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Niikawa, Takuya

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Illusionism and Definitions of Phenomenal Consciousness

Abstract

This paper aims to uncover where the disagreement between illusionism and anti-illusionism about phenomenal consciousness lies fundamentally. While illusionists claim that phenomenal consciousness does not exist, many philosophers of mind regard illusionism as ridiculous, stating that the existence of phenomenal consciousness cannot be reasonably doubted. The question is, why does such a radical disagreement occur? To address this question, I list various characterisations of the term “phenomenal consciousness”: (1) the what-it-is-like locution, (2) inner ostension, (3) thought experiments such as philosophical zombies, inverted qualia and Mary’s room, (4) scientific knowledge about secondary qualities, (5) theoretical properties such as being ineffable and being intrinsic, and (6) appearance/reality collapse. Then I examine whether each characterization provides (i) a *dubitable* sense of phenomenal consciousness in which the existence of phenomenal consciousness can be reasonably doubted, (ii) an *indubitable* sense in which its existence cannot be reasonably doubted, or (iii) a *grey* sense in which it is controversial whether its existence can be reasonably doubted. By doing so, I show that there is no single sense of phenomenal consciousness in which illusionists and anti-illusionists disagree whether the existence of phenomenal consciousness can be reasonably doubted. I conclude that the disagreement between illusionists and anti-illusionists is fundamentally *terminological*: while illusionists adopt a dubitable sense of phenomenal consciousness, anti-illusionists adopt an indubitable sense of phenomenal consciousness. Because of the extreme vagueness and ambiguity of the term “phenomenal consciousness”, illusionists and anti-illusionists fail to see that they talk about different senses of phenomenal consciousness.

1. Introduction

I am now sitting in my armchair, tasting Springbank 15 years and looking at the monitor of my desktop computer. In so doing, I seem to have various phenomenal

experiences, such as a comfortable feeling, a flavour experience of the perfect combination of sweetness and saltiness and a visual experience of this sentence. How can I doubt the presence of these phenomenal experiences? Perhaps, I may make mistakes about their details. For instance, I may judge that the flavour experience does not contain any peaty element, where it actually does; I may judge that all words in this paragraph are clearly presented in my visual field, where only a few attentive words are actually presented with determinate shapes. However, it seems undebatable that *I have phenomenal consciousness*, in which various phenomenal elements appear to be presented. There seems to be nothing more obvious than this experiential fact; it seems as evident as that I am thinking or I exist.

However, some philosophers—so-called illusionists—claim that there is no phenomenal consciousness and that it is illusory that we have it. Keith Frankish, who is one of the most famous advocates of illusionism, states that “it [strong illusionism] claims that phenomenal consciousness is illusory; experiences do not really have qualitative, “what-it’s-like” properties, whether physical or non-physical” (Frankish 2016a, 17).

It is not surprising that many philosophers see the illusionist claim as clearly wrong. Rather than taking the illusionist claim literally and simply dismissing it, anti-illusionist philosophers typically take diagnostic or charitable attitudes to it.¹ For instance, Balog (2016) judges that the illusionist claim is clearly wrong and explores how it can apparently look tenable.

I find illusionism extraordinarily implausible simply because it flies in the face of one of the most fundamental ways the world presents itself to us: the awareness of our mind. Illusionism perhaps sounds plausible, or at least conceivable, from the third-person, scientific perspective we can take on mental representation. From this point of view, it is possible to argue that organisms have no introspective way of

¹ I prefer “anti-illusionist” to “realist about phenomenal consciousness”, because there is a few exceptional realist philosophers who take illusionism as attractive and not ridiculous at all (see, e.g., Chalmers 2018).

checking the accuracy of their introspective representations, and so they cannot rule out the possibility that these representations are non-veridical. (Balog 2016, 58).

Balog seems to think that illusionism is so obviously implausible that she does not need to give any substantial argument against it. Instead, Balog provides a diagnosis of how the illusionist claim can look tenable.²

Some philosophers state that since the illusionist claim is too ridiculous for sober philosophers to believe seriously, it should be interpreted not literally but in a charitable manner. For example, Nida-Rümelin claims that even an illusionist “does not in fact deny the existence of phenomenal consciousness. He is under the illusion of denying it and the illusion is based on a distorted view of what phenomenal consciousness is supposed to be” (Nida-Rümelin 2016, 211).

These diagnostic and charitable attitudes to the illusionist claim show that the anti-illusionist philosophers do not think that whether illusionism is true is worth seriously discussing.³ These attitudes seem to reflect the anti-illusionist firm belief that *the existence of phenomenal consciousness cannot be reasonably doubted*.⁴ Given this, the dialectical situation seems to be as follows: the anti-illusionist camp thinks that we cannot reasonably doubt the existence of phenomenal consciousness, while the illusionist camp actually doubts it, thinking that it can be reasonably doubted.

How can such a radical disagreement occur among sober philosophers of mind? When many philosophers strongly believe that we cannot reasonably doubt X, there is usually no philosopher who actually doubts X. For instance, many philosophers strongly

² For a similar response, see Strawson (1994, 101).

³ It is interesting to compare this reaction with the reactions to *illusionism of free will*. Even philosophers who argue for the existence of free will do not seem to take illusionism of free will as so ridiculous and crazy that we should take a diagnostic or charitable attitude to it (for a detailed debate over illusionism of free will, see Blackmore (2013)). This difference in attitude may reflect some significant conceptual difference between phenomenal consciousness and free will.

⁴ I will cash out the notion of “can reasonably doubt” in Section 3.

believe that we cannot reasonably doubt that we are thinking, and no sober philosopher actually doubts that he/she is thinking. Likewise, when many philosophers actually doubt X, then there is usually no philosopher who claims that we cannot reasonably doubt X. For instance, many philosophers actually doubt the genuine existence of possible worlds, and no philosopher claims that we cannot reasonably doubt it. In light of this, the dialectical situation over illusionism and anti-illusionism looks unique and weird.⁵

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the radical disagreement between the two camps, illusionism and anti-illusionism. In particular, this paper aims to uncover where the disagreement between illusionism and anti-illusionism lies fundamentally. In the next section, I will present two hypotheses about the nature of the disagreement between illusionism and anti-illusionism.

2. Two hypotheses

This section presents two hypotheses about the fundamental disagreement between illusionism and anti-illusionism.

One hypothesis is that the disagreement is fundamentally *terminological*. Perhaps, there are different senses of the term “phenomenal consciousness”. In some senses of it, we cannot reasonably doubt the existence of phenomenal consciousness; in other senses of it, we can reasonably doubt the existence of phenomenal consciousness. Let us call a sense of “phenomenal consciousness” in which *we can reasonably doubt* (and illusionists actually doubt) *the existence of phenomenal consciousness*, a “dubitable” sense, and one in which *we cannot reasonably doubt the existence of phenomenal consciousness*, an “indubitable” sense. The hypothesis is that (1) the anti-illusionist camp adopts an indubitable sense of “phenomenal consciousness”, (2) the illusionist camp adopts a dubitable sense of “phenomenal consciousness” and (3) there is no single sense of “phenomenal consciousness” in which both camps disagree about whether we can

⁵ I do not claim that there is no other example of this sort of debate. One possible example is the one over dialetheism (Priest, Berto, and Weber 2018).

reasonably doubt the existence of phenomenal consciousness. Let us call this hypothesis the “terminological hypothesis”. According to the terminological hypothesis, the disagreement occurs because the two camps adopt different senses of the term “phenomenal consciousness” and the debate lies fundamentally in which sense we should adopt of it. The terminological hypothesis suggests that the distinctively radical disagreement between illusionism and anti-illusionism consists in the extreme obscurity and ambiguity of the term “phenomenal consciousness”.

There is another hypothesis about the nature of the disagreement between illusionism and anti-illusionism. Perhaps, there is a “grey” sense of the term “phenomenal consciousness”, in which it is controversial whether we can reasonably doubt the existence of the referent of “phenomenal consciousness”. If there exists a grey sense of “phenomenal consciousness”, the issue can be substantial rather than terminological; that is, the issue can be of whether we can reasonably doubt the existence of phenomenal consciousness in a grey sense. The alternative hypothesis is, thus, that (1) there is a grey sense of the term “phenomenal consciousness” and (2) each camp disagrees about whether or not we can reasonably doubt the existence of phenomenal consciousness in the grey sense. Let us call this hypothesis the “substantial hypothesis”. The substantial hypothesis suggests that the radical disagreement between illusionism and anti-illusionism is due to the distinctively puzzling nature of the grey concept of phenomenal consciousness.⁶

⁶ Note that I do not rule out the possibility that some philosophers dispute about whether there exists phenomenal consciousness in a specific sense *on the common ground* that it can be reasonably doubted. Perhaps, some philosophers agree that phenomenal consciousness is (in part) defined as being such that the functional duplicate of us can lack phenomenal consciousness, and thereon debate whether there exists phenomenal consciousness as such (for this definition of consciousness, see Section 4.3). In this case, however, the philosophical debate would look like more straightforward and fruitful; that is, each camp takes the other camp’s claim seriously, understands it to some extent and tries to provide an argument against it. What I am

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In what follows, I will examine which hypothesis—the terminological or substantial hypotheses—is more plausible. To do this, I will list possible characterisations/definitions of the term “phenomenal consciousness” and examine whether each characterisation/definition is indubitable, dubitable or grey. In Section 3, I will make preliminary remarks. In Section 4, I will present the most standard definition of phenomenal consciousness, that is, the what-it-is-like definition of phenomenal consciousness and will examine whether it is indubitable, dubitable or grey. In Section 5, I will examine whether each of the possible characterisations of phenomenal consciousness that Frankish (2016a) listed is indubitable, dubitable or grey. Section 6 concludes by identifying where the fundamental disagreement between illusionism and anti-illusionism lies.

3. Preliminary Remarks

In this section, I make three preliminary remarks. The first remark is on the notion of “can reasonably doubt”. Supposing that P is a default view, it is plausible to think that we can reasonably doubt P *only if* there is a good reason to think that P does not hold. For instance, it is undoubtedly a default view that there is no round square. We cannot reasonably doubt it, because there is no good reason to think that there is a round square. It is also a default view that it is raining outside right now, since it perceptually appears to me that it is raining outside. However, we may be able to reasonably doubt it, since there may be a good reason to think that it is actually not raining outside, such as the realistic possibility of illusion and hallucination. When we want to claim that we can reasonably doubt P where P is a default view, we are required to present a good reason to think that P does not hold.

Given this, we can describe a general case in which two camps disagree about whether X can be reasonably doubted. Given that P is a default view, if one camp presents an *apparently* good reason to doubt P and the other camp denies that the reason is

interested in is not something like that but something more confusing and difficult to follow, namely the debate in which each camp seems to argue on different planes.

actually good, then the two camps disagree about whether P can be reasonably doubted. For instance, given that it is a default view that I have two hands, if one camp presents an apparently good reason to doubt it, for example the possibility that I am just a brain in a vat, and another camp denies that the reason is actually good by stating that the mere possibility is not enough to seriously doubt the default view, then the two camps disagree about whether the view that I have two hands can be reasonably doubted.⁷

In this light, we can describe the general scenario in which two camps disagree about whether the existence of phenomenal consciousness can be reasonably doubted. Given that it is a default view that phenomenal consciousness exists, the illusionist and anti-illusionist camps disagree about whether the existence of phenomenal consciousness can be reasonably doubted if (1) the illusionist camp presents an apparently good reason to think that phenomenal consciousness does not exist (despite its opposite appearance) and (2) the anti-illusionist camp denies that the reason is actually good.

The second remark is on the relation between a specific phenomenal experience and phenomenal consciousness. A standard metaphysical view of phenomenal consciousness is that phenomenal consciousness is the highest determinable of phenomenal conscious experiences, each of which is located in the determinate-determinable hierarchical structure (Kriegel 2015, 9–12). According to this view, for instance, a phenomenal headache experience is a determinate of a phenomenal pain experience, which is a determinate of phenomenal consciousness, which does not have any phenomenal determinable. On this view, the existence of specific phenomenal experience such as a phenomenal headache experience implies the existence of phenomenal consciousness. Given this, we can examine whether a sense of “phenomenal consciousness” is dubitable, indubitable or grey by exploring whether the corresponding sense of a paradigmatic phrase which is supposed to refer to *any phenomenal experience in the determinate-determinable hierarchical structure* is dubitable, indubitable or grey. If its sense is such that the existence of its referent can (or cannot) be reasonably doubted,

⁷ It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the general standard to determine whether a reason is good. For this issue, see Thagard (2004, sec. 4).

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then the corresponding sense of “phenomenal consciousness” would also be such that the existence of its referent can (or cannot) be reasonably doubted. In this paper, I adopt the metaphysical conception of phenomenal consciousness as the highest phenomenal determinable and assume that it holds for any concept of phenomenal consciousness. On this assumption, we can target any level of phenomenal experience to explore the fundamental disagreement between illusionists and anti-illusionists.

The third remark is on the difference between definitional properties and non-definitional properties. When we state that phenomenal consciousness has P, there are two relevant readings of it. First, we can read it as giving a partial definition of phenomenal consciousness, namely partially defining the term “phenomenal consciousness” as having P. In this case, if it turns out that nothing has P, it means that the referent of “phenomenal consciousness” does not exist. Second, we can read it only as attributing a property to phenomenal consciousness where the sense of “phenomenal consciousness” has already been given. In this case, even if it turns out that nothing has P, it does not mean that the referent of “phenomenal consciousness” does not exist. It only means that phenomenal consciousness does not have P. When one states that phenomenal consciousness has P, we need to consider in which way we should interpret it. Relevantly, even if having P is counted as a partial definition of “phenomenal consciousness” and it turns out that nothing has P, we may not have to accept that phenomenal consciousness does not exist. We may be able to appropriately revise the definition of “phenomenal consciousness” in a way that does not include having P.

4. The “What it is Like” Definition of Phenomenal Consciousness

This section discusses the most standard definition/characterisation of “phenomenal consciousness”, namely the “what it is like” (or “something it is like”) definition/characterisation (Nagel 1974; Tye 1997; Kriegel 2006; Koch 2012). According to this definition,

For any subject S and any psychological state X of S, X is a phenomenally conscious state if and only if X is such that there is something it is like for S to be in X (Stoljar 2016, 1190).

There are two distinct camps about the nature of the what-it-is-like definition. One camp claims that the what-it-is-like notion is an *ordinary* notion in the sense that it comes from our ordinary language (Farrell 2016; Stoljar 2016). The other camp claims that the what-it-is-like notion is a *technical* notion in the sense that it makes sense only in the technical context of the philosophy of mind (Lewis 1995; Byrne 2004).⁸ If it is a technical notion, then the what-it-is-like notion needs further technical definition/characterisation to be used for defining/characterising “phenomenal consciousness”. Otherwise, the what-it-is-like definition/characterisation is empty.⁹ However, given that the what-it-is-like definition makes sense only when the notion is further characterised technically, the very technical characterisation directly serves as the characterisation of “phenomenal consciousness” itself. What is essential is not the what-it-is-like notion but the technical characterisation. Thus, if the what-it-is-like notion is technical, we can skip it and focus directly on the technical characterisation in question.

In contrast, if it is an ordinary notion, the what-it-is-like definition can make sense independently of any further technical characterisation. I adopt this interpretation of the what-it-is-like notion. The question is, what analysis should we give to the what-it-is-like notion?

The most detailed and clearest syntactical and semantical analysis has been proposed by Stoljar (2016):

⁸ For an persuasive objection to the interpretation of the “what it is like” notion as being technical, see Farrell (2016).

⁹ Mandik (2016) emphasises the emptiness of what-it-is-like definition of phenomenal consciousness in the technical sense.

There are stereotypical contexts C such that there is something it is like to x for y to ψ is true in C if and only if there is in C some *experiential way* that y's ψ -ing affects x; in other words, there is in C some way that x *experiences* y's ψ -ing; in still other words, there is some way that x *feels* as a result of y's ψ -ing. (2016, 16 emphases added)¹⁰

Given this semantic analysis, the what-it-is-like definition of “phenomenal consciousness” is, in turn, analysed as follows:

For any subject S and any psychological state X of S, X is a phenomenally conscious state if and only if X is constitutively such that there is some way that S feels in virtue of S's being in X. (Stoljar 2016, 29)¹¹

In light of this analysis of the what-it-is-like definition of “phenomenal consciousness”, let us consider whether it is dubitable, indubitable or grey. Let me take a headache for example. To say that my headache is a phenomenally conscious state is to say that my headache is constitutively such that there is some way that I feel in virtue of my having a headache. In what sense can we deny that my headache is constitutively

¹⁰ The reason why he qualifies the scope of the semantic analysis to *stereotypical contexts* is that there are some untypical usages of the phrase “there is something it is like to x for y to ψ ” which do not concern our experiences. One example he uses comes from Snowdon (2010): What will it be like for the British economy to finally enter the Euro-zone? This (ironical) example obviously does not concern psychological effects but the economical effects of the British economy entering the Euro-zone on the British economy itself.

¹¹ The reason why Stoljar adds “constitutively” in this definition is to rule out some exceptional cases in which S's feeling is accidentally caused by being in an unconscious state. For instance, one may feel nausea by having an unconscious desire to do something morally bad. Since the unconscious desire does not always co-occur with a feeling such as the feeling of nausea, it does not satisfy the constitutive condition.

such that there is some way that I feel in virtue of my having a headache? There are three different ways to deny it. First, one might deny the constitutive condition, stating that my headache is such that sometimes there is some way that I feel in virtue of my having a headache but sometimes I do not feel anything in virtue of my having a headache. Second, one might deny that there is *a specific type* of feeling that I feel in virtue of my having a headache, while accepting that my headache is constitutively such that there are some different ways that I can feel in virtue of my having a headache. Third, one might simply claim that there is no feeling that I feel in virtue of my having a headache.

If one denies the existence of my headache as a phenomenal conscious state in the first sense, anti-illusionists can accept it by claiming that “my headache” is a disjunctive notion covering the two kinds of psychological states, one such that there is some way that I feel in virtue of my being in the kind of psychological state and another such that I do not feel anything in virtue of my being in the kind of psychological state. However, this does not mean that there does not exist any phenomenally conscious state. Rather, it merely means that I call two different kinds of psychological states “headache”, only one of which is a phenomenally conscious state. Thus, the first type of denial does not capture the disagreement between illusionism and anti-illusionism.

Likewise, if one denies the existence of my headache as a phenomenal conscious state in the second sense, anti-illusionists can accept it. Even though there are some different ways that I can feel in virtue of my having a headache and I cannot introspectively identify the (subtle) difference, it does not imply that there is no feeling that I feel in virtue of my having a headache. If there is at least one way that I feel in virtue of my having a headache, it is enough to say that my headache is a phenomenally conscious state. Thus, the second type of denial does not also capture the disagreement between illusionism and anti-illusionism.

If one denies the existence of my headache as a phenomenal conscious state in the third sense (namely claiming that there is no feeling that I feel in virtue of my having a headache), anti-illusionists would regard it as ridiculous. I do not feel anything when my hair naturally falls off. To say that I do not feel anything in virtue of my having a headache is to say that my having a headache does not differ from my hair naturally

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falling off in how they feel. This seems clearly wrong; I feel something when I have a headache, while I do not feel anything like that when my hair naturally falls off. Thus, anti-illusionists would claim that it is indubitable that there is some way that one feels in virtue of having a headache.

Arguably, even illusionists would not doubt that there is some way that one *feels* in virtue of having a headache in the *ordinary sense*. Frankish accepts that we can instantiate personal-level properties when being in pain, feeling sad, seeing a blue colour and so on; what he denies is that the personal-level properties are *phenomenal* (Frankish 2016b, 357–58). This suggests that illusionists would not deny that one feels something in virtue of seeing, smelling and thinking in the ordinary sense; rather, they would deny that the fact that we feel something in the ordinary sense implies that we have phenomenal consciousness *in a stricter, proper sense*. That is to say, illusionists would claim that the what-it-is-like definition of “phenomenal consciousness” does not fully capture the definitional properties of phenomenal consciousness, namely the *phenomenality* of phenomenal consciousness.

There are two lessons we can draw from this consideration. First, the what-it-is-like definition gives *indubitable* sense to the term “phenomenal consciousness”, and even illusionists do not doubt the existence of its referent. Perhaps, we have some misunderstandings of the referent of a phenomenal term. For instance, I may mistakenly think that there is only one type of feeling that I feel in virtue of my having a headache, where there are actually some different types of feelings that I can feel in virtue of my having a headache. In this case, I have a misunderstanding of the referent of the term “my headache as a phenomenal conscious state”. However, this does not mean that the *existence* of its referent can be reasonably doubted. A reasonable doubt can be, at best, presented to *the nature of the referent* rather than *its existence*. Second, since the what-it-is-like definition is the most standard one, the burden of further characterisation lies with the illusionist camp. If illusionists want to claim that there are further conditions that X must satisfy to be *phenomenal*, then they need to specify what they are. We can add the further conditions schematically to Stoljar’s definition of phenomenal consciousness:

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For any subject S and any psychological state X of S , X is a phenomenally conscious state if and only if X is constitutively such that there is some way that S feels in virtue of S 's being in X *and further conditions* $P_1...P_n$ are satisfied.

The question to be asked is, what can the $P_1...P_n$ be? The next section will address this question by focusing on Frankish's list of possible characterisations of "phenomenal consciousness".

4. The List of Possible Characterisations of "Phenomenal Consciousness"

Frankish states that we form the concept of phenomenal consciousness through "phenomenality language game".

The concept is typically introduced via a sort of language game (call it 'the phenomenality language game'), which involves a combination of inner ostension (think of how pain feels, coffee smells, etc.), reflection on the appearance/reality distinction (where is the colour of an after-image located?), thought experiments (imagine inverts and zombies), and scientific knowledge (science tells us that colours are really 'in' us), supplemented with theoretical claims (phenomenal properties are ineffable, intrinsic, radically private, and so on). (Frankish 2016b, 343).

According to Frankish, there are at least five different kinds of processes/items which contribute to the formation of the concept of phenomenal consciousness, namely (1) inner ostension (IO), (2) reflection on the appearance/reality distinction (AR), (3) thought experiments (TE), (4) scientific knowledge (SK) and (5) theoretical claims (TC). First, I will see how each process/item on Frankish's list is supposed to contribute to the formation of the concept of phenomenal consciousness. In doing so, I will also discuss which sense of phenomenal consciousness each process/item provides, namely dubitable, indubitable or grey. For the sake of argument, I will discuss IO , TE , SK , TC and finally AR in turn.

4.1. Inner Ostension

How does inner ostension contribute to characterising the term “phenomenal consciousness”? To see this, it is helpful to look at *outer* ostension. Suppose that I do not know what kind of animal a koala is, but my friend Mai knows it, and Mai tries to teach me what “koala” refers to in an Australian national park. Pointing to a koala, Mai says that this kind of animal is called “koala”. By this ostensive characterisation, I can learn what kind of animal “koala” refers to. Next, let us suppose that Mai and I both do not know what kind of animal a koala is, and Mai and I come to the national park, look at a koala for the first time and try to name the kind of animal. I come up with the name “hug devil” and define the term “hug devil” by ostension, namely pointing to the koala and stating that let’s call this kind of animal “hug devil”. In this way, I can give an ostensive definition to the term “hug devil”. Generally speaking, we seem able to define/characterise a term by ostension, namely by pointing to a kind of thing and define/characterise the term as referring to the kind of thing.

We also seem able to define/characterise terms by *inner* ostension. Let us suppose that I have a severe headache on the right side of my head but do not know how the pain experience is called in English, and Mai observes my behaviours and expressions such as having the right side of my head in my hand with groaning and says to me that I would have a migraine. Then I can tie the pain experience in my head with the term “migraine” and can give an inner-ostensive characterisation to the term “migraine”. That is to say, I can attend to the pain experience and can characterise the term “migraine” as *referring to the kind of pain experience*. Next, let us imagine a slightly different situation where I by myself try to name the kind of pain experience. I come up with the name “baking headache” and define the term “baking headache” by inner ostension, namely attending to the pain experience and stating internally that I call this kind of pain experience “baking headache”. In this way, I can give an inner-ostensive definition/characterisation to the term “baking headache”.¹²

¹² It may be controversial whether inner ostension can work for experiential terms as outer ostension works for non-experiential terms such as animal names. One might

In the same manner, we seem able to give an inner-ostensive definition/characterisation to *phenomenal terms*. For instance, I seem able to define/characterise “phenomenal migraine experience” by attending to my migraine experience and define the term as referring to the kind of experience, in the same way as I can define the term “baking headache”.¹³ We may add this condition in Stoljar’s definition of phenomenal consciousness:

argue that inner ostension must be *private* and that private inner ostension does not work as it is intended to do (Wittgenstein 1973). In response, Goldstein (1996) persuasively argues that inner ostension does not need to be private. Agreeing with him, this paper assumes that inner ostension is available to define experiential terms. However, even if it turns out that inner ostension is not available to define experiential terms, it does not mean that phenomenal consciousness does not exist. It only means that the characterisation of the term “phenomenal consciousness” in terms of inner ostension should be discarded. The what-it-is-like definition of phenomenal consciousness remains intact.

¹³ One may wonder how inner ostension can define/characterise a term as referring to *something beyond a token experience to which I actually attend*. When I say that I call this kind of experience “phenomenal migraine experience”, how is the scope of “this kind” determined? There are two views, metaphysical and epistemic. The metaphysical view is that there exists a metaphysical structure about experiential kinds and the scope of definition/characterisation of an experiential term based on inner ostension is in part determined by the metaphysical structure of the experience that is attended to. This is analogous to the view on which the scope of the term “hug devil” is in part determined by the biological characteristics of the animal that I actually point to when giving ostensive definition to the term. In contrast, the epistemic view is that the scope of the definition/characterisation of an experiential term based on inner ostension is determined by the subject’s relevant recognitional/epistemic capacities. This is analogous to the view on which the scope of the term “hug devil” is determined by my recognitional/epistemic capacities available to identify which animal is a hug devil. I leave open which view to adopt.

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For any subject S and any psychological state X of S, X is a phenomenally conscious state if and only if X is constitutively such that there is some way that S feels in virtue of S's being in X and (IO) *the way is the object of inner ostension when we ostend "phenomenal X"*.

Given that inner ostension works in this way to give sense to phenomenal terms, what is its type? Is it indubitable, dubitable or grey? Arguably, anti-illusionists claim that it is not reasonable to doubt that we feel something in virtue of having a migraine and the something is the object of inner ostension when we ostend "phenomenal migraine experience". Then, what would illusionists say? Illusionists would also not deny that there exists some way that we feel in virtue of having a migraine and the way is the object of inner ostension when we ostend "phenomenal migraine experience". At least I do not see any apparently good reason to deny it. Rather, illusionists would claim that being the object of inner ostension alone does not adequately capture *the phenomenality* of phenomenal consciousness. Simply put, illusionists would claim that *the what-it-is-like definition plus IO* is not sufficient to characterise phenomenal terms and there must be some further characterisation of them.

This suggests that the sense of phenomenal terms given by the what-it-is-like definition plus IO is *indubitable*. It would not be the sense of phenomenality in which illusionists doubt the existence of phenomenal consciousness.

4.2. Thought Experiment

The best known thought experiment regarding phenomenal consciousness is *philosophical zombies* (Chalmers 1997). It has been claimed that we can conceive of a creature – the philosophical zombie – which is a functional duplicate of S but lacks phenomenal consciousness. Through reasoning from conceivability to possibility, it is concluded that phenomenal consciousness does not supervene on physical/functional properties. Another important thought experiment is *inverted qualia* (Shoemaker 1982; Block 1990). It has been claimed that we can conceive of a case in which two persons who

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are identical in functional and/or physical properties can have distinct phenomenal experiences with reddish phenomenology and greenish phenomenology. Through reasoning from conceivability to possibility, again, it is concluded that phenomenal experiences do not supervene on functional and/or physical properties. Finally, there is *Mary's room* (Jackson 1982). It describes a scenario in which a great scientist Mary has never had any colour experience but has every scientific knowledge about colour. When she first has a phenomenal colour experience, she seems to get *new* knowledge about colour, namely knowledge about the phenomenal colour experience. However, if phenomenal experiences were identical to physical/functional properties, then she would have already known about phenomenal colour experiences before actually having them. Thus, the thought experiment suggests, phenomenal experiences are not identical to physical/functional properties.

Generalising this, the thought experiments indicate that *phenomenal experiences are different from physical and functional properties*.¹⁴ There are two different manners of adding this consideration to Stoljar's definition of phenomenal consciousness:

The Metaphysical Version:

For any subject S and any psychological state X of S, X is a phenomenally conscious state if and only if X is constitutively such that there is some way that S feels in virtue of S's being in X and (*M-TE*) *the feeling is different from S's physical and functional properties*.

The Epistemic Version:

For any subject S and any psychological state X of S, X is a phenomenally conscious state if and only if X is constitutively such that there is some way that S feels in virtue of S's being in X and (*E-TE*) *the feeling is such that it seems to be different from S's physical and functional properties*.

¹⁴ Although there may be more detailed analyses of how different they are, I leave it open and stick with this general characterisation in this paper.

Let us first discuss the metaphysical version. *M-TE* poses a difficulty to physicalism and attracts us to take dualism about phenomenal consciousness, because if X is constituted by something different from physical and functional properties, it is desperately difficult to explain X in a physicalist framework. Thus, if the term “phenomenal consciousness” is in part defined by *M-TE*, the existence of phenomenal consciousness poses a severe difficulty to physicalism. Provided that physicalism is an attractive metaphysical position and dualism is a problematic metaphysical position, there is an apparently good reason to doubt the existence of phenomenal consciousness that is in part defined by *M-TE*. Simply put, the conflict with physicalism provides a good reason to doubt it. Indeed, the main motivation for illusionists is that they can accept physicalism without any problematic complication and therefore do not need to accept any form of dualism (Frankish 2016a, sec. 2.3; Kammerer 2019, sec. 2). Thus, illusionists would claim that there is no X that satisfies *M-TE* and hence there is no phenomenal consciousness in the sense defined above.

Although some anti-illusionists may contend that there exists X that satisfies *M-TE*, they would not deny that we *can reasonably doubt* the existence of X that satisfies *M-TE*. Given this, the sense of “phenomenal consciousness” given by the what-it-is-like definition with *M-TE* is *dubitable*.

Since anti-illusionists take the position that we cannot reasonably doubt the existence of phenomenal consciousness, they would claim that the term “phenomenal consciousness” should be defined *without M-TE*. For anti-illusionists, it is *not a matter of definition but a substantial issue* as to whether phenomenal consciousness (defined without *M-TE*) is different from physical and functional properties. It actually seems controversial whether to include *M-TE* in the definition of phenomenal consciousness. Whereas some illusionist-friendly researchers seem to take it as a definitional property of phenomenal consciousness (Graziano 2019), reductive realists about phenomenal consciousness do not take it as a definitional property of it.

Let us turn to the epistemic version. Many philosophers of consciousness would accept *E-TE* as a feature of phenomenal consciousness; some realists about phenomenal consciousness seem to take it as a definitional property of phenomenal consciousness (Kriegel 2015, 52). Contrary to *M-TE*, *E-TE* does not in itself conflict with physicalism,

since it might be possible to explain why a psychological state appears to be different from physical/functional properties without accepting that it is actually non-physical/non-functional. As illusionists propose, for example, this appearance seems able to be explained in terms of introspective misrepresentation (Frankish 2016a; see also Graziano 2019). Given this, even illusionists would not deny that there exists X that satisfies *E-TE*; there does not seem to be an apparently good reason to doubt its existence.¹⁵ We can thus conclude that the sense of “phenomenal consciousness” given by the what-it-is-like definition with *E-TE* is *indubitable*.

4.3. Scientific Knowledge

Frankish takes colour science as an example of scientific knowledge that affects the concept of phenomenal consciousness. Recent colour science is claimed by some to show that external objects do not have colour as we experience it and that colour exists only in our consciousness (Hardin 1988).¹⁶ Given this, we may be able to partially characterise “phenomenal consciousness” by saying that phenomenal consciousness is such that it contains colour. The same consideration may hold for scientific knowledge about other secondary qualities such as taste and smell. If scientific research shows that

¹⁵ There may be a good reason to doubt *the conceivability* of the thought experiments presented above. For instance, it may be argued that philosophical zombies are inconceivable (Marcus 2004). If the thought experiments turn out to be inconceivable (despite its opposite appearance), the case for *E-TE* disappears. Given this possibility, it may be that the existence of X that satisfies *E-TE* can be reasonably doubted. Accordingly, the sense of “phenomenal consciousness” given by the what-it-is-like definition with *E-TE* may turn out to be *dubitable*. Since I do not think that this point is directly related to the dispute between anti-illusionists and illusionists, I ignore this issue in this paper.

¹⁶ Although I doubt that colour science really implies that external objects cannot instantiate experiential colour, I do not discuss this issue in this paper. See Maund (2019) for a comprehensive review on this issue.

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smells and tastes are not instantiated in the external world but our consciousness, we may be able to partially characterise “phenomenal consciousness” by saying that phenomenal consciousness is such that it contains smells and tastes. We may add this condition in Stoljar’s definition of phenomenal consciousness:

For any subject S and any psychological state X of S, X is a phenomenally conscious state if and only if X is constitutively such that there is some way that S feels in virtue of S’s being in X, where *(SK)* *S’s feeling is such that S can feel secondary qualities such as colour, taste and smell*.

As long as the term “phenomenal consciousness” is characterised as the container of experiential colour, no one wants to doubt that there exists the referent of “phenomenal consciousness” so characterised. This is because it is ridiculous to deny that we experience colours. The existence of experiential colour should be counted as data, though its nature should be further explored. The same can be said of other secondary qualities such as taste and smell. The existence of experiential taste and smell should be counted as data, though their nature should be further explored. Hence, if the term “phenomenal consciousness” is characterised as the container of secondary qualities, there is no good reason to doubt that there exists the referent of “phenomenal consciousness” so characterised. Thus, *SK* gives an *indubitable* sense to the term “phenomenal consciousness”.

4.4. Theoretical Claims

Frankish lists several examples of theoretical claims: phenomenal consciousness is (1) ineffable, (2) intrinsic and/or (3) radically private. X is ineffable if and only if X cannot be conceptually described. In the context discussing phenomenal consciousness, X is intrinsic if and only if X is nonrepresentational. X is radically private if and only if only the possessor of X can know X. We may add these theoretical claims in Stoljar’s definition of phenomenal consciousness:

For any subject S and any psychological state X of S, X is a phenomenally conscious state if and only if X is constitutively such that there is some way that S feels in virtue of S's being in X and (TC) *the feeling is ineffable, intrinsic and/or radically private*.

Note that many *realists* about phenomenal consciousness actually deny that phenomenal consciousness is ineffable, intrinsic or radically private (Frankish 2012).¹⁷ There are two relevant implications of this fact. First, it is implausible that we cannot reasonably doubt the existence of phenomenal consciousness defined as being ineffable, intrinsic or radically private. This means that TC gives a *dubitable* sense to the term “phenomenal consciousness”. Second, it is not standard to partially define the term “phenomenal consciousness” as being ineffable, being intrinsic and/or being radically private. It is more appropriate to consider the theoretical claims to be attributing corresponding properties to phenomenal consciousness, rather than defining the term “phenomenal consciousness”. Thus, there is no reason for anti-illusionists to accept TC as a partial definition of the term “phenomenal consciousness”.

Other theoretical claims can be treated in the same manner; that is, they can be counted as attributing corresponding properties to phenomenal consciousness, rather than defining the term “phenomenal consciousness”. For instance, one might claim that phenomenal consciousness is *luminous*, where X is luminous if and only if the following conditional holds: if a subject is in X, then the subject is in a position to know that the subject is in X (Williamson 2000, 95). We can interpret this claim not as defining the term “phenomenal consciousness” but as attributing a specific epistemic property to phenomenal consciousness. Even though it turns out that luminosity does not hold for phenomenal consciousness, it does not mean that phenomenal consciousness does not exist.

¹⁷ Although it has been actually debated whether or not phenomenal experience is intrinsic (Block 2003), there is almost no one who endorses the view that phenomenal consciousness is ineffable and/or radically private.

4.5. Appearance/Reality Distinction

How can reflecting on the distinction between appearance and reality contribute to defining/characterising phenomenal terms? Phenomenal consciousness is often counted as something for which the distinction between appearance and reality does not hold (Kripke 1982; Searle 1990). To see the point, let us first see how a perceptual appearance can be dissociated from the reality. It perceptually appears to me that there is a red apple in front of me. This perceptual appearance might not correspond to the reality. For instance, the apple might not be actually red and just looking red due to a tricky lighting condition, or more radically, I might just hallucinate a red apple where there is no red apple before me. In this sense, the perceptual appearance that there is a red apple in front of me can be dissociated from the reality. Most importantly, a perceptual appearance can be dissociated from the reality *in the most determinable level*. Even when I describe the perceptual appearance at the most determinable level, namely stating that it perceptually appears to me that *there is something* in front of me, it can be dissociated from the reality, because it is possible that the experience is totally hallucinatory and there is nothing in front of me in reality.

However, this kind of appearance/reality dissociation does not seem to hold for phenomenal consciousness. It seems plausible to think that when it appears to me that I have some kind of experience, I have some kind of experience in reality. In other words, it seems impossible that while it appears to me that I have some kind of experience, I do not have any kind of experience in reality. Note that this is not to say that if it appears to me that I have *a specific kind* of experience such as a pain experience, then I have *the specific kind* of experience in reality. Rather, the claim is that if it appears to me that I have some kind of experience, I at least have an experience of *the most determinable kind*. This conditional claim looks undeniable.¹⁸

¹⁸ One might insist that what philosophers typically have in their mind when mentioning the appearance/reality collapse is the stronger conditional claim that if it appears to me that I have a specific kind of experience, then I have *the specific kind of experience*. This may be correct, but there is a dialectical reason to focus on the weaker

Utilising the impossibility of the appearance/reality dissociation in the most determinable level, we can in part characterise the term “phenomenal consciousness” as being such that if it appears to us that we have phenomenal consciousness, then we actually have it. We may incorporate this characterisation into Stoljar’s definition of phenomenal consciousness:

For any subject *S* and any psychological state *X* of *S*, *X* is a phenomenally conscious state if and only if *X* is constitutively such that there is some way that *S* feels in virtue of *S*’s being in *X*, where (AR) *S*’s feeling is such that if it appears to *S* that *S* feels something, then *S* actually feels something in the most determinable level.

How would illusionists react to *AR*? To see this, let us consider an original form of the conditional representing appearance/reality collapse (*CAR*), namely that *if it appears to us that we have phenomenal consciousness, then we have phenomenal consciousness*. Illusionists argue against *CAR* (Frankish 2016a, sec. 3.2; Kammerer 2019, sec. 3). Since illusionists accept that it appears to us that we have phenomenal consciousness, it follows from the acceptance of *CAR* that we have phenomenal consciousness. This clearly conflicts with illusionism; this is why illusionists argue against *CAR*.

conditional claim. The aim of this paper is to uncover the fundamental disagreement between illusionists and anti-illusionists. And it has recently been widely accepted that the stronger conditional claim can be reasonably doubted (Schwitzgebel 2012; see also Williamson 2000, chap. 4). As I have mentioned in the Introduction, it may even be intuitive that we sometimes make mistakes about the details of our phenomenal experiences. Given this, the stronger conditional claim does not seem to be a point of dispute, since anti-illusionists would not claim that it cannot be reasonably doubted. Rather, it should be at best counted as a theoretical claim, which attributes a distinctive epistemic property to phenomenal consciousness. Thus, I focus on the weaker conditional claim, which (1) illusionists may deny and (2) anti-illusionists would think to be doubtless.

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However, it is important to note that CAR makes sense only if the sense of “phenomenal consciousness” used in CAR has already been given. Otherwise, we could not have any grip on what CAR talks about. If the term “phenomenal consciousness” is defined in terms of the what-it-is-like notion (in the way described in Section 3), then CAR is interpreted as the conditional (CAR*) that *if it appears to us that we feel something, then we actually feel something (in the most determinable level)*. Is there any reason for illusionists to deny CAR*? It only follows from the acceptance of CAR* (given that illusionists also accept that it appears to us that we feel something) that we feel something in the most determinable level. As we have seen in Section 3, this is what even illusionists can admit. Thus, if we take the what-it-is-like definition of phenomenal consciousness only, illusionists do not need to argue against CAR*.

However, the situation changes if we also add *M-TE* or *TC* to the definition of phenomenal consciousness:

For any subject S and any psychological state X of S, X is a phenomenally conscious state if and only if X is constitutively such that there is some way that S feels in virtue of S’s being in X and (*M-TE*) *the feeling is different from S’s physical and functional properties* or (*TC*) *the feeling is ineffable, intrinsic and/or radically private*.

As we have seen in Section 4.2 and 4.4, there is an apparently good reason to doubt the existence of phenomenal consciousness in the sense so defined. That is to say, *M-TE* conflicts with physicalism and *TC* is in itself doubtful (or at least very controversial). According to the above definition of phenomenal consciousness, the acceptance of CAR* implies that we feel something, *where* the feeling is different from our physical and functional properties or the feeling is ineffable, intrinsic and/or radically private. Since this implication is unacceptable for illusionists, they are motivated to argue against CAR*.¹⁹

¹⁹ Illusionists may raise another objection to CAR*. The acceptance of CAR* implies that we have a special kind of epistemic access to our feelings, which can be called

This consideration suggests that CAR^* is acceptable even for illusionists if $M-TE$ and TC are not included in the definition of phenomenal consciousness. Put differently, whether we can reasonably doubt the existence of the referent of “feeling” that is characterised by AR depends on whether to add $M-TE$ or TC to the characterisations of the “feeling”. Since whether to include $M-TE$ in the definition of phenomenal consciousness is actually controversial (though it is widely agreed that TC should not be included in it), it is controversial whether we can reasonably doubt the existence of the referent of “feeling” that is characterised by AR . This suggests that the sense of “phenomenal consciousness” given by the what-it-is-like definition and AR is *grey*.

5. Concluding Remarks

I have first discussed the most standard definition of phenomenal consciousness, namely the what-it-is-like definition, and have pointed out that it gives *indubitable sense* to the term “phenomenal consciousness”. Then I have examined other additional characterisations of the term “phenomenal consciousness”, namely inner ostension (IO), thought experiments suggesting that phenomenal consciousness is different from

“acquaintance”. However, it is unclear how acquaintance can be realized in a physicalist framework (Frankish 2016a, sec. 3.1). This objection seems to work only when a feeling is regarded as *different from physical and functional properties*. In other words, the objection also seems to depend on $M-TE$. If a feeling is identical to a certain neural state, for example, we can imagine a self-monitoring neural mechanism (1) whose function is to monitor the neural state and (2) which is in part *constituted by* the neural state itself. The self-monitoring mechanism cannot be activated to produce the appearance that I have a feeling unless I actually have the feeling, since the feeling is a constituent of the mechanism itself. We can think that acquaintance is realized by the self-monitoring neural mechanism; this is compatible with a physicalist framework. On the other hand, if a feeling is different from physical and functional properties, it is certainly unclear how acquaintance can be explained in a physicalist framework.

physical and functional properties (TE), scientific knowledge about secondary qualities (SK), theoretical claims (TC) and appearance/reality collapse (AR).²⁰

I have argued that (1) the IO-based sense of phenomenal consciousness is indubitable, (2a) the M-TE-based sense is dubitable, (2b) the E-TE-based sense is indubitable, (3) the SK-based sense is indubitable, (4) the TC-based sense is dubitable and (5) the AR-based sense is grey. It is important to note that although the AR-based sense of phenomenal consciousness is grey, the greyness relies on the *terminological controversy* of whether we should include *M-TE* in the definition of phenomenal consciousness.²¹ In other words, we can make it clear whether the AR-based sense is indubitable or dubitable by addressing the terminological controversy. Hence, the greyness of the AR-based sense of phenomenal consciousness does not suggest that the AC-based concept of phenomenal consciousness is distinctively puzzling. Rather, it reflects the controversy over the appropriate definition of the term “phenomenal consciousness”. There is no grey sense of phenomenal consciousness that does not depend on any terminological choice.

Thus, we can plausibly conclude that the terminological hypothesis is correct. That is to say, (i) the anti-illusionist camp adopts an indubitable sense of “phenomenal consciousness” (defined by the-what-it-is-like characterisation optionally with *IO*, *E-TE*, *SK* and/or *AR*) and (ii) the illusionist camp adopts a dubitable sense of “phenomenal consciousness”, which at least includes *M-TE*, and (iii) the debate between illusionism and anti-illusionism lies fundamentally in whether we should include *M-TE* in the definition of phenomenal consciousness. The main reason why the distinctively radical disagreement occurs between illusionists and anti-illusionists is that the term “phenomenal consciousness” is extremely obscure in that it has too many possible characterisations, and thereby both camps fail to see that the disagreement is

²⁰ I have assumed that the what-it-is-like notion is ordinary. But if the notion is technical, the five characterisations (IO, TE, SK, TC and AR) can be used to theoretically characterise the what-it-is-like notion with some formal revisions.

²¹ As we have seen in Section 4.4, the theoretical claims should not be counted as defining the term “phenomenal consciousness”. This is why I only take *M-TE* here.

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fundamentally terminological, that is, it consists in whether to include *M-TE* in the definition of phenomenal consciousness.

Importantly, to say that the disagreement is terminological is not to say that it is easy to solve, let alone unimportant. The illusionist camp may emphasise the historical processes through which the term “phenomenal consciousness” has been introduced and widespread. Undoubtedly, the historical processes have been associated with the thought experiments such as philosophical zombies, inverted qualia and Mary’s room. Given this, the illusionist camp may claim that if we define “phenomenal consciousness” without *M-TE*, there is no point in introducing the notion “phenomenal consciousness” in the first place; we should just call it “consciousness”. In contrast, the anti-illusionist camp may contend that the what-it-is-like definition is canonical, claiming that we should have the notion “phenomenal consciousness” so-defined to make it clear that it is not functionally defined. To address the terminological debate, there are a bunch of issues to consider, for example, (1) historical authenticity, (2) academic productivity and (3) the association with our ordinary concept of consciousness. Since the term “phenomenal consciousness” has been widely used in consciousness studies, it is an urgent issue to address the terminological debate over the sense of “phenomenal consciousness” in order to avoid unnecessary confusion.

If we can somehow agree to adopt a single sense of “phenomenal consciousness”, then possible characterisations of phenomenal consciousness that are excluded from the shared definition can be counted as referring to non-definition properties which may or may not be instantiated by/in phenomenal consciousness. For example, we typically do not count the properties of being ineffable, being intrinsic or being radically private as the definitional properties of phenomenal consciousness. Still, whether phenomenal consciousness has those properties is a substantial issue. That *P* is excluded from the definitional properties of phenomenal consciousness does not mean that *P* becomes irrelevant to the debate over the nature of phenomenal consciousness. Even though a phenomenon is not defined as having *P*, it may still be the case that the phenomenon has *P* in some or all conditions and whether or not the phenomenon has *P* may be theoretically important. Defining the term “phenomenal consciousness” in a way that

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discards some possible definitional characterisations of phenomenal consciousness does not necessarily shrink the scope of the debates over phenomenal consciousness.

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