” (2012: 669). Frankish considers some strategies—diet qualia as appearing to be classic qualia, appeals to conceivability, direct ostension of diet qualia, recognitional concepts, diet qualia as given—and shows that they all fail to steer a stable middle course between classic and zero qualia. If there are no classic qualia, then, as there is no robust notion of diet qualia, there are only zero qualia. Thus, “the chief moral is that the fundamental dispute about consciousness should be over the nature of the explanandum, not the explanans” (2012: 575). If the illusion of qualia, therefore, can be explained in terms of zero-qualia, then the illusionist can thread the needle: their theory will account for the appearance of phenomenology without needing to offer an account of phenomenology which exceeds that of zero qualia.

So, illusionists argue that what needs to be explained are really zero qualia, which are properties which merely dispose us to judge, incorrectly, that experiences have classic qualia (which I will refer to as just “qualia” from now on). Once zero qualia have been explained, there is no need to explain the qualia that experiences merely seem to have as a result of their zero qualia.

However, there are two possible construals of illusionism, and it can be unclear in the literature as to which is being proposed. Views on introspection and qualia will presumably divide illusionist theories into one of two camps in which either: (a) introspection directly presents experience as having qualia, only this is illusory in more or less the same sense as perceptual illusions are illusory and non-exemplified qualia are projected onto experiences in a way analogous to Locke’s secondary qualities; or (b) introspection does not project qualia in this way but involves or triggers a disposition or other psychological mechanism that directly causes us to conceive of experiences as having qualia without

support or interjection from theoretical argument. Illusionists who offer the explanation in (a) would hold that introspection does present qualia as this is traditionally understood, but that introspection is mistaken in this respect. With Pereboom (2011), for example, one could draw an analogy with illusory theories of secondary qualities, and then hold that introspection projects qualia on to experiences. Illusionists who would deny that introspection projects qualia in this way would offer an explanation of the type outlined in (b). On this view, it would be incorrect to hold that experiences introspectively “seem” to have qualia, if this is understood in a perception-like sense, but introspection nonetheless involves or triggers some automatic mechanism which disposes or causes us to believe that experiences have qualia.

Proponents of (b) will need to explain why there is such a psychological mechanism and how it works. Proponents of (a) will need to explain why and how introspection has evolved to project qualia. These are both significant explanatory burdens (see Frankish 2017 for some discussion). The eliminativist has no such burden, as all that needs to be explained is the error through which the notion of phenomenology is introduced. Although some will argue that the explanatory burdens on (a) or (b) can be met, I will argue, in §3.1 and §3.2 respectively, against both characterizations of the central aspect of the view as outlined in (a) and (b). Illusionism as outlined in (a) falls to transparency. And there is no such psychological mechanism as outlined in (b). Experience does not even seem to have a phenomenology. In Frankish’s terms, not only are there no classic qualia, there are not even zero qualia.

3.1. Transparency and qualia

I believe that experience is transparent and introspection does not present qualia as properties of experience. The construal of illusionism in (a) should therefore be rejected. An enormous amount has been written, and continues to be written, about transparency since Harman (1990). Many philosophers defend transparency and it is a well-known view. It would therefore be possible, noting that many

oppose transparency, to take an adherence to transparency off the shelf and move on. However, I would like to make the following point about the strength of the transparency claim, one which will be relevant to the discussion in §4.

The core of transparency was outlined by Moore (1903). Moore's central contention was that introspection reveals experience to be a relation to its objects, not itself an object which has the properties that are in fact properties of the objects which are its relata. Moore seems to have viewed the experiential relation, if not its objects, in the same way as contemporary direct realists. According to this view, when s perceptually experiences x , s stands in a primitive, dyadic relation, A , to x . A is common to all experiences, regardless of what x is. The central point that we can extract from Moore is that upon introspection, all of the properties with which we are familiar in experience are properties of x (see Hellie 2007 for a full discussion of Moore's argument). Although we can, according to Moore, become aware of A , A is not an object of one's experience or introspection as x is in A , nor does A have any properties of the kind that are exemplified by x . What we discover in introspection is that A is the relation through which we are aware of x . This relation is, as Moore famously put, it "diaphanous" in the sense that A does not come before the mind in introspection in the way that x does in A . There is something of a tension in this view, as it is not immediately clear what the awareness that A is a relation amounts to. However, present purposes require only the negative point that introspection makes one aware of there being an experience of x through A without this resulting from a direct awareness of any features of A in the way that A makes one directly aware of features of x —i.e. A makes one aware of intrinsic features of x , but introspection of A does not make one aware of any intrinsic features of A , (nor of any intrinsic features of any accompaniments to A which are distinct from x). One common way in which this is put is to contrast experience *of* x with a cognitive awareness *that* one is undergoing an experience of x (e.g., Dretske 1995, 1999; Tye 2014).

Proponents of contemporary direct realism essentially agree with proponents of sense-data that the experiential relation is dyadic, primitive, and unanalyzable, as well as transparent. Proponents of contemporary functional-representational theories also agree with this transparency claim but hold that representation provides structure to experience (e.g., Dretske, Harman, Tye). Representational content determines the objects experienced as what it is to experience, say, x as F , is for the experience to have x being F as part of its representational content. To experience a cup on the table, for example, is not to be related through a dyadic relation to the cup on the table (or some parts such as the facing surfaces) but to be in a mental state which represents a cup on the table and therefore brings the cup (or that there is a cup) before perceptual consciousness.

Great efforts have been exerted to raise counterexamples to the representationalist transparency thesis and thus to attribute qualia to experience. Transparency is committed to at least the supervenience of the subjective or qualitative aspects of experience on its representational content, and so if a case can be found where this supervenience fails, then there must be some qualitative aspect to experience which is non-representational. However, the transparency thesis is extremely difficult to refute, the representationalist version especially so.

Consider trying to refute transparency in the face of a determined sense-data theorist. Any qualitative aspect to experience will be attributed to the sense-data. The “blur” in blurry vision, for example, will be attributed to the sense-data. One could argue that there is in some sense a “qualitative” difference between myopic vision and 20/20 vision of a blurry painting which duplicates the “painterly eye” as cast over a myopic experience which shows that this is not so. However, the sense-data theorist will argue that what explains any such difference between the cases is non-perceptual knowledge. The pattern of attributing differing qualitative aspects of experience either to properties of the sense-data or to an awareness of the circumstances of the experience will repeat itself in response to each proposed counterexample. The anti-transparentist is in something a bind here. For the less properties that they

allow to sense-data, for example limiting them only to colour, shape and extension in two dimensions, the less scope there is to argue that there are cases where experiences with identical sense-data differ in a strictly experiential, and non-cognitive, aspect. However, should they increase the range of properties that they allow sense-data to have, such as being three-dimensional or exemplifying higher level properties, then the sense-data theorist is presented with a greater range of properties of sense-data which they will argue can change across the two cases. More expansive sense-data could likely account in this way for other classic counter examples such as Peacocke's (1983) trees, in which a tree twice the size and twice the distance away as another still "looks bigger" despite the two (allegedly) taking up identical sections of the visual field and thus "looking the same size", aspect switching cases in which, for example, the duck-rabbit "looks identical" yet in one case appears to be a rabbit and in another a duck, or cases where the elements of a scene can be held fixed but different aspects given visual "prominence" (Macpherson 2006).

I find it difficult to see how to refute the transparency aspect of the sense-data theory, as the proponent of sense-data can pack any genuine change of experienced properties into the sense-data. The functional-representational theory duplicates the sense-data theory's strategy, but with the addition that it is the content that determines the objects of experience and how they are experienced. So, changes in the way that things are seen are understood not in the first place as changes in the objects of experience but as changes in the contents of experience which in turn determine the ways in which the objects are experienced. This is a superior, more flexible, and more plausible version of the same tactic. Thus, blur, for example, becomes, a decrease in the determinacy or accuracy of representation, and aspects-switches are explained by different representations of some aspect of the scene such as visual depth, size, etc. This version of transparency, then, seems to me to be at least as difficult to refute as the sense-data version.

Transparency is a matter of significant controversy and the foregoing will, of course, no doubt fail to convince its opponents. However, I do believe that experience is transparent, and that introspection therefore reveals no qualia.

3.2. Introspection and Phenomenology

If experience is transparent, then introspection does not project qualia onto experiences, either in an illusory or accurate way. Illusionism is therefore not best understood in the way described in (a). This leaves (b): that introspection involves or triggers a disposition or other psychological mechanism that directly causes us to conceive of experiences as qualitative without cognitive interjection and support from theoretical argument. But the lack of qualia projection which rules out the version of the theory described in (a) also raises a problem for (b).

Consider transparency in respect of the illusionist commitment that introspection represents experience as having a “simple, intrinsic phenomenal feel” (Frankish 2016: 17). If this is correct, then introspection both represents experience as possessing properties which give it a “simple, intrinsic phenomenal feel” but does not make us directly aware of these properties in the way that introspection of qualia would were they projected onto experience on the model of Lockean secondary qualities as in (a). There is at least a tension here: introspection involves no projection and thus no direct awareness of qualia, but nonetheless represents experiences as having such properties—properties which are traditionally understood as being necessarily objects of experience and as revealing their nature in totality when they are experienced. The proponent of this theory, though, may argue that this air of tension depends on a particular conception of introspection as a perception-like state. If—as, note, transparency theorists likely hold—introspection is not perception-like in at least some aspects, then the lack of direct introspective awareness of qualia could be accompanied by a representation of a “simple, intrinsic phenomenal feel” even in the absence of the projection of these properties. Indeed, in

eliminating illusionism understood as in (a) the proponent of transparency perhaps presents the proponent of (b) with exactly this theoretical distinction in their account of introspection. Nevertheless, even if we can make sense of this claim, I do not believe that introspection contains or triggers the mechanism described in (b).

I do also do doubt, though, that transparency can be comfortably squared with this characterization of introspection. Without qualia as the direct objects of introspection, the view postulates a significant mismatch between the overall content output by introspection and the direct objects of introspection. A similar mismatch could be claimed for the transparency theorist's account of introspection as, for example, making one indirectly aware that one is undergoing an experience while making one directly aware only of the objects of that experience, but the illusionist's mismatch is more significant. Even if introspection makes one aware that one is undergoing an experience "indirectly", or without making one aware of the experience as an object in the way that one is aware of the objects of experience, there actually is an experience and introspection is not mistakenly making one aware of any properties of the experience that it does not have. And it is not a great introspective leap from being in an experience to being aware that one is undergoing that experience through introspection, even if one is not directly aware of the experience. This is a relatively modest and easy to grasp theoretical advance over the contents of experience: one can easily scrutinize experience and introspection and see how the objects of which one is directly aware in introspection are related to the experience that one must be in when one experiences them. And it is also easy to see why we possess such an introspective faculty. The same cannot be said for the illusionist's claim. Here, we are claimed to be aware not just that we are undergoing an experience in addition to awareness of the objects of experience, but also that this experience has significant and mysterious properties whose nature is usually held to be revealed in totality only by direct awareness of them, but of which we are not directly aware and which, in fact, experience does not have.

There is a further problem for (b). The eliminativist view is that the notion of phenomenology is introduced theoretically through cognitive reflection on the results of introspection. In order to avoid collapsing illusionism into a view more amenable to this interpretation, introspection itself must characterize experience as phenomenological prior to any independent cognitive reflection. The proponent of (b) must therefore claim that a characterization of experience in terms which are not reducible to non-phenomenological terms is either the direct casual output of introspection or the result of such a mechanism that is triggered by introspection and without the aid of broader theoretical reflection. But the alternative explanation according to which the characterization of experience as having a phenomenology is introduced as a consequence of theoretical reflection is significantly more plausible.

In a pair of recent papers, Kammerer (2019, 2021) identifies both the main motivation for this view of (b), which involves a problem that he calls the “illusion meta-problem”, and clarifies the different senses of “illusion”, “rich” and “sparse” illusions, that could be employed by proponents of (b):

“[the illusion meta-problem is] the problem of explaining not only why phenomenal consciousness seems to exist even though it does not (why we have an illusion of phenomenality), but also why it seems so strongly to exist (why the illusion of phenomenality is so peculiarly strong); notably, and that’s the crucial point, why it is so hard for us, not only to believe that phenomenality is an illusion, but even to seriously entertain the possibility that it is” (2021: 5).

“By “rich illusion”, I mean an illusion in which an object is positively presented in an incorrect way by a cognitively impenetrable representational process; by “sparse illusion” I mean an illusion in which the object is not positively presented in an incorrect way by a cognitively impenetrable representational

process—but presented in a merely partial or incomplete way, which in turn leads us to infer incorrect beliefs about the object (2019: 1–2).

The final claim in the first passage motivates the idea that it is introspection itself, and not a consequence of theoretical reflection on introspection, which is directly responsible for the illusory characterization of experience. If this characterization is a causal output of introspection, then this would explain the alleged strength of the illusion and illusionists therefore look for a mechanism which outputs this characterization. But I do not believe that there is good reason to posit such mechanism as the “illusion” does not have the features which would support this. As a consequence, it is not a rich illusion. Indeed, it is not really a sparse illusion either if this is understood to involve introspection’s misrepresentation of experience leading us to believe in phenomenology in a way which does not involve inference. There are, to again make use of Frankish’s distinction, not only no classic qualia, there are not even zero qualia.

After the passage quoted above, Kammerer (2021) goes on to argue that the strength of the illusion is not the result of a mere tendency or disposition to believe, only one which just happens to be particularly strong. He compares visual illusions, which, even though they do not disappear, we can disavow in light of countervailing evidence, and argues that the strength of the illusion about phenomenology is different in kind, not just degree. It is, he argues, not just that it is difficult to come to believe that there is no phenomenal consciousness, but that it is difficult to even entertain or conceive of this. This claim seems to me to be too strong. I for one have no difficulty in conceiving of this, and I imagine that the same will be true of many readers. Note that I am not saying that I can conceive of or entertain not being in a conscious state when introspecting one (although it is also not immediately obvious that this should be rejected), but that I can conceive of a conscious state that I

introspect as not having a phenomenology—not having qualia, being phenomenally conscious, etc. Indeed, it seems quite easy for me to conceive of this and entertain it.

I believe that we should therefore read the claim made by the proponent of (b) as a weaker one which does not require it to be difficult or even impossible to conceive of experiences which lack phenomenology. This, however, likely does not significantly alter the dialectic, for either way the illusionist will still look to “hard-wired features of our introspective mechanisms” (Kammerer 2021: 5) as an explanation for the allegedly stubborn nature of this illusory belief. The question to consider, then, is whether it is correct to couple the belief in experience as having a phenomenology so tightly to introspection as to require such an explanation. Again, I believe not.

In order for the illusionist to defend a theory on which experiences do genuinely seem to have a phenomenology, it is not enough for introspection merely to present experiences as merely conscious states or as having any cluster of properties which, no matter how complicated, do not entail the genuine notion of phenomenology captured by qualia. The characterization of experience as phenomenological must come to be believed directly as an output of introspection and unaided by independent reflection about the contents of introspection which makes use of premises whose content exceeds that which can be derived from introspection of experience. But it seems to me as though the psychological facts do not match this description of introspection and phenomenological beliefs. Here, I would like to echo objections I made to Chalmers’ (2018) discussion of the meta-problem of consciousness in Peebles (2020).

Chalmers’ meta-problem of consciousness is very closely related to the illusionist meta-problem. Frankish and Kammerer ask for an explanation as to why our belief in the phenomenology of experience is so resistant to revision. Chalmers asks for an explanation of the source of the hard problem of consciousness, our allegedly stubborn belief or intuition that consciousness cannot be physical. As the hard problem follows from the nature of the alleged phenomenological properties of

experience leading to problems with physical reduction, the illusion meta-problem and the meta-problem of consciousness are closely aligned. And Chalmers, like the proponent of (b), couples our belief in the hard problem very tightly to introspection:

“Problem intuitions can result from inferences. So that judgments that result from philosophical arguments will count as problem intuitions. Still, it is plausible that, in solving the meta-problem, the most important problem intuitions will be non-inferential judgments that arise prior to philosophical argument” (Chalmers 2018: 11–12).

Applied not just to the hard problem, but to the underlying belief in the phenomenology of experience from which the hard problem follows, the following is the view that I believe to be more plausible. We introspect, scrutinize experience and its objects, reflect upon it in relation to other conscious states and our background beliefs and theories, and then we draw philosophical conclusions. One of these conclusions is often that experiences have a phenomenology, another that there is therefore the hard problem of consciousness. But this is not an automatic, causal result of introspection. I raised two points in objection to Chalmers’ characterization of the meta-problem of consciousness, both of which also apply, I think, to the illusion meta-problem. First, that this description of introspection and its results is not true to the psychological facts. Second, that there is a significant content mismatch between the content of introspection and the content of the belief that introspection is alleged to support.

I ask the reader to consider when the idea that there is such a thing as phenomenology first struck them. Not the general notion of consciousness, the mind, the subject, or the notions of a mental state or experience, but a notion of phenomenology. I submit that this characterization, if it exceeds the former group of notions, does not automatically first strike one merely as a result of introspection. Yet

that is the claim that the illusionist must make. In order to avoid collapsing the view into eliminativism in which there is theoretical reasoning between introspection and belief in phenomenology, the illusionist must hold that either introspection directly causes the belief in phenomenology or disposes us to automatically form this belief, subject perhaps subject to some further conditions which cannot include any theoretical reflection or independent support. As with the claim that introspection so directly discloses the hard problem, this does not seem to me to be an accurate reporting of the psychological facts. Readers will be familiar with explaining such concepts to undergraduate students and will no doubt recall that it can sometimes be difficult for students to grasp even such seemingly—to philosophers—obvious ideas as that of experience having a phenomenology. Sometimes extended discussion of, for example, Mary's room is required to sufficiently pump the students' intuitions, and sometimes these intuitions remain stubbornly unforthcoming. This simple fact seems to me to raise a significant problem for illusionism understood as the thesis that mere introspection issues directly in a belief in phenomenology. If there is such a mechanism, one which causally outputs belief in phenomenology, or at the very least disposes one to automatically believe in phenomenology, then why does this mechanism so often fail?

A possible rejoinder to this argument is that although it may take some work to come to realize that experiences have a phenomenology, this can be done solely by unpacking the contents of introspection and without the aid of any (non-trivial) conceptual resources sourced from outwith introspection.⁴ As with the meta-problem of consciousness, this does not seem to me to be plausible for the illusion meta-problem. Here, this point I raised against non-inferential views of the meta-problem of consciousness is perhaps stronger than when applied to the illusion meta-problem, but it still has traction.

4 This seems to be Chalmers' (2020: 17–18) response to this objection to non-inferentialist views of the meta-problem.

It is difficult to see how plausible contents of introspection alone could suffice for the content of beliefs in the hard problem. The hard problem is a problem of multifaceted complexity involving such notions as the physical, causal, intentional, modal, fundamental, etc. It is hard to see how such notions can be derived or unpacked from the contents of introspection without the aid of independent premises sourced from outwith introspection. Introspection alone does not lead to belief in the hard problem. Inference which draws in content from outside introspection and applies it to the content of introspection is required. The formation of this belief is a broader, rational, inferential process. As the hard problem of consciousness is in a sense more complex than the notion of phenomenology as it relies on it, there will perhaps be less distance from the contents of introspection to the notion of phenomenology than there is to the hard problem. However, there still is a significant level of conceptual complexity involved in even the simplest characterization of phenomenology as, for example, intrinsic, ineffable, qualitative, etc. These are highly complex notions, not those of everyday discourse—and not notions that are plausibly output by introspection either directly and plainly or that can be unpacked without significant theoretical reflection on what introspection tells us about experience. And the point I made against illusionism understood as in (a) is again relevant for it removes any scrutable grounds for the notion.

I believe, then, that we ought not to characterize our belief in experience as having a phenomenology as, in Kammerer's terms, a rich illusion, whereby introspection directly misattributes properties to experience that it does not have. And I also believe it not quite right to characterize introspection as a sparse illusion if this means that introspection also presents experience in a way which directly leads to a belief in phenomenology in the way suggested in (b). Kammerer (2019) discusses Graziano's attention schema theory in these terms, for example. However, if Graziano's view is to count as a genuine type of illusionism of the type described in (b), then this schematic representation will have to directly lead to belief in phenomenology without inferential support from

independent premises and a broader theoretical reflection on the schematic representation and its structure, consequence, etc. Otherwise, and this is perhaps a better characterization of such views, introspection can lead one into making mistakes about experience when one reflects on it. But this is not illusionism as described in (b). Rather, it is the eliminativist view that our belief in phenomenology arises from (mistaken) theoretical argument, not directly from introspection.

So, it seems to me that as experience is transparent, illusionism should not be understood as in (a). Introspection does not project qualia onto experience. But we should not understand it as in (b) either, for the belief in phenomenology is not so tightly coupled to introspection as to support the mechanism described in (b). Introspection does not cause, dispose, or otherwise automatically lead to beliefs in phenomenology. There are, then, not only no classic qualia but no zero qualia either.

4. A Fallacy Regarding a Comparison Between Perception and Thought

This points the illusionist back towards the view that the introduction of phenomenology is a mistake that we make about what introspection tells us, not a mistake that we inherit from introspection. If not sourced directly from introspection, the introduction of the notion of phenomenology must lie in our reasoning about experience. To close, I would like to briefly discuss what I believe to be a central, perhaps foundational, example where reasoning about experience can introduce the notion of phenomenology, but where this reasoning is strictly fallacious. My point is, of course, not that this entirely explains the general belief in phenomenology, but I do believe that it is a pervasive and recurring feature of philosophical theory, one that plays a, if not the, central role in the introduction and solidification of the notion of phenomenology.⁵

⁵ Similar points have, of course, been suggested in the literature, both historically (e.g., Dennett 1988; Armstrong 1968b) and in contemporary responses to illusionism (e.g., Garfield 2016, Mandik 2016)

At the beginning of §2, I discussed the traditional view that divides conscious states into sensations, such as perceptual experiences, pains, and the like, and thoughts. If it is to exceed such notions as those of the mental or conscious, the notion of phenomenology must be fundamentally contrastive in this way. And indeed it standardly is introduced by pointing to the difference between, say, seeing a red square and thinking about a red square. The perception of the red square is “vivid”, or “phenomenal”, or “sensational”, and so on, in a way that the mere thought of the red square is not—i.e. the perception of the red square has a phenomenology that the thought of the red square does not. But the difference between perception and thought is, in fact, only epistemological. The introduction of any non-merely epistemological metaphysical notion of phenomenology to characterize any introspective distinction between the two groups is therefore strictly fallacious, no matter how intuitive its pull may be.

Consider again the discussion of transparency in §3.1. Introspection does not reveal anything more about experience than that it is a relation to its objects. When one experiences x , one is in a relation A to x which reveals some features of x . Upon introspection, one becomes aware that one is in a relation to x ; however, one is not aware of any features of A in the way that one is aware of features of x in A . There are thus no intrinsic properties of A which are introspected. But consider now whether the same is true of thought. It is the same in this respect. If one thinks about x , one is aware of x in whatever way one thinks about it., e.g. as the drawer in which I left my keys. If one perceives x , one is aware of it in whichever way it is that one perceives it, e.g. as (to vastly simplify) the upper left drawer in the brown desk over by the window. The very same transparency thus holds of thought as holds of perception. Upon introspection, one becomes aware that one is thinking about x , not aware of any properties of the thought other than that it is about x in the way that one is thinking about it—i.e. its content.

These introspective differences between perception and thought are differences only in the features that we are aware of, or in the way that we are aware of those features. To take two vivid examples, perception makes us aware of colours in a way that thought does not, and perception locates objects egocentrically in both space and time from the origin of both axes in a way that thought does not. But these differences are merely epistemological differences. Experience makes us aware of what colours are, for example, and makes us aware of objects in the similarly most fundamental way—knowing the egocentric location from one’s own relative position at the centre of the axes of time and space of an object through perception is the epistemically most fundamental, rock-bottom way that one can understand, conceive of, or know some external object. Thought does not make us directly aware of these features of objects and their perceptible properties. In thought, we remember objects that we have previously egocentrically identified, identify them as objects described by another, conceive of objects that we have not egocentrically identified, and so on, but we do not immediately identify objects egocentrically as we do in perception. Nor are their colours, for example, revealed to us. But, again, these are epistemological differences, differences in the contents and in the causal, functional, inferential, or psychological roles that these two types of conscious states play in our psychology.

This distinction leads to much metaphysics of the mind—acquaintance, conceptual and non-conceptual content, singular or Russellian propositions, analog and digital contents, in past times sense-data, etc.—but whatever merits these have as metaphysical theories of aspects of the mind they are not phenomenological. One cannot derive such notions as the qualitative, intrinsic, sensational, subjective etc., from these epistemological differences. To characterize aspects of these distinctions, for example non-conceptual contents of experience, or acquaintance relations in experience, as such is to fallaciously introduce some metaphysics which the underlying epistemological distinctions can do without and therefore do not support. Although it may be difficult to resist describing the underlying epistemological distinctions in terms which lead to phenomenological characterization, this does seem

to me to be either redundant loose talk, or technically fallacious in that it makes new metaphysics out of epistemological distinctions which do not license it.

And we can easily explain the source of this difference between experience and thought. Perceptual experiences (as types) result from the workings of the sensory system, whereas thoughts are not the direct causal outputs of the sensory system (this is overly simplistic, but the explanatory point holds). Both their functional role and the properties of their vehicles are thus quite different: experiences directly encode and report the output of the sensory system which directly represents the immediate environment and have the representational capacity required to represent these contents in significant detail; thoughts are at least a step removed and do not encode information in the same detailed way. Indeed, this seems to me to be the only difference between perception and thought. Perceptual experiences are thoughts, or judgements, which are directly output from the sensory system (see Armstrong 1968 and Pitcher 1971 for famous defences of this type of view). It may be difficult to avoid invoking such notions as “sensations”, “vividness”, “phenomenal character”, “something it is like”, and so on—i.e. notions of phenomenology—when we think about the difference between perception and thought, but these notions cannot be read-off either from experiences themselves nor from introspection, and upon examination their grounds reveal themselves to be merely epistemological in nature and thus not grounds for the introduction of any novel metaphysics of phenomenology.⁶

5. *Conclusion*

6 As I mentioned in §2, some philosophers hold that all conscious states have a phenomenology. Once the notion of phenomenology—“what it is like”, etc., has taken hold—it is easy to see how this can naturally be extended to cover all conscious states. Especially when one also considers how language can lead us astray in such circumstances (see, e.g., Hacker 2002).

I have made the case for the eliminativism as opposed to illusionism as follows. Introspection does not reveal qualia either as mistaken projections onto experience on the model of Lockean secondary qualities, or as a characterization of experience in these terms which is a direct output from introspection. There are thus no classic qualia and no zero qualia. The notion of phenomenology is therefore not introduced directly from or by introspection, but theoretically. In order to get some purchase beyond such notions as the conscious, the mental, the theoretical introduction is fundamentally contrastive of thoughts and experiences. However, the contrast between perception and thought which is the basis for this introduction only brings out epistemological differences which do not license the introduction of any notion of phenomenology. The notion should therefore be eliminated.

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