Cognitive Phenomenology: An Introduction

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1. Introduction
Consciousness takes many forms. There are experiences in the five familiar sensory modalities: vision, audition, olfaction, gustation, and touch. There are bodily sensations of various kinds: itches, tingles, cramps, pains, and experiences of hunger, thirst and drowsiness. There are the conscious states associated with emotions and moods, such as feelings of elation, despair, boredom, fear, and anxiety. Each of these kinds of conscious state has a distinctive phenomenal character; there is ‘something it is like’ to be in such states. Although no one would pretend that we have a fully adequate conception of these forms of consciousness, it seems fair to say that we have a respectable grip on how they ought to be characterized. We know—at least in rough and ready terms—what it is that a theory of perceptual and sensory consciousness must account for.

But our conscious lives are not limited to perception, bodily sensation, and affect. With the possible exception of moments in which one is immersed in physical exercise, musical
performance, or some form of meditation, the stream of consciousness is routinely punctuated by episodes of conscious thought. We deliberate about what to have for lunch, we remember forgotten intentions, we consider how best to begin a letter or end a lecture, and we puzzle over the meaning of a friend’s remark and the implications of a newspaper headline.

In contrast with the amount of attention that has been devoted to perceptual and sensory consciousness, conscious thought has been woefully neglected. This neglect might be understandable if conscious thought were well understood, but even the most cursory acquaintance with recent philosophy of mind reveals that that is very far from being the case. The disagreement surrounding conscious thought is not limited to its details or fine-grained structure but concerns its fundamental nature.

Simplifying somewhat, we can distinguish two very different conceptions of conscious thought. One approach holds that although sensory states—broadly construed to include images, moods, and the feelings associated with emotions—have a distinctive ‘phenomenal character’ or ‘what it’s likeness’, conscious thoughts do not. Here are some representative examples of this position:

Bodily sensations and perceptual experiences are prime examples of states for which there is something it is like to be in them. They have a phenomenal feel, a phenomenology, or, in a term sometimes used in psychology, raw feels. Cognitive states are prime examples of states for which there is not something it is like to be in them, of states that lack a phenomenology. (Braddon-Mitchell & Jackson 2007: 129; original emphasis)

Should we include any mental states that are not feelings and experiences on the list of phenomenally conscious states? Consider my desire to eat ice cream. Is there not something it is like for me to have this desire? If so, is this state not phenomenally conscious? And what about the beliefs that I am a very fine fellow? Or the memory that September 2 is the date on which I first fell in love? … It seems to me not implausible to deal with these cases by arguing that insofar as there is any phenomenal or immediately experienced felt quality to the above states, this is due to their being accompanied by sensations or images or feelings that are the real bearers of the phenomenal character. (Tye 1995: 4).

Our thoughts aren’t like anything, in the relevant sense, except to the extent that they might be associated with visual or other images or emotional feelings, which will be phenomenally conscious by virtue of their quasi-sensory status. (Carruthers 2005: 138-9)
Neither the *believing* nor the *consciousness* that one oneself is believing *feels* like anything, if by ‘feels’ one means some sort of phenomenal or phenomenological state. It is only because we take sensations and sensation-like states as our paradigms of consciousness that we think that any state about which we are conscious must have phenomenalological properties. (Nelkin 1989: 424; emphasis in original)

We will refer to this as the ‘conservative’ conception of conscious thought—conservative because it conceives of sensory phenomenology, broadly construed as above, as the only kind of phenomenology there is. On this view, conscious thoughts lack any kind of distinctive non-sensory or non-imagist phenomenology. There are two main varieties of the conservative view. The first grants that conscious thoughts may possess phenomenal character, but that they do so only in virtue of the sensory states with which they are associated or embedded. The second and more radical version of conservatism holds that there is a non-phenomenal kind of consciousness, and that thoughts are conscious only in a non-phenomenal sense. (Some may regard reference to non-phenomenal consciousness as a contradiction; we will return to this point in §3 and §4.)

Until recently, conservatism was orthodoxy within the philosophy of mind. (At least, within so-called ‘analytic’ philosophy of mind.) Prominent textbooks in the subject would state the position without argument—indeed without even acknowledging that the view might be controversial. But controversial it is, for running alongside it is another—and increasingly influential—view, according to which conscious thoughts do possess a ‘distinctive’ and ‘proprietary’ phenomenology. This phenomenology—‘cognitive phenomenology’, as it has come to be called—can initially be defined negatively as a kind of phenomenology over and above sensory phenomenology. We will call this the ‘liberal’ conception of conscious thought—liberal because it sees the domain of phenomenology as extending beyond the sensory.¹

Here are a few recent expressions of this liberal view:

[T]he experience of seeing red and the experience of now seeming to understand this very sentence, and of thinking that nobody could have had different parents … all

¹ In this volume Siewert contrasts an ‘inclusivist’ conception of the phenomena of consciousness with an ‘exclusivist’ conception; Robinson contrasts ‘liberal’ views with ‘frugal’ views; Prinz contrasts ‘restrictive’ and ‘expansive’ conceptions of consciousness. These distinctions correspond, at least in broad outline, to our distinction between ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’ conceptions of the domain of consciousness.
fall into the vast category of experiential episodes that have a certain qualitative character for those who have them as they have them. (Strawson 1994: 194).

...generally, as we think—whether we are speaking in complete sentences, or fragments, or speaking barely or not at all, silently or aloud—the phenomenal character of our noniconic thought is in continual modulation, which cannot be identified simply with changes in the phenomenal character of either vision or visualization, hearing or auralization, etc. (Siewert 1998: 282; emphasis suppressed)

In addition to arguing that there is something it is like to think a conscious thought, I shall also argue that what it is like to think a conscious thought is distinct from what it is like to be in any other kind of conscious mental state, and that what it is like to think the conscious thought that p is distinct from what it is like to think any other conscious thought... (Pitt 2004: 2)

Intentional states have a phenomenal character, and this phenomenal character is precisely the what-it-is-like of experiencing a specific propositional-attitude vis-à-vis a specific intentional content. Change either the attitude-type (believing, desiring, wondering, hoping, etc.) or the particular intentional content, and the phenomenal character thereby changes too. (Horgan and Tienson 2002: 522)

The aim of this book is take stock of the debate between the advocates of these two conceptions of conscious thought—what we call the ‘cognitive phenomenology’ debate. Our contributors attempt to identify just what the cognitive phenomenology debate is about; they present arguments for and against the existence of cognitive phenomenology; and they wrestle with the question of what might be at stake in this debate.

The aim of this introduction is to set the stage for the chapters that follow, and to provide newcomers to this debate with a map by means of which they might orient themselves. We begin in §2 with a brief—and no doubt opinionated!—overview of the historical backdrop to the debate. In §3 we consider some of the terminological challenges posed by the current literature. §4 distinguishes various ways in which the commitment to cognitive phenomenology might be understood. In §5 we turn our attention to arguments for and against the existence of cognitive phenomenology. We conclude in §6 by considering some of the potential implications of the cognitive phenomenology debate.

2. Some Historical Context
One of the striking features of the cognitive phenomenology debate is that it exists at all. Why do some theorists (the ‘conservatives’) hold that there is no distinctive phenomenal character to thought, whilst others (the ‘liberals’) hold that there is? After all, it is widely
held that one is—or at least can be—aware of the phenomenal character of a given mental state just in virtue of being in that mental state. In light of this, explaining why there is such deep disagreement about the nature of conscious thought poses something of a challenge. (Compare the cognitive phenomenology debate to debates about the sensory-phenomenological character of perception, which are not typically about whether sensory phenomenology exists but about how best to explain it.)

In order to understand the current discussion of conscious thought we need to appreciate its historical roots. As theorists, we come to the study of consciousness with particular expectations and distinctive vocabularies in which to express those expectations, and our opponents may share neither our expectations nor our vocabulary. Although we cannot hope to provide a full ‘genealogy’ of the current cognitive phenomenology debate here, we do want to draw attention to some of the more influential historical moments that have helped shape the contemporary landscape.²

Because René Descartes has been such a central figure in the philosophy of mind, it seems fitting to begin with him. Consider Descartes’ definitions of ‘thought’ and ‘consciousness’:

by the term ‘thought’ I understand everything which we are aware of as happening within us, insofar as we have awareness of it. Hence, thinking is to be identified here not merely with understanding, willing and imagining, but also with sensory awareness. (1644; 1.195 Principles 9)

Thought [cogitatio]. I use this term to apply to all that exists within us in such a way that we are immediately conscious of it … thus all the operations of the will, the intellect, the imagination and the senses are thoughts. [1641: 2.116 Second Replies]

Part of what is significant about these remarks is that Descartes is introducing a term that applies to all mental states in virtue of something they have in common. To this extent, therefore, he is treating the concepts THOUGHT and in turn CONSCIOUSNESS as unitary concepts. All mental states of which we are consciously aware fall under the same concept—what Descartes is here calling ‘thought’ (‘cogitatio’). The property that unites all mental states that are part of the conscious field is our being immediately conscious of them. We find the same idea, expressed in different terms, in Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Reid, among many others.

² See the chapters by Prinz, Siewert and Woodruff-Smith for further discussion of the historical context to the cognitive phenomenology debate.
Franz Brentano (1874) also possessed a unitary conception of consciousness. According to Brentano, mental phenomena must be studied from the first-person perspective, a method that he called ‘phenomenology’. One rarely mentioned criterion that Brentano employed for demarcating the class of mental from non-mental phenomena is that all and only mental phenomena are the objects of inner awareness or inner consciousness. ‘Another characteristic which all mental phenomena have in common is the fact that they are only perceived in inner consciousness…’ (1874: 91). This criterion entails that there cannot be a mental state, properly so-called, of which we are unaware. There is no indication that Brentano thought of consciousness as taking one of two forms—a phenomenal form and a non-phenomenal form.\(^3\)

A similar conception of consciousness can arguably be found in Edmund Husserl, one of the central proponents of the phenomenological method. Husserl had a very inclusive theory of what the discipline of phenomenology covered—of what was *experienced* by the subject:

...percepts, imaginative and pictorial representations, acts of conceptual thinking, surmises and doubts, joys and griefs, hopes and fears, wishes and acts of will etc., are... ‘experiences’ or ‘contents of consciousness’. (1900–01: V. 2)

Husserl here endorses the view that acts of conceptual thinking are just as much experiences as percepts and pictorial representations. Kant had earlier expressed much the same point: ‘experience consists not only of feelings, but also of judgements’. (1788: Preface, *Critique of Practical Reason Ak. 5:14*).

This inclusive conception of consciousness can also be found in the writings of the very person to whom we owe the notion of the ‘stream of consciousness’—William James:

We ought to have some general term by which to designate all states of consciousness merely as such, and apart from their particular quality or cognitive function... ‘Feeling’ has the verb ‘to feel,’ both active and neuter, and such derivatives as ‘feelying,’ ‘felt,’ ‘feltiness,’ etc., which make it extremely convenient. But on the other hand it has specific meanings as well as its generic one, sometimes standing for pleasure and pain, and being sometimes a synonym of ‘sensation’ as opposed to *thought*; whereas we wish a term to cover sensation and thought indifferently...In this quandary we can make no definitive choice, but must,

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\(^3\) Of course, it is a further question whether the immediate awareness that Descartes and Brentano think that we have of our conscious states should be understood in *phenomenal* terms, but many are inclined to think that it should.
according to the convenience of the context, use sometimes one, sometimes another of the synonyms that have been mentioned. *My own partiality is for either FEELING or THOUGHT.*’ (1890: 1.186-7)

Moving closer to the present day, we can find a commitment to cognitive phenomenology in the work of G.E. Moore. Although Moore rejected the view of the British Empiricists, such as Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, that understanding involves internal imagistic goings-on, he did not think that it is altogether devoid of experiential character. Rather, he argued that it involves a certain sort of cognitive experience.

I will now utter certain words which form a sentence: these words, for instance: Twice two are four. Now, when I say these words, you not only hear them—the words—you also understand what they mean. That is to say, something happens in your minds—some act of consciousness—over and above the hearing of the words, some act of consciousness which may be called the understanding of their meaning....[B]esides the mere hearing of the words, there occurs another act of consciousness—an apprehension of their meaning.... (Moore 1910 / 1953: 57, 59)

Taken as a whole, these quotations reveal a strong commitment in the history of philosophy to what we have called the ‘liberal’ conception of consciousness. From Descartes to Moore, we find authors who possess a common commitment both to the claim that the concept of consciousness is unitary, and to the claim that the concept of experience applies just as firmly to thought—episodes of judging, entertaining, and understanding—as it does to sensory episodes.”

Just as today’s liberals can find anticipations of their position in earlier writers, so too can today’s conservatives. One influential figure in this tradition is C. I. Lewis. Although C. S. Peirce (1866) coined the term ‘quale’ (plural: ‘qualia’), it was Lewis’s (1929) use of it that left an abiding mark on the philosophy of mind. Lewis did not explicitly deny the existence of cognitive phenomenology, but he did contrast ‘qualia’, the subjective elements given in immediate experience, with the interpretational/conceptual elements of thought.

Qualia are subjective; they have no names in ordinary discourse but are indicated by some circumlocution such as ‘looks like’; they are ineffable, since they might be different in two minds with no possibility of discovering that fact and no necessary inconvenience to our knowledge of objects or their properties. All that can be done to designate a quale is, so to speak, to locate it in experience, that is, to designate the conditions of its recurrence or other relations to it. Such location does not touch the quale itself; if one such could be lifted out of the network of its relations, in the total
experience of the individual, and replaced by another, no social interest or interest of action would be affected by such a substitution. What is essential for understanding and communication is not the quale as such but that pattern of its stable relations in experience which is what is implicitly predicated when it is taken as the sign of an objective property. (1929: 124-5.)

We are presented here with a dichotomy between what is experiential and non-conceptual on the one hand and what is conceptual and non-experiential on the other hand.

Another figure who can be placed in this conservative tradition is Gilbert Ryle. Although Ryle himself had no theoretical use for such notions as the stream of consciousness or sensation, he does make the following striking remark:

Whatever series of sensations an intelligent person may have, it is always conceivable that a merely sentient creature might have had a precisely similar series; and if by ‘stream of consciousness’ were meant ‘series of sensations’, then from a mere inventory of the contents of such a stream there would be no possibility of deciding whether the creature that had these sensations was an animal or a human being; an idiot, a lunatic or a sane man … (Ryle 1949: 204-5)

These comments suggest a fairly radical version of conservatism, insofar as they would reduce the stream of consciousness to a series of sensory states, none of which have any substantive connection to thought. A similar view seems to be implicit in the following passage from J.J.C. Smart:

…for a full description of what is going on in a man you would have to mention not only the physical processes in his tissues, glands, nervous system, and so forth, but also his states of consciousness: his visual, auditory, and tactual sensations, his aches and pains. (1959: 142)

Hilary Putnam takes up this general train of thought, suggesting that there is a deep divide between the way in which concepts feature in our mental lives and the way in which images, sensations and feelings do:

When we introspect we do not perceive ‘concepts’ flowing through our minds as such. Stop the stream of thought when or where we will, what we catch are words, images, sensations, and feelings…to attribute ‘concept’ or a ‘thought’ to someone is quite different from attributing any mental ‘presentation’, any introspectible entity or event, to him. Concepts are not mental presentations that intrinsically refer to external objects for the very decisive reason that they are not mental presentations at all. (Putnam 1981: 17-18, emphasis added)
One recurring feature in the writings of the authors just discussed is the idea that sensory features are ‘directly’ experienced in a sense in which thoughts and their constituent concepts are not. According to this tradition, thoughts feature in the stream of consciousness only indirectly—by way, perhaps, of structuring those sensory elements which themselves make up the contents of consciousness. Those who reject cognitive phenomenology—‘conservatives’ in our terms—might not want to endorse all of the various claims expressed by Lewis, Ryle, Smart and Putnam, but it is possible to see them as the heirs of this intellectual tradition.

3. Terminology

We turn now from the historical background of the cognitive phenomenology debate to the terminology in which it is conducted. Perhaps the central question here is whether the key terms that are employed in discussions of conscious thought—‘phenomenology’, ‘phenomenal character’, ‘what it’s likeness’, ‘experience’, ‘qualia’—are used in the same ways by the various parties to the discussion. As we will see, there is reason to doubt whether this is so.

At the centre of the current debate, in addition to the core term ‘phenomenology’, we find the expression ‘phenomenal consciousness’ and its cognates ‘phenomenal property’, ‘phenomenal character’ and so on. The widespread usage of ‘phenomenal consciousness’ owes much to Ned Block (1995). Block denied that the term could be defined as such, but he did suggest that ‘phenomenal consciousness’ could be regarded as a synonym for ‘experience’. He also contrasted phenomenal consciousness with what he called ‘access consciousness’. A mental state is phenomenally conscious (or ‘P-conscious’) just in case there is ‘something it is like’ to be in that state, whereas a mental state is access conscious (or ‘A-conscious’) just in case its content is available for free use in reasoning and the rational control of action. Finally, Block provided examples of states that he took to be paradigms of phenomenal consciousness and access consciousness respectively:

The paradigm P-conscious states are sensations, whereas the paradigm A-conscious states are ‘propositional attitude’ states like thoughts, beliefs, and desires, states with representational content expressed by ‘that’ clauses. (1995/2002: 206-08)

By contrasting phenomenal consciousness with access consciousness, and by suggesting that sensations, rather than thoughts, are the paradigms of phenomenal consciousness, Block arguably encouraged the view that thought has no distinctive phenomenal character. However, Block did not deny that thoughts have a distinctive phenomenal character (nor, for that matter, does he deny that sensations can be access conscious), and
he expressed some uncertainty about what the phenomenal character of thought involves: ‘One possibility is that it is just a series of mental images or subvocalizations that make thoughts P-conscious. Another possibility is that the contents themselves have a P-conscious aspect independent of their vehicles’ (Block 1995/2002: n. 3).

The standard way in which the notions of phenomenal consciousness and phenomenology are introduced is by appeal to the phrase ‘what it’s likeness’. Phenomenal states, it is said, just are states that there is something it is like for the subject of experience in question to be in. Not only can we distinguish phenomenal states from non-phenomenal states by appeal to the notion of what it’s likeness, but—so the thought goes—we can also distinguish phenomenal states of different types from each other by reference to what it is like to be in them. What it is like to taste ripe strawberries differs from what it is like to smell lavender, and both of these experiences differ in turn from what it is like to feel the smooth touch of silk. But what exactly does ‘what it’s likeness’ amount to?

One obvious point is that ‘what it’s likeness’ must be understood in terms of what it is like for the subject itself to be in the relevant states (see e.g. Levine 2001; Strawson 1994). This qualifier is needed because there are all sorts of entities—shoes, ships, and sealing wax—that lack phenomenal states but for which the question ‘What is it like?’ is perfectly well-formed. Although there is a sense in which there is something it is like to be (say) a shoe, there is nothing that it is like for a shoe to be a shoe.

We should also note that there are uses of the phrase ‘what it’s like’ that do not even purport to pick out phenomenal states. Consider the claim that there is something that it is like to live in Hull (grow up in the circus; spend a winter at the North Pole, etc).

Presumably no one would use this expression in order to make the claim that there is a particular phenomenal property—a particular ‘what it’s likeness’—that is uniquely associated with living in Hull. Instead, reference to what it’s like to live in Hull (grow up in the circus; spend a winter at the North Pole) is presumably intended as a convenient way of identifying a messy collection of phenomenal states that those who live in Hull (grow up in the circus; spend a winter at the North Pole) might enjoy. As we will see, one__________

4 To the best of our knowledge the phrase was first used in print by Farrell (1951) and then Sprigge (1971). It also occurs in Wittgenstein’s Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, Vol. 1., although Wittgenstein’s remarks were not published until 1980. We owe the current influence of the phrase to Nagel (1974). See Lormand (2004) for a detailed analysis of the use of the phrase in the current literature.
of the questions at stake in the cognitive phenomenology debate is whether reference to the ‘what it’s likeness’ of thought can be understood on this model.

Although it is widely assumed that there is a notion of ‘what it’s likeness’ that is sufficiently well-behaved to function as the starting point for theorizing about consciousness, this assumption is far from universally granted.5 Lycan, for one, has described the phrase as ‘worse than useless,’ claiming that its use ‘sends the struggling mind of even the most talented philosopher into yet another affect-driven tailspin of confusing a welter of distinct issues’ (Lycan 1996: 77).6 Few theorists have endorsed Lycan’s pessimism, but a significant number have argued that there is more than one sense of ‘what it’s likeness’ at play in contemporary philosophy of mind. Georgalis distinguishes a restricted sense of what it’s likeness, which includes bodily sensations and perceptual states but not thoughts, from an unrestricted sense that includes not only sensory states but also propositional attitudes and their contents (Georgalis 2005: 69). Carruthers (1998, 2000) distinguishes what he calls ‘worldly what it’s likeness’ from ‘mental state what it’s likeness’, where the former concerns what the world (or the state of the organism’s own body) is like for an organism and the latter concerns what the organism’s representations of the world (or its own body) is like for the organism. Rosenthal (2002) argues for a similar distinction, couched in terms of a contrast between what he calls ‘thin phenomenality’ and ‘thick phenomenality’. Indeed, Lycan (2008) himself distinguishes what he calls ‘first-order’ what-it’s-likeness from ‘second-order’

5 There are also theorists who hold that the notion of ‘what it’s likeness’ can come apart from that of phenomenal consciousness. Consider the following passage from Kim’s Philosophy of Mind (2nd ed.): ‘…it is evident that there are conscious mental states with no special phenomenal character. In general, mental occurrences that we call ‘experiences’ appear to be those that possess phenomenal properties. If this is so, the idea of phenomenal character and the idea of there being something that it is like come apart. For it certainly seems that there is something that it is like to believe something, to suspend judgment about something, to want something, and so on. But as we saw, at least many instances of these states don’t have any phenomenal, sensory quality.’ (1996: 159)

6 Consider also Papineau’s claim: “There are many ways of being, from those of humans who make phenomenal judgments about their own states, through cats who can attend but not introspect, down to amoebas and plants with simple sensorimotor systems. Why suppose that the phrase ‘like something’ draws a line across this spectrum?” (Papineau 2002: 227). See also Snowdon (2010) and Hill (2010) for further worries about the utility of the phrase in discussions of consciousness.
what-it’s-likeness, where the former is an apparently monadic property inhering in a mental state, and the latter is a higher-order property of the apparently monadic property. Clearly any account of whether there is ‘something that it is like’ to have an occurrent thought needs to reckon with the charge that there is more than one notion of ‘what it’s likeness’ at play in discussions of consciousness.\(^7\)

What about the notion of experience? On one use of the term ‘experience’, there is a natural contrast between experience and thought. In this sense of the term, to experience an object is to be acquainted with it in perception rather than thought. It is this notion that is operative when we ask someone whether they have experienced vegemite (skiing; ballroom dancing; Paris) or whether they know about it only on the basis of testimony. In this sense of the term, thoughts are by definition non-experiential. Some of our contributors have this sense of ‘experience’ in mind. For example, Carruthers and Veillet announce that the purpose of their chapter is to “defend the view that phenomenal consciousness is exclusively experiential (or nonconceptual) in character,” assuming that if they can establish that consciousness is exclusively experiential, then they will have thereby shown that thought has no distinctive phenomenal character. But as we saw in §2, there are also uses of the term ‘experience’ according to which thoughts might qualify as experiential. In this broader sense of the term, an experience is any element or component of the stream of consciousness—any element that constitutes what it’s like to be the creature in question. To deny from the outset that thoughts can be experiential in this sense of the term would beg the question against the advocate of cognitive phenomenology.

Let us turn now from ‘experience’ to ‘qualia’. Perhaps no term in the study of consciousness carries with it more conceptual baggage than ‘qualia.’ One important contrast is between those who take it that qualia are by definition non-intentional states or ‘raw feels’, and those who leave open the possibility that qualia can be understood in intentional terms. Those in the second camp hold that to recognize the existence of (e.g.) colour qualia is not to take a position on whether colour experience can be captured in intentional terms, whereas those in the first camp hold that colour qualia exist only if it is not possible to capture colour experience in intentional terms. In light of this, the assertion that there are cognitive qualia is ambiguous. On the one hand, it could simply mean that conscious thought has an experiential or phenomenal character—a character that cannot be captured in sensory terms. On the other hand, it could mean that conscious thought has an experiential or phenomenal character that cannot be captured in intentional terms.

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\(^7\) See Byrne (2004) for an illuminating discussion of this literature.
This contrast is important, because the latter claim is considerably more controversial than the former.\(^8\)

Leaving that issue to one side, one might think that qualia must in any case be aspects of sensory or perceptual experience, and that the notion of cognitive qualia is something of a contradiction in terms. Perhaps there are uses of ‘qualia’ for which that might be the case, but there are also other—and venerable—uses that allow for the possibility of cognitive qualia. According to C. S. Peirce, there is ‘a distinctive quale to every combination of sensation…a distinctive quale to every work of art—a distinctive quale to this moment as it is to me—a peculiar quale to every day and every week—a peculiar quale to my whole personal consciousness…’ (1866: para 223). In the more recent literature, Flanagan distinguishes between a narrow sense of ‘qualia’ that is limited to sensations and a broader sense ‘under which fall all types of experience with subjective, first-person, phenomenal feel’. He goes on to say that ‘beliefs, thoughts, hopes, expectations, and propositional-attitude states generally, as well as large narrative structures, are qualitative (or have qualitative components) in this sense’ (Flanagan 1992: 67).

This brief survey of the terminology in which the cognitive phenomenology debate is conducted has raised the question of whether central aspects of the debate might not be ‘merely verbal’. Perhaps those who advocate the existence of cognitive phenomenology have something rather different in mind by that phrase than those who deny its existence. We won’t develop this theme here, but the reader might want to keep it in mind. Whether or not the cognitive phenomenology debate is ‘merely verbal’, one thing the preceding discussion clearly demonstrates is just how difficult it is to break out of a fairly narrow circle of terms: ‘phenomenological’, ‘what it’s like’, ‘qualia’, ‘experiential’. One can perhaps define each of these notions in terms of the others, but finding a stable place to nail down the entire cluster of concepts remains an on-going challenge, even if this does not imply breaking out of the cluster.

4. The Varieties of Cognitive Phenomenology

In §2 we distinguished a liberal conception of the nature of conscious thought, according to which conscious thought possess a distinctive phenomenal character, from a conservative conception, which denies that that is the case. We turn now to the task of providing a more detailed characterization of what separates the liberals from the

\(^8\) See Langsam (2000) for an argument for the existence of qualia in the second sense of the term based on the need to distinguish conscious thought with a certain content from conscious perceptions with the same content.
conservatives. We should note at the outset that providing a characterization of this debate is no simple matter. Different contributors conceive of the debate in different ways, and it is not entirely clear that there is a single claim that might separate all of those who endorse ‘cognitive phenomenology’ from those who reject it. The aim of this section is to distinguish some of the many positions that might—and arguably do—trade under the ‘cognitive phenomenology’ label.

We start with a point that is common ground among all parties to the debate: dispositional or unconscious states have no phenomenological character. As such, reference to the phenomenology of beliefs, desires, intentions and other thoughts should be taken to refer to occurrent or conscious tokens of such states. Readers who hold that beliefs (desires, intentions and so on) cannot as such be occurrent but are necessarily dispositional should take reference to conscious beliefs (desires, intentions and so on) as shorthand for the analogues of these states that can—by the lights of such readers—be occurrent. Reference to thoughts ought also to be understood in terms of token mental acts or states—particular, dated instances of thinking such-and-such—rather than thoughts considered as types.

4.1. First approximations
At the heart of the cognitive phenomenology debate is the question of whether conscious thought possesses a non-sensory phenomenology. As we read them, most of those who see themselves as advocates of cognitive phenomenology answer this question in the affirmative, whereas those who see themselves as opponents of cognitive phenomenology answer it in the negative. Within the literature, this non-sensory or purely cognitive phenomenology is sometimes referred to as ‘pure’ cognitive phenomenology (Levine) or as a kind of phenomenology that is ‘proprietary’ to thought (Pitt, Prinz).

Some theorists reject the existence of a kind of cognitive phenomenology that is ‘pure’ or ‘proprietary’, but nonetheless hold that there is a sense in which thoughts ‘possess’ a distinctive phenomenal character. There are two ways in which one might develop this idea. On the one hand, one might hold that thought always and essentially involves, or is somehow ‘realized in’, a sensory medium of some sort, such as inner speech. On this view, a particular thought will be ‘carried by’ a phenomenal state, but the phenomenology of that state will be exclusively sensory. On the other hand, one might hold that the occurrence of thoughts (and the deployment of concepts more generally) always has an impact on the structure of the subject’s sensory manifold. For example, one might argue that judging something to be (say) meat as opposed to soy changes the phenomenal character of the way that it tastes, or that recognizing someone changes the phenomenal
character of one’s visual perception of them. Levine refers to these phenomena as examples of ‘impure’ cognitive phenomenology; one might also refer to them as instances of ‘non-proprietary’ cognitive phenomenology.

It is an open question whether impure or non-proprietary cognitive phenomenology ought to be regarded as a genuine form of cognitive phenomenology. Although we recognize that there is something to be said for an inclusive conception of cognitive phenomenology that would bring such states within its ambit, we prefer a narrower use of the phrase according to which cognitive phenomenology is by definition ‘pure’ or ‘proprietary’. In our view, the label ‘cognitive phenomenology’ is best reserved for a class of phenomenal properties that are non-sensory. One consequence of this stipulation is that it is possible for someone to reject the existence of cognitive phenomenology whilst holding that conscious thought necessarily has a (sensory) phenomenal character. Indeed, one could even reject the existence of cognitive phenomenology but hold that the phenomenal character of a particular thought-type was unique to tokens of that type, for it might turn out that a certain cluster of sensory phenomenal properties is possible only in the context of a particular thought.

It is sometimes said that the cognitive phenomenology debate is about whether phenomenal character is ‘individuative’ or ‘constitutive’ of thought (e.g. Pitt 2004; Lycan 2008; Carruthers & Veillet, this volume; Tye & Wright this volume). We can distinguish two ideas behind such claims, one stronger than the other. The stronger—and perhaps more natural—reading of this claim is that there is a necessary relationship between phenomenal state types and thought state types, such that it is not possible to be in a certain thought state without being in a certain phenomenal state. For example, one might hold that there is some particular phenomenal property (or cluster of phenomenal properties) \( P \) that characterizes the thought \(<\text{fish swim}>\), such that one thinks \(<\text{fish swim}>\) if and only if one instantiates \( P \). Tye and Wright (this volume: p. 00) seem to have this idea in mind when they claim that the phenomenology of thought thesis requires ‘that there be a unique phenomenology that goes along with any token thought with the one content.’

A weaker notion of what it means to claim that the phenomenology of thought is individuative or constitutive applies not to thoughts considered as types but to thoughts considered as tokens. On this reading, to claim that phenomenal character is individuative or constitutive of thought is to claim that for any subject \( S_1 \), \( S_1 \)’s thought of a certain type (\( t_1 \)) has a phenomenal character that sets it apart from \( S_1 \)’s thought of a distinct type (\( t_2 \)). This thesis allows that there may be another subject of experience, \( S_2 \), whose \( t_1 \)-type thoughts have a different phenomenal character from that which \( S_1 \)’s \( t_1 \)-type thoughts
possess. It is important to note that on neither of these two readings is the claim that the phenomenology of thought is individuative or constitutive entailed by the claim that there is a pure or proprietary phenomenology of thought. In other words, one could coherently claim that thought possesses a non-sensory phenomenal character but deny that this phenomenal character is individuative or constitutive of it.

4.2 Attitude

Within the sensory realm we can distinguish a vast variety of sub-types of phenomenal states. Not only are there obvious differences between experiences in different perceptual modalities, there are also many distinctions to be made within perceptual modalities. What it’s like to smell a piece of mouldy camembert differs from what it’s like to smell a freshly baked apple pie, and each of these experiences differs from what it’s like to smell wet grass. Is there a similar kind of richness and diversity within the phenomenology of thought? If so, what are the central dimensions in terms of which it might be structured?

Following Bertrand Russell (1918, 1948), it is common to think of thoughts as involving attitudes to propositions. On this model, judging that fish swim is to be understood as taking up the attitude of judgment to the proposition <fish swim>. Similarly, desiring to visit Asmara is to be understood as adopting the attitude of desire to the proposition that <one visits Asmara>. Our interest here is not in the question of whether (all) thoughts can be understood as propositional attitudes, but in the question of whether this approach to thought might give us a useful framework for considering the structure of its phenomenology. Arguably it does: we can ask whether cognitive phenomenology is structured in terms of propositional attitudes, and we can ask whether it is structured in terms of propositional content. We examine these two questions in this and the following section respectively. (Both questions, of course, are premised on the assumption that there is something worth calling ‘cognitive phenomenology’.)

Are there distinctive phenomenal characters corresponding to attitude types? Russell himself appears to have thought so, claiming that ‘believing P feels different from disbelieving it, supposing it, desiring it, or from any other propositional attitude towards it’ (Russell 1948: 108/146). On this view, judging that P will have a phenomenal element in common with judging that Q, even if their overall phenomenal characters may differ; similarly, desiring that P and desiring that Q will share that phenomenal element which is in common to all occurrent desire. (Of course, it is arguable that each of these propositional attitudes will be characterized by a generic phenomenology of thought that sets them apart from sensory and affective states). One might think of the phenomenal characters of particular attitude-types on the model of the phenomenal character of the
various perceptual modalities. Just as visual experiences have a phenomenal character that distinguishes them from auditory experiences, so too merely cognitive (non-evaluative) judgments have a distinctive phenomenal character that distinguishes them from desires. Indeed, one could hold that phenomenal character marks fine-grained attitudinal contrasts between thoughts, such that there are distinct phenomenal characters associated with (say) the strength of one’s belief in a given proposition or the degree to which one desires that a certain state of affairs obtain (Klausen 2008).

One question raised by attitudinal phenomenology is whether it might play a role in the individuation of thought types. In his contribution to this volume, Shields argues that it does. A less demanding position—one that Shields considers and rejects—is that attitudinal qualia are merely associated with particular propositional attitudes, rather than essential to them, and that the individuation of propositional attitudes is fixed by (say) the functional roles of the propositional-attitude states. A third possible view would be that although attitudinal qualia are required in order for thoughts to play certain functional roles, it is those functional roles (rather than the qualia themselves) that makes it the case that a thought is (say) a belief rather than a desire.

What do conservatives make of attitudinal phenomenology? In their contributions to this volume, Prinz and Robinson allow that thoughts do possess a distinctive ‘what it’s likeness’ on the basis of their attitudinal character, but they argue that attitudinal phenomenology should be thought of as sensory in a suitably broad sense of the term. They suggest that attitudinal phenomenology should be grouped together with that of emotions and epistemic feelings, such as curiosity, novelty, confusion (see §4.4). On this view, the phenomenology associated with one’s desire to win the race may be explicable in terms of nervous anticipation, and the phenomenology associated with doubting that one will win the race may be explicable in terms of feelings of uncertainty.

In addition to the phenomenology of thoughts, some would argue that we ought also to recognize a phenomenology that is distinctive of thinking. Thoughts can occur as isolated events, but they are more usually tokened within the context of trains of thought. Sometimes the members of such trains are linked with each other only on associative grounds; at other times one thought leads to the next on the basis of inferential considerations. One might put together the thoughts ‘Today is Monday’ and ‘I have a faculty meeting on Monday,’ and as a result token the thought ‘I have a faculty meeting today.’ Examples like this encourage some theorists to hold that there are phenomenal states associated with certain kinds of transitions between thoughts. For example, one might argue that there is something that it is like to grasp the fact that one thought entails another (see, classically, James 1890: ch. 9; also Chudnoff 2010).
4.3 Content

A second dimension along which positions within the cognitive phenomenology debate can be located concerns the content of thought. At one end of the spectrum there are theorists who deny that the content of thought has any direct impact on its phenomenal character; at the other end of the spectrum are those who hold that every distinction between thought contents brings with it a distinction in phenomenal character. In between these two poles are theorists who hold that only certain kinds of distinctions between thought contents are reflected in phenomenal character.

There are, of course, multiple conceptions of intentional content. Some theorists conceive of intentional content in terms of objects and their properties, others conceive of it in terms of states of affairs or sets of possible worlds, and still others take content to involve modes of presentation. Complicating matters further is the fact that many philosophers allow that thought and perception can have multiple layers of content. In the same way that it is an open question which kind(s) of content might best capture the phenomenology of perception (Chalmers 2004; Pautz 2009; Thompson 2009), so too it is an open question which kind(s) of content might best capture the phenomenology of thought (if such there be).

A central question here is whether the kind of content that varies with phenomenal character is internal (‘narrow’) or external (‘wide’). This issue can be illuminated by contrasting the phenomenal states of a person on Earth with those of their ‘twin’ on Twin Earth (Putnam 1975). The Twins are, let us suppose, both consciously thinking thoughts expressed by the sentence ‘water is wet’ in their respective languages. If both of their ‘water’ thoughts can have the same cognitive-phenomenological character, then cognitive-phenomenological character must be associated with internal (‘narrow’) content. If, on the other hand, their two ‘water’ thoughts cannot have the same cognitive-phenomenological character, such character must be associated with external (‘wide’) content.

Although both proponents and opponents of cognitive phenomenology have usually assumed that cognitive phenomenology must be narrow, it is not obvious that this assumption should be granted. After all, it is somewhat controversial whether perceptual phenomenology must be narrow, with a number of theorists arguing that it is wide (Dretske 1996; Lycan 2001; Tye forthcoming). If it can be plausibly argued that perceptual phenomenology is wide, then perhaps it can also be plausibly argued that cognitive phenomenology is wide. (Of course, if it can be argued that cognitive-phenomenological content is narrow, then perhaps one could adapt such arguments to show that perceptual-phenomenological content is also narrow.)
A further question about cognitive-phenomenological content is whether it is structured. It is very plausible to suppose that perceptual phenomenology is structured. What it is like to see a dog involves a state whose phenomenology is in some way ‘built up’ out of phenomenal states that concern its various features — its shape, its colour, its spatial location, and so on. Is the phenomenal character of thought similarly structured? Consider the thought <apples are sweeter than lemons>. Just as its intentional content is built up out of the concepts APPLES, LEMONS and IS SWEETER THAN, so too one might argue that its overall phenomenal character is built up out of the phenomenal characters of its constituent concepts. Of course, this view is not a forced move, and advocates of cognitive phenomenology might argue that the structure of the phenomenal character of thought content is somewhat independent of its conceptual structure. Each of these possibilities (and more) remains open at this stage.

A final but particularly important question to be addressed here is whether phenomenal properties might ground or determine the content of thought. A version of this idea can be found in Kripke’s seminal discussion of meaning in Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language. In an attempt to address the question of what might fix the meaning of the concept PLUS, Kripke considers the following proposal:

Why not argue that ‘meaning addition by “plus”’ denotes an irreducible experience, with its own special quale, known directly to us by introspection? … I refer to an introspectible experience because, since each of us knows immediately and with fair certainty that he means addition by ‘plus’, presumably the view in question assumes that we know this in the same way we know that we have headaches – by attending to the qualitative character of our own experiences. Presumably the experience of meaning addition has its own irreducible quality, as does that of feeling a headache (Kripke 1982: 41, see also p. 43).

Although Kripke went on to reject this proposal, a number of theorists have argued that there is a form of intentionality — often dubbed ‘phenomenal intentionality’ — which is wholly constituted by phenomenology alone (see e.g. Farkas 2008; Loar 2003; Kriegel 2007; Horgan and Tienson 2002). A radical form of this approach holds that phenomenal intentionality tells the full story about intentionality—that phenomenal intentionality is the only genuine form of intentionality (see e.g. Farkas 2008). A less radical version of this position holds that although phenomenal intentionality is the fundamental form of intentionality, there are modes of intentionality that are fixed by non-phenomenal relations (see e.g. Horgan and Tienson 2002).
Whichever of these two views they adopt, advocates of phenomenal intentionality need to account for the apparent existence of unconscious intentionality. Kriegel addresses this challenge in his contribution to this volume, arguing that it can be met by adopting what he calls ‘interpretivism’. His proposal is that a state possesses unconscious intentionality just in case an ‘ideal’ interpreter would interpret it as having the relevant content. Kriegel argues that since interpretation is a conscious activity, interpretivism entails that unconscious intentional content is grounded in cognitive phenomenology. Whether or not Kriegel’s arguments are persuasive, they are a further reminder of how close the question of cognitive phenomenology is to issues that lie at the heart of philosophy of mind.9

4.4 Emotion, perception, and epistemic feelings
So far we have focused on the question of whether thoughts—instances of judging, entertaining, desiring, intending, and so on—have a phenomenal character. In this section we examine three other domains of mental activity in which there is some reason to think we can find cognitive states that possess a distinctive phenomenology: the domain of emotion; the domain of categorical perception; and the domain of epistemic feelings.

There is no doubt that emotional states often (if not invariably) involve phenomenal properties. There is something that it is like to experience sadness about the death of a loved one, jubilation about the success of a friend, or anger at a perceived injustice. The question is whether the phenomenal character of emotions can be captured in purely sensory terms. On some accounts, emotions are to be understood as nothing more than ‘perceptions of changes in our respiratory, circulatory, digestive, musculoskeletal, and perhaps endocrine systems’ (Prinz this volume: p. 000; see also Prinz 2004). Other accounts hold that emotions have cognitive components, but they regard the cognitive element(s) of emotions as independent of their phenomenal character. For example, on some views emotions are composites of a cognitive state (such as a judgment) and a non-cognitive sensory feeling. Such views would be of a piece with ‘conservative’ conceptions of phenomenology.

There are, however, conceptions of the phenomenal nature of emotions that are more of a piece with liberal treatments of phenomenology. For example, Gunther (2004) argues that various types of emotional states (anger, joy, and so on) are characterized by distinctive, and non-sensory, phenomenal properties. More recently, Montague (2009) has argued that

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9 For further discussion of the idea that intentionality (including all dispositional intentionality) can and perhaps must be grounded in consciousness see Searle (1992: ch. 7), Fodor and Lepore (1994), Strawson (1994, ch. 7, 2008) and Horgan and Kriegel (2011).
emotions should be understood as *sui generis* intentional attitudes, and that part of their distinctiveness is to be explained by their phenomenological character, and in particular by what she calls their ‘evaluative phenomenology’, which she takes to be non-sensory.

Categorical perception or ‘perceiving as’ provides us with a second domain in which we may find cognitive states that possess a distinctive phenomenology. Consider the claim that one can see something as a pine tree, smell the odour in the air as that of over-ripe bananas, or hear a sequence of notes as the opening of Schubert’s *Unfinished Symphony* (Wittgenstein 1953: II. ix; see also e.g. Siegel 2005; Bayne 2009; Masrour, in press; Woodruff Smith this volume). Do such acts of ‘high-level’ or ‘categorical’ perception possess a distinctive phenomenal character? Many have been tempted to think so. After all, we do describe objects as (e.g.) looking like pine trees (smelling like over-ripe bananas; sounding like the *Unfinished Symphony*). However, it is controversial whether such talk is to be understood in phenomenal terms, and a number of authors have argued that such claims are true only in a non-phenomenal sense of the relevant appearance terms (see e.g. Lyons 2005; Tye 2000).

Suppose, however, that it can be plausibly argued that high-level or categorical content does enter into perceptual phenomenology—what bearing would this have on the cognitive phenomenology debate? It may not provide direct evidence for cognitive phenomenology, for one could argue that high-level perception is quite distinct from thought. At the same time, it is not implausible to suppose that the existence of categorical phenomenology might provide indirect evidence for cognitive phenomenology (in our sense of the term). At the very least, one might argue that if ‘perceiving as’ involves conceptual content—as many theorists have argued—then the phenomenology of categorical perception shows that there is no inconsistency between the possession of conceptual content and the possession of a proprietary phenomenal character. One might also argue that some instances of ‘perceiving as’ ought not be regarded as purely perceptual but are intermediate (or perhaps ‘hybrid’) states that straddle the divide between thought and perception. The notion of a perceptual judgement, which some of the contributors to this volume appeal to (see Woodruff-Smith), can perhaps also be regarded as a state that is neither categorized as purely perceptual or purely thought-based.

A third domain of mental activity in which we may find cognitive states with a distinctive phenomenal character is that of ‘epistemic feelings’—feelings of knowing, tip of the tongue experiences, experiences of familiarity, experiences of understanding and so on (Clore 1992; Koriat 2000; Trout 2002). The distinctive phenomenal character of these states
seems to be intimately related to their cognitive content. Indeed, Goldman appeals to tip of the tongue experiences as evidence for the existence of non-sensory phenomenology:

When one tries to say something but cannot think of the word, one is phenomenologically aware of having requisite conceptual structure, that is, of having definite…content one seeks to articulate. What is missing is the phenomenological form: the sound of the sought-for word. The absence of this sensory quality, however, does not imply that nothing (relevant) is in awareness. Entertaining the conceptual unit has a phenomenology, just not a sensory phenomenology (1993: 24).

Not everyone has been persuaded by Goldman’s conception of tip-of-the-tongue phenomenology. Drawing on Jackendoff (1987), Lormand (1996) argues that such experiences can be accounted for solely in sensory terms. According to him, there is a void associated with the absent phonological representation, and there is something it is like, sensorily speaking, to experience this void (akin to what it’s like to ‘hear’ silence). Tip-of-the-tongue experiences involve a sense of effort, but according to Lormand this too is sensory, akin to what it is like to sense physical effort. So, a question remains as to whether tip-of-the-tongue experiences—not to mention the other examples of ‘epistemic feelings’—are states with a distinctive cognitively-structured phenomenology.

We have examined three domains in which there is some reason to posit states with a non-sensory phenomenal character. How might this bear on the question of whether thought itself has a phenomenal character? One possibility is that these states might function as a kind of bridgehead for the advocate of cognitive phenomenology: if the cognitively-structured states seen in emotion, categorical perception and epistemic feelings possess a distinctive phenomenology, why shouldn’t thoughts also possess a distinctive phenomenology? Establishing that these three domains furnish us with examples of cognitive states that possess a distinctive phenomenology might not demonstrate that thoughts also possess a distinctive phenomenology, but it might succeed in undermining various objections to that thesis. For their part, those who reject cognitive phenomenology will either want to resist the claim that emotion, categorical perception and epistemic feelings do involve states with a distinctive non-sensory phenomenal character, or they will want to draw a principled distinction between these ‘thought-like’ states and thoughts proper. Whether either of these tasks can be successfully executed is a task we leave for readers to explore.
5. Argumentative considerations
Having distinguished various conceptions of cognitive phenomenology, we turn now to some of the central arguments for and against its existence. These arguments differ in the extent of their ambitions. Some of them are relatively modest, aiming to establish only that we enjoy—or, as the case may be, do not enjoy—cognitive phenomenology. Others are bolder, purporting to show either that cognitive phenomenology is in some way necessary for thought or, alternatively, that it is impossible. We will start with some of the less ambitious arguments.

5.1 Introspection
The most straightforward argument for the existence of cognitive phenomenology involves a direct appeal to introspection. Just as (say) emotional or perceptual phenomenology is introspectively discernible as such, so too—say the advocates of cognitive phenomenology—there is a type of phenomenology distinctive of thought that is also introspectively discernible as such. As Horgan and Tienson, put it, ‘attentive introspection reveals that both the phenomenology of intentional content and the phenomenology of attitude type are phenomenal aspects of experience, aspects that you cannot miss if you simply pay attention’ (Horgan & Tienson 2002: 522-23). Perhaps few advocates of cognitive phenomenology would put things quite as boldly as this, but the idea that cognitive phenomenology is introspectively manifest enjoys widespread support. In the current volume endorsement for this view can be found in the chapters by Horgan, Kriegel, Montague, Pitt, Shields, Siewert, Strawson, and Woodruff-Smith.

Needless to say, conservatives have not been persuaded. Here, for example, is Wilson:

In the spirit of Horgan and Tienson’s appeal for a reader to ‘pay attention to your own experience’, I have just done the decisive experiment: I thought first that George Bush is President of the United States, and had CNN-mediated auditory and visual phenomenology that focused on one of his speeches. I then took a short break, doodled a little, wandered around the room, and then had a thought with that very same content and…nothing. (Wilson 2003: 417)

In a similar vein, Nichols and Stich describe the view that there is a distinct feel or set of qualia for every type of propositional attitude and content as ‘crazy’:

As best we can tell, believing that 17 is a prime number doesn’t feel any different from believing that 19 is a prime number. Indeed, as best we can tell, neither of these states has any distinctive qualitative properties. Neither of them feels like much at all. (Nichols and Stich 2003: 196).
This position is echoed by a number of contributors to this volume. Robinson claims that there is nothing it feels like, phenomenally speaking, for one to have a particular belief or desire (see also Robinson 2005); Tye and Wright trace the primary source of resistance to cognitive phenomenology to its ‘introspective unfamiliarity’ (p. 5); Prinz comments on the ‘introspective elusiveness’ of purely cognitive qualities; and Carruthers and Veillet claim to be unable to detect anything in the contents of their introspection that might qualify as cognitive phenomenology.

It is possible to distinguish at least two ways in which introspection has been used to motivate the case for cognitive phenomenology. Most straightforwardly, some theorists have argued that there are conscious thoughts which are not clothed in any kind of sensory or imagistic ‘garb,’ and hence that the ‘what it’s likeness’ of such thoughts must be non-sensory (see e.g. Siewert 1998; Pitt 2004). As Prinz notes in his chapter, the question of whether non-imagistic thought exists is not a new one but has been around since the late nineteenth century. In fact, this question was at the heart of one of the most important debates in the history of introspection (Boring 1953; Lyons 1986; Ogden 1911). On one side were Titchener and his followers at Cornell, who claimed that introspection provides no evidence of non-imagistic thought. On the other side were the members of the Würzburg school—notably Külpe, Ach and Bühler—who claimed to have discovered introspective evidence of non-imagistic thought. The debate between these two positions was extremely heated. As one observer put it,

one is left with the feeling that the case is largely reduced to mere assertion, and denial, occasionally to vituperative recrimination. It seems to be largely a matter of ‘It is!’ or ‘It isn’t’, adorned with such adjective as taste may dictate and capacity afford. (Angell 1911: 305).

The debate surrounding the existence of non-imagistic conscious thought continues in this volume, although hopefully with less ‘vituperative recrimination’.

However, even if it should turn out that all conscious thought is clothed in sensory form, one might still argue that it is possible to introspectively discern non-sensory elements within a thought’s overall phenomenal profile. On this view, ‘what it’s like’ to consciously judge (say) that guavas are fruit might involve distinctively cognitive elements in addition to whatever sensory elements it might have, such as those associated with inner speech. One way to develop this claim would be to argue that even if every tokening of the thought <guavas are fruit> is accompanied by some sensory phenomenology or other, it is far from obvious that there will be any sensory elements in common to all such tokenings.
And yet—the liberal might argue—introspection reveals the existence of a common phenomenal element running through all conscious tokenings of this thought.

Can a liberal reasonably hold that cognitive phenomenology only ever occurs in conjunction with sensory phenomenology? Prinz (this volume) suggests not, arguing that if there are non-sensory phenomenal qualities, then we ought to be able to experience them in isolation from their sensory brethren. After all, he argues, given that it is possible to experience various components of sensory consciousness in isolation from each other, there is no reason why it shouldn’t also be possible to experience the elements of cognitive phenomenology (if they exist) in isolation from each other and from the various elements of sensory phenomenology. He concludes that the case for cognitive phenomenology may require advocates of the view ‘to come up with a clear example of a cognitive experience that occurs without any sensory experiences, or at least without any sensory experiences that are related to the cognitive act.’ (Prinz: 00). Some liberals will think that Prinz’s demand is easily met. Others may argue that whether or not it is easily met, it is not a reasonable demand: they might either challenge Prinz’s assumption that the various components of sensory consciousness can be experienced in isolation from each other, or they might challenge his assumption that cognitive phenomenology must share the ‘atomistic’ structure that allegedly characterizes sensory phenomenology.

Let us return to the two forms of the introspective argument for cognitive phenomenology. As we have seen, both arguments are challenged on the grounds that conservatives fail to discern in their own experience the kinds of states that liberals appeal to. There is disagreement both about whether thought is ever non-imagistic, and about whether imagistic thought might contain non-sensory elements. Each of these disagreements is deeply puzzling. If non-imagistic thought exists, why are some theorists unable to detect it? If it doesn’t exist, why do some theorists claim to be able to detect it? If imagistic thought contains non-sensory elements why are some theorists unable to detect them? If it doesn’t, why do some theorists claim that it does?

In her contribution to this volume, Spener grapples with the implications of these disagreements. She argues that they undermine the introspective warrant that each side of the debate claims for its own position: introspection neither counts for nor against the existence of cognitive phenomenology. Whether or not Spener’s case is persuasive—and we suspect that her arguments will convince neither liberals nor conservatives—she makes a powerful case for the claim that the cognitive phenomenology debate raises questions about the trustworthiness of introspection (see also Schwitzgebel 2008).
5.2 Phenomenal contrast arguments
Faced with the dialectical impotence of direct appeals to introspection, advocates of cognitive phenomenology have often resorted to indirect appeals. Such appeals involve what are known as phenomenal contrast arguments. Contrast arguments are so-called because they involve the presentation of two scenarios that allegedly differ in phenomenal character but not in sensory or perceptual features. One kind of case concerns two subjects who hear the same sounds but have different overall experiences because one of them experiences the sounds as words that they understand and the other does not (see e.g. Moore 1910: 58-9; Strawson 1994: 6–7; Siewert 1998: 275-6). Another class of contrast arguments concerns high-level perceptual content (§4.4). Siegel, for example, argues that learning to recognize pine trees can change the way that they look—in the phenomenal sense of ‘look’ (Siegel 2005, see again Wittgenstein 1953: II.ix). The claim is that since the sensory phenomenology is unchanged by perceptual learning, we must appeal to the cognitive components of such states to explain the change in phenomenal character that occurs. We can think of phenomenal-contrast arguments as a species of inference to the best explanation: since there is no sensory difference between the two scenarios, the phenomenal contrast between them can be accounted for only by appealing to some form of non-sensory phenomenology. That, at least, is the claim.10

Broadly put, there are three ways in which conservatives can respond to contrast arguments. Most obviously, the conservative can simply deny that the particular scenarios in question do involve any phenomenal contrast. As we previously noted (§4.4), although we do describe objects as (e.g.) looking like pine trees, it is controversial whether such talk is to be understood in phenomenal terms. Those who hold that such descriptions are true only in a non-phenomenal sense of the appearance terms might hold that learning to recognize a class of objects on the basis of perception involves no distinctively phenomenal change to the subject’s point of view.

A second response to contrast arguments allows that the scenarios concerned do involve phenomenal contrasts, but holds that such contrasts can be fully explained in sensory terms. For example, Tye and Wright (this volume) point out that the contrast between hearing a language that one understands and hearing an unfamiliar language involves differences in the way that one processes the auditory stream, which in turn leads to differences in auditory phenomenology. In a similar vein, Carruthers and Veillet (this volume) claim that although a subject’s concepts do not directly enter into or constitute the subject’s phenomenal states, they do have a causal influence on their phenomenology.

10 See Siegel (2007) for discussion and defence of the phenomenal contrast method.
Similarly, Levine (this volume) holds that although thoughts have no ‘proprietary’ or ‘pure’ phenomenal character, they do affect the structure of the subject’s sensory manifold. Finally, Prinz (this volume) attempts to account for a range of contrast cases by appealing to the phenomenal effects of prototypicality, verbal labelling, the generation of images, and the allocation of attention to category-relevant sensory features. In each case, the conservative’s claim is that phenomenal contrasts can be accounted for by appealing to differences in sensory phenomenology. Note that this line of reply doesn’t attempt to establish that contrast scenarios don’t involve differences in cognitive phenomenology, but only to undermine the thought that contrast scenarios require us to posit a distinctively cognitive phenomenology.

A final response allows that contrast arguments do establish the existence of high-level perceptual phenomenology, but that they do not provide any evidence for the existence of cognitive phenomenology in the sense in which we have been using the term—that is, for the claim that thought has a distinctive phenomenal character. For example, one might take Siegel’s arguments to show that such properties as being a pine tree can be encoded in visual phenomenology, but deny that they provide any reason to think that thoughts about pine trees possess a distinctive phenomenology. Insofar as it is unclear just where (and how) to draw the line between thought and high-level perception (see §4.4), it will also be unclear whether a particular contrast argument would establish the existence of ‘cognitive phenomenology’ even if successful. Consider, for example, what Strawson calls ‘understanding experience’ or ‘meaning experience’. Opinions might differ as to whether understanding speech qualifies as a form of perception or thought. Our intention here is not to pronounce on this issue, but merely to draw attention to the fact that certain contrast arguments inhabit the murky zone between categorical perception and thought.

5.3 Self-Knowledge
A third argument for cognitive phenomenology appeals to the role that cognitive-phenomenological properties might play in accounting for the kind of epistemic access we have to our conscious thoughts. It is quite plausible to suppose that knowledge of one’s own bodily sensations and perceptual experiences involves some kind of acquaintance with their phenomenal properties. The suggestion is that we can extend this account of self-knowledge from knowledge of sensations and perceptual experiences to knowledge of cognitive states. Alvin Goldman (1993; although see Goldman 2006) was an early advocate of this position, arguing that we know what propositional-attitude states we are in on the basis of their phenomenal character. Central to his argument for this position is the claim that awareness of one’s own mental states must involve properties that are both intrinsic (non-relational) and categorical (non-dispositional), and that the only properties
that might meet these conditions are phenomenal properties. A more recent defence of the self-knowledge argument for cognitive phenomenology can be found in the work of David Pitt (2004; this volume), although his version of the argument focuses only on knowledge of the contents of one’s own thoughts.

The self-knowledge argument has not met with much enthusiasm in the literature. Some theorists deny that we have introspective access to our propositional-attitude states, and hence that there is no problem that phenomenal properties need be invoked in order to solve. Carruthers (2010) defends a version of this view, arguing that we have no direct or privileged access to our conscious judgments or conscious intentions (see also Gopnik 1993). Most theorists allow that we have introspective access to our thoughts, but few think that such access as we have involves the detection of phenomenal properties. Phenomenal properties may play a role in explaining how we know our sensations and perceptual states, but—say most theorists—they play no such role in accounting for knowledge of one’s own thoughts (see e.g. Nichols and Stich 2003; Prinz 2004; Schwitzgebel forthcoming).

The self-knowledge argument for cognitive phenomenology is discussed by a number of contributors to this volume, with Pitt’s (2004) version of the argument being singled out for particular attention. Tye and Wright claim that Pitt’s argument depends on a (discredited) perceptual model of introspective awareness, and that even if introspective awareness of thought did involve phenomenal properties, these properties would not be possessed by thoughts themselves. Levine also criticizes Pitt’s phenomenological account of self-knowledge, and develops an alternative model of self-knowledge in its place. Drawing on a broadly Fodorian (1978, 2008) account of thinking according to which propositional attitudes involve distinctive functional relations to ‘mentalese’ sentences, Levine argues that what it is to have knowledge of one’s thoughts involves tokening a higher-order mentalese sentence that expresses what one is thinking. This counts as ‘immediate self-knowledge’ because the higher-order state is reliably caused by the first-order state and some functionally defined internal monitoring process. In his own contribution to this volume, Pitt defends his phenomenological account of self-knowledge and argues against some of the leading alternatives to it.

5.4 Grounding content

The three lines of argument for the existence of cognitive phenomenology that we have examined so far are all modally weak in that none attempts to establish that phenomenal character is in any way essential to the nature of thought. However, a fourth kind of argument for cognitive phenomenology would, if successful, provide a deep link between
thought and phenomenal character. Philosophers have different strategies for making this link, but the central idea is that we must appeal to phenomenological considerations in order to ground the intentional content of thought. We might refer to these arguments as ‘content grounding’ arguments (see e.g. Horgan and Tienson 2002; Horgan & Graham in press; Kriegel this volume; Loar 2003; Strawson 2005, 2008).

The first content-grounding argument concerns the determinacy of thought. At least since Quine (1960) and Kripke (1982), philosophers have worried that the apparent determinacy of intentional content might be an illusion. Put most broadly, the worry is that the determinacy of thought—the fact that we can think about particular properties and objects as such—must be grounded in something, and yet there seems to be no viable account of what that ground might be. Since no purely functional or physical relation could underwrite the determinacy of content, thought cannot—despite appearances to the contrary—really have determinate content.

Horgan and colleagues have argued that even if no purely functional or physical relation can underwrite the determinacy of thought, it doesn’t follow that the determinacy of thought is an illusion (Horgan & Tienson 2002; Horgan & Graham 2009). Rather than being grounded wholly in physical or functional relations, the determinacy of thought—they suggest—might be partly grounded in its phenomenal character. Given that what it is like to think that rabbits have tails is distinct from what it is like to think that collections of undetached rabbit parts have tail subsets, we can appeal to this difference in what it’s likeness to explain why these two states have different intentional contents. More generally, the proposal is that we can appeal to the phenomenal character of a thought—together, perhaps, with facts about the environment in which the thinker is situated—to explain why it has the particular content that it does. And since we need to appeal to cognitive phenomenology in order to secure the determinacy of content, we have here an argument for the existence of cognitive phenomenology.

A second content-grounding argument can be found in Strawson (2008), who argues that cognitive phenomenology is needed in order to solve what he calls the ‘stopping problem’. Consider a subject, Lucy, who is perceiving or thinking about Mandy the moose. Assuming that Lucy has the appropriate causal connections to Mandy, how does Lucy’s experience or thought manage to be about Mandy the moose, rather than about the set of Mandy-caused photons impacting on her retinas, or certain other sets of causes on the causal chain leading to the experience? How does Lucy’s thought manage to stop precisely at Mandy rather than at some other location on the causal chain? Strawson rejects Dennettian ‘interpretationist’ solutions to this problem, and argues that the answer must appeal to cognitive phenomenology: Lucy’s experience contains a certain (fully
internalistically specifiable) conception of what particular kind of thing her experience is about, and this conception, which is part of the cognitive-phenomenological content of her experience, is an essential part of what enables her experience (or thought) to be specifically about Mandy, given her causal relations to Mandy.

Grounding arguments have been subject to two lines of criticism. Some critics have raised concerns about just how phenomenal properties might ground intentional properties. After all, it is not entirely clear how this grounding relation ought to be understood. Others have argued that the advocates of this argument have been too quick to dismiss the possibility that non-phenomenal properties might be able to ground the determinacy of thought. Dennett (1982) and others would argue that our interpretative practices and the behavioural patterns that underlie them can fully account for the kind of determinacy our thoughts possess. Millikan (1984) and others would argue that our evolutionary heritage bestows a sufficient degree of determinacy on thought. And Fodor has argued that the determinacy of thought can be secured by what he calls the strategy of ‘counterfactual triangulation’ (Fodor 2008: 7.4). Just where these two lines of response leave the grounding argument is an issue for further discussion.

5.5 The ontology of thought

For the most part the opponents of cognitive phenomenology have been on the defensive, and have been content to respond to the arguments of their opponents rather than provide positive arguments of their own. However, it is possible to discern a couple of arguments against the existence of cognitive phenomenology in the literature. One such argument can be founded in the contribution that Tye and Wright make to this volume. Drawing on the work of Geach (1949) and more recently Soteriou (2007, 2009), Tye and Wright argue that thoughts are not the kinds of entities that could enjoy phenomenal character. Their argument involves two claims. Firstly, anything that figures in the stream of consciousness must ‘unfold over time’; in other words, it must be an event or a process rather than a state. Secondly, thoughts are states, and as such they do not unfold over time. To use their example, in thinking the thought ‘The claret is delightful’ one does not first grasp the noun ‘claret’, and then the copula ‘is’, and finally the adjective ‘delightful’ in a successive process. Instead, they claim, the entire thought arrives ‘all at once’. According to Tye and Wright, it is only the various phenomenal goings-on that

11 Carruthers and Veillet (this volume) also provide arguments against the possibility of cognitive phenomenology, one of which we mention in §5.6.

12 This position is often associated with the work of the later Wittgenstein (1953).
accompany thoughts—for example, linguistic sub-vocalizations and images—that unfold over time. Thoughts themselves do not, and as a result they cannot feature in the stream of consciousness.

There are two general lines of response that advocates of cognitive phenomenology might adopt in response to the objection. On the one hand they might argue that even if the stream of consciousness is limited to events and processes, it by no means follows that there can be no phenomenology of thought, for at least some thoughts do unfold over time. We certainly describe ourselves as thinking through a problem or deliberating about what to do, and it is far from obvious that such occurrences lack a temporal structure. A more ‘confrontational’ response to the objection would be to take issue with the claim that the stream of consciousness is limited to events and processes. One way to put pressure on that assumption would be to argue that not all elements of perceptual experience are processive. Consider, for example, perceptual recognition. Although perceptual recognition might be (necessarily) embedded in processes that unfold over time, it is not clear that the ‘act’ of recognition itself unfolds over time. The experiences of seeing an assortment of dots as (say) a Dalmatian appears to arrive ‘all at once’; the experience of recognizing a sequence of notes as a particular tune also seems to lack a processive structure. Whatever the merits of these responses, it is clear that there are important points of contact between the cognitive phenomenology debate and questions concerning the temporal structure and the ontology of consciousness.

5.6 Epistemic challenges
We bring this section to a close by considering a cluster of arguments that centre on the epistemic challenges that are closely associated with consciousness. Three such challenges can be identified. Firstly, there is the famous ‘explanatory gap’ between phenomenal properties on the one hand and neural (or functional) properties on the other (Levine 1983). We are certain that there is an intimate relationship between the brain states that underlie phenomenal consciousness, but we lack an adequate explanation of the relationship between brain states and phenomenal states. Secondly, there is Jackson’s (1982) knowledge argument, the upshot of which purports to be that no amount of physical (or functional) knowledge of the brain and its operations suffices for knowledge of phenomenal properties. As Jackson’s celebrated example has it, Mary can know everything there is to know about the neurophysiology of the visual system but she won’t know what it’s like to see red. Thirdly, there are ‘zombie’ intuitions: it seems conceivable that there might be creatures that are physically and/or functionally and behaviourally identical to us but which lack phenomenal properties (Kirk 1974; Chalmers 1996).
Our interest here is not in these epistemic challenges per se, but in the question of what light they might shed on the cognitive phenomenology debate. One possibility is that these challenges might function as criteria or markers for the presence of phenomenal properties. In other words, one might argue that the case for cognitive phenomenology turns on whether conscious thought poses an explanatory gap, or whether it is possible to construct a thought-based version of the knowledge argument, or whether certain kinds of cognitive zombies are conceivable. Let us consider these ideas in more detail by examining how some of our contributors develop them.

In their chapter Carruthers and Veillet argue against the existence—in fact, the very possibility—of cognitive phenomenology on the grounds that there is no explanatory gap for thought. Their focus is on the conceivability of inverted-experience scenarios. They argue that inversion scenarios are not conceivable for conceptual states on the grounds that inversion scenarios require the deployment of conceptually isolated phenomenal concepts, and that there are no such phenomenal concepts when it comes to conceptual content. They conclude that since conscious thought should give rise to an explanatory gap if it had a distinctive phenomenal character, the lack of any such gap is evidence that it has no such phenomenal character.

In his chapter Horgan uses the epistemic puzzles associated with consciousness to argue for precisely the opposite conclusion. His focus is not on the explanatory gap but on the conceivability of partial-zombies. Partial zombies are creatures who are functionally identical to us despite the fact that they enjoy only certain aspects of our overall phenomenology. Horgan’s particular interest is in the conceivability of cognitive zombies: creatures who share our sensory phenomenology but not our cognitive phenomenology. He argues that since such creatures are robustly conceivable, there must be more to the nature of conscious thought than its functional role: it must also possess a proprietary phenomenal character.

It is clear from the foregoing that there is no settled view in the literature concerning whether the epistemic challenges associated with consciousness might also apply to conscious thought. A more fundamental question is whether it is indeed legitimate to treat the epistemic puzzles associated with consciousness as markers of phenomenal consciousness. There is reason for caution here, for such puzzles appear to be more closely connected to certain aspects of perceptual phenomenology than others. It is noteworthy

13 This proposal can also be found in Block (2002), Goldman (1993) and more explicitly in Kriegel (2009: 4).
that discussions of the explanatory gap, the knowledge argument and zombies almost always invoke the experience of secondary properties (colours, flavours, tastes, and so on) and rarely appeal to the experience of primary properties (shape, motion, spatial relations, and so on). Perhaps one reason for this is that the epistemic puzzles associated with phenomenal consciousness are more pressing with respect to experiences of secondary qualities than they are with respect to experiences of primary qualities. Despite this fact, there is little doubt that experiences of primary qualities do have a robust and proprietary phenomenal character. The upshot of these reflections is that questions marks surround the use of the epistemic puzzles associated with phenomenal consciousness as general markers of phenomenal consciousness.

6. Implications
We bring this introduction to a close by sketching some of the ways in which the cognitive phenomenology debate might inform our understanding of consciousness and of the mind more generally.

We have already noted one issue that arises from the cognitive phenomenology debate: the trustworthiness of introspection. If there is cognitive phenomenology, then conservatives are guilty of overlooking a range of phenomenal states that they enjoy. If on the other hand there is no cognitive phenomenology, then liberals are guilty of positing a range of phenomenal states that they don’t enjoy. Either way, the failure of theorists to converge on a shared conception of the phenomenal character of thought calls into question the reliability of introspection. Of course, introspective disputes are not confined to discussions of cognitive phenomenology, but this introspective dispute seems particularly worrying (Schwitzgebel 2008; Bayne & Spener 2010; Spener, this volume).

The cognitive phenomenology debate also has the potential to constrain and inform accounts of the nature and functional role of consciousness. Some accounts of consciousness are at odds with the existence of cognitive phenomenology. Consider, for example, accounts that identify phenomenal states with representational states that have either analogue content (Dretske 1995) or non-conceptual content (Tye 1995). Such accounts would appear to be in trouble if thought has a distinctive phenomenal character that attaches to its content, for the content of thought is neither analogue nor non-conceptual. If, on the other hand, it can be shown that there is no distinctively cognitive phenomenology, then this might provide something in the way of indirect evidence in favour of such accounts.

A third issue raised by the cognitive phenomenology debate concerns the question of what positive characterization of conscious thought conservatives might be able to
provide (see Montague unpublished). In the first section we mentioned two main conservative views of conscious thought: one view grants that conscious thought possesses phenomenal character, but only in virtue of the sensory states with which it is associated or embedded; the second claims that thought is characterized only by a non-phenomenal kind of consciousness. Each of these proposals raises questions. With respect to the first proposal, one might ask exactly how the possession of sensory phenomenology accounts for the fact that the thought itself is conscious. Given some particular conscious thought, does there have to be a particular kind of sensory phenomenology that makes it conscious, or will any sensory phenomenology suffice? With respect to the second proposal, one might ask for a more thorough conception of this kind of non-phenomenal consciousness. Is it possible to characterize it in purely functional terms, or—like phenomenal consciousness—is it a form of consciousness that appears to resist functional analysis? Cases of blindsight give us a sense of what unconscious awareness might be, but a non-phenomenal yet conscious sense of awareness is an entirely different matter.

Fourth, the cognitive phenomenology debate has implications for our view of the relationship between ‘the phenomenal mind’ and the ‘intentional mind’. These two features of the mind have often been regarded as metaphysically independent, with many theorists holding both that some mental states possess phenomenal character but lack intentional content, and that some mental states possess intentional content but lack phenomenal character. Following Horgan & Tienson (2002), one might conceive of such approaches to the mind as forms of ‘metaphysical separatism’. Metaphysical separatism has fostered a kind of methodological separatism, with many theorists holding that phenomenality and intentionality can and should be tackled independently of each other. In defence of this view, separatists often point to the fact that thoughts have no (distinctive) phenomenal character. But if the existence of cognitive phenomenology can be established, then this line of argument will no longer be available to the separatist. Of course, this would not itself establish any form of inseparatism, but it would make inseparatist conceptions of the mental that much more plausible (Montague 2010).

Finally, the cognitive phenomenology debate has implications for the broader project of understanding the place of consciousness in nature. Attempts to explain how consciousness comes about as a result of ‘irritating nervous tissue’ (Huxley 1866: 189) have focused almost exclusively on states of sensory consciousness. Theorists have worried about the gap between what it’s like to smell a rose, taste burnt sugar, or feel sharp pain and the neural states underlying such experiences. How might the hard problem(s) of consciousness look if we were to suppose that thoughts too possess a distinctive phenomenal character? There are two possibilities. Pessimists might worry that
accepting cognitive phenomenology would mean that the prospects for closing the explanatory gap and solving the hard problem will be that much bleaker than many of us used to think, for conscious thought would no longer be immune to the deep puzzles that surround sensory experience. Optimists, on the other hand, might welcome the establishment of cognitive phenomenology, on the grounds that such a view might provide us with new ways of thinking about the explanatory gap and the hard problem, ways that our fixation on sensory consciousness might have obscured.

The resurgence of interest in consciousness is now into its third decade. There is no doubt that we have made progress on many fronts. We have a better conception of the neural basis of consciousness; we possess a richer set of empirical data against which to test accounts of consciousness; and we have a better understanding of the logical space in which those accounts are located. But for all this progress, the cognitive phenomenology debate is a reminder that our grasp on fundamental features of consciousness itself remains surprisingly tenuous.
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