

## The Paradox of Phenomenal Judgement and the Case Against Illusionism

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### Abstract

Illusionism is the view that conscious experience is some sort of introspective illusion. According to illusionism, there is no conscious experience, but it merely seems like there is conscious experience. This would suggest that much phenomenological enquiry, including work on phenomenological psychopathology, rests on a mistake. Some philosophers have argued that illusionism is obviously false, because seeming is itself an experiential state, and so necessarily presupposes the reality of conscious experience. In response, the illusionist could suggest that the relevant sort of seeming here is not an experiential state, but is a cognitive state, such as a judgement or a belief, which is fully amenable to a physical or functionalist analysis. Herein, I argue that this response is unsuccessful and fails to undermine the reality of conscious experience. Nonetheless, the response does raise the problem of how a judgement or belief about the character of a conscious experience, even if it is true, can be justified if the conscious experience has no causal role in the formation of the judgement or belief. This is not a new problem, but is a reiteration of an old problem that is known in the philosophy of mind literature as the paradox of phenomenal judgement. I consider how the paradox of phenomenal judgement can be resolved and how the judgement or belief about conscious experience can be justified with appeal to the notion of acquaintance.

### Keywords

illusionism; consciousness; phenomenal judgement; acquaintance; philosophy of mind

Consciousness presents a challenge to the scientific picture of the world. How can the third-person conception of the world in terms of physical structures and dynamics accommodate the “something it is like” of first-person subjectivity (Nagel, 1974)? Philosophical treatments of this issue typically accept realism about conscious experience. That is to say, they acknowledge that conscious experience exists and then seek to explain its relation to the rest of the world. Some theorists assume physicalism and claim that phenomenal properties are reducible to or supervene on physical properties (Place, 1956; Smart, 1959; Armstrong, 1968; Papineau, 2002; Balog, 2020). Other philosophers propose that dualism is true, whereby consciousness exists as a fundamental nonphysical entity that is ontologically separate from physical matter (Chalmers, 1996; Gertler, 2007; Maung, 2019; Nida-Rümelin, 2010; Fürst, 2011; Schneider, 2012). In contrast with realism, an approach that has been suggested more recently by scholars such as Keith Frankish (2016), Daniel Dennett (2017), and François Kammerer (2021) is illusionism, which is the claim that conscious experience is some sort of powerful introspective illusion. According to illusionism, there is no conscious experience, but it merely seems like there is conscious experience.

Illusionism is a somewhat unconventional position and many philosophers regard it to be false and even incoherent. After all, conscious experience is my immediate first-person access to reality, and so I am more certain of its existence than anything else. For this reason, Galen Strawson considers illusionism to be so implausible as to be absurd. He writes:

What is the silliest claim ever made? The competition is fierce, but I think the answer is easy. Some people have denied the existence of consciousness: conscious experience, the subjective character of experience, the “what-it-is-like” of experience. (Strawson, 2018, p. 130)

A similar sentiment is shared by William Seager, who notes:

The claim that consciousness could be an illusion seems preposterously, ridiculously false on its face. Is it not evident that if we know anything at all we know that there is consciousness, or that there are states of consciousness? (Seager, 2017, p. 7)

And so, illusionism considered by many to be philosophically problematic and tends to be defended only by a relatively small proportion of scholars.

Nonetheless, even though illusionism is a somewhat unconventional position, it is a position worthy of attention because of its potential implications for some key areas of enquiry. First, it has been suggested to have the potential to sidestep the hard problem of consciousness (Frankish, 2016). The hard problem arises because the apparent irreducibility of conscious experience to the physical world. However, if one assumes that conscious experience is just an illusion, then the hope is that the hard problem could be evaded. Second, illusionism may be considered disconcerting because the reality of conscious experience has been long taken as a foundation for philosophical enquiry into the nature of being. Many philosophers in the phenomenological tradition, from Edmund Husserl (1931) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) in the early twentieth century to Dan Zahavi (2005) and Uriah Kriegel (2015) in the present day, have contributed rich insights into the characters of our experiential realities. Some of these insights are foundational to the study of phenomenological psychopathology (Parnas and Sass, 2008; Stanghellini and Broome, 2014). To assume illusionism would be to concede that possibility that such phenomenological enquiry rests on a mistake. Indeed, Katalin Balog notes:

So, instead of trying to reconcile the objective and subjective perspectives, scientifically inclined philosophers have come to deny the existence of experience altogether. But, by doing so, they distance themselves from important aspects of human life ... These are areas that are of the greatest importance to human beings, involving matters of value, meaning, and choice. (Balog, 2020, p. 51)

Therefore, although illusionism is considered to be unsound by many philosophers, it is a view that deserves reasoned critique.

My aim in this paper is to defend the soundness of phenomenological enquiry by articulating a philosophical refutation of illusionism. In doing so, I hope to arrive at a clearer understanding of what the illusionist argument does and does not do, as well as show how it relates to previous work in the philosophy of mind literature. As we shall see, the most defensible form of the illusionist argument does not work as an argument against the reality of conscious experience itself, but amounts to an argument against the justifiability of a higher order judgement or belief about conscious experience. This latter sort of argument does not raise a new problem, but reiterates an old problem that is recognised in the philosophical literature as the paradox of phenomenal judgement (Chalmers, 1996). Accordingly, to address the paradox of phenomenal judgement is to undercut the most tenable implication of the illusionist argument.

The rest of this paper will proceed as follows. I suggest that the illusionist claim that it only seems like there is conscious experience can be interpreted in two broad ways and that neither of them can do the required work for the illusionist. In the section “Experiential

Seeming”, I argue that if the seeming is taken as an experiential state, then illusionism is incoherent, because it necessarily presupposes the reality of conscious experience. To avoid such incoherence, the illusionist could claim that the seeming is not an experiential state, but is a cognitive state, such as a judgement, which is fully amenable to a physical or functionalist analysis. In the section “Cognitive Seeming”, I argue that this cognitive strategy shifts the target from the existence conscious experience itself to the justifiability of the higher order judgement about conscious experience, and so fails to undermine the reality of conscious experience. Nonetheless, in the section “The Paradox of Phenomenal Judgement”, I suggest that the cognitive strategy raises another important problem concerning how a judgement about conscious experience can be justified if conscious experience has no causal role in the formation of the judgement. Finally, in the section “A Solution to the Paradox”, I consider how the paradox of phenomenal judgement can be solved with appeal to the notion of acquaintance.

### **Experiential Seeming**

As noted above, the key illusionist claim is that there is no conscious experience, but it merely seems like there is conscious experience. This is articulated by Frankish, who suggests that illusionism “holds that phenomenal consciousness is an illusion and aims to explain why it seems to exist” (Frankish, 2016, p. 11). Such a claim relies on an assumed distinction between what merely seems real and what actually is real. To illustrate this, Dennett (2017) suggests an analogy with the user interface on a computer screen, which seems to contain various folders and icons, with which one can seemingly interact. However, these are not real folders and icons, but are just images generated by the computer’s underlying circuitry and software.

Straight away, an argument could be raised against the coherence of the illusionist claim in the case of conscious experience, on the basis that seeming presupposes conscious experience. The following formulation is provided by Seager, who calls it the obvious argument:

1. If consciousness is an illusion, then it merely seems that it exists.
2. But if anything seems to exist, that seeming is a state of consciousness.
3. Therefore consciousness (states of consciousness) exists (Seager, 2017, p. 7).

The obvious argument shows that illusionism is necessarily false. It is incoherent to claim that conscious experience is not real but only seems real, because seeming is itself an experiential state. Thus, the claim that conscious experience seems real necessarily presupposes the reality of conscious experience.

Other philosophers have also endorsed the obvious argument against illusionism. For example, Thomas Nagel writes:

You may well ask how consciousness could be an illusion, since every illusion is itself a conscious experience—an appearance that doesn’t correspond to reality. So it cannot appear to me that I am conscious though I am not: as Descartes famously observed, the reality of my own consciousness is the one thing I cannot be deluded about. (Nagel, 2017, p. 33)

Here, René Descartes’ (1641/1993) famous argument is evoked, whereby I cannot doubt the existence of myself as a first-person conscious subject, because the fact that I exist necessarily follows from the fact that I doubt. Likewise, Strawson notes:

One of the strangest things that the Deniers say is that although it genuinely and undeniably seems that there is conscious experience, there isn’t really any conscious

experience: the seeming is in fact a complete illusion. The trouble with this is well known: any such seeming or illusion is already and necessarily an instance—an actually existing example—of the thing that is said to be an illusion. (Strawson, 2018, p. 132)

What the obvious argument reveals is that there is no distinction between being real and seeming real in the case of conscious experience, because seeming is something that presents in conscious experience, and so the presence of seeming entails the presence of conscious experience.

In some respect, the obvious argument recalls Parmenides' thesis regarding the necessity of existence, which could be interpreted as an answer to the question "why is there something rather than nothing?" (Gallop, 1984). The claim that nothingness exists is necessarily false, because existing would entail the presence of existence, which is the negation of nothingness. And so, ontological realism is necessarily true and ontological nihilism is necessarily false. That is to say, it is necessarily true that existence exists and it is necessarily true that nothingness does not exist. Likewise, the claim that there is no conscious experience but it only seems like there is conscious experience is necessarily false, because seeming would entail the presence of conscious experience. It is necessarily true that consciousness exists, because its existence is necessary for the very discernment of what is real and what is illusory. Therefore, it must be acknowledged that phenomenal realism is necessarily true in order for there to be any seeming at all.

Another way to express the obvious argument is to say that the illusionist is making a category mistake. Illusory is a predicate that applies to the accuracy of the content of experience, but does not apply to the presence of the experience. Accordingly, it is possible to be under an illusion regarding the accuracy of the content of experience, but impossible to be under an illusion about the reality of the experience itself. Consider, for example, when a straight rod that is partly submerged in water appears bent due to refraction. The illusion here is that the image of the bent rod that is the content of one's experience does not accurately represent the straight rod that is being represented. However, consciousness itself is not a content of experience, but is the necessary condition of possibility for experience, or the first-person experiential dimension wherein experience presents (Zahavi, 2015). This supports a transcendental argument against illusionism. In order for there to be any content that could be deemed an illusion, there has to be conscious experience wherein the illusion can manifest. Therefore, illusionism is false, because the existence of consciousness is a necessary condition of possibility for any seeming, regardless of whether this seeming is illusory or veridical.

### **Cognitive Seeming**

The obvious argument against illusionism rests on the understanding that seeming is an experiential state. However, the illusionist could respond by denying this conception of seeming, as Dennett (1991) does when he notes that the term "seems" is ambiguous between an experiential notion and a cognitive notion. The cognitive notion does not necessarily involve an experiential quality, but is a sort of epistemic appraisal, such as a judgement or a belief. For example, when one says "it seems incredible that there are more molecules in a glass of water than there are stars in the observable universe", one is making a judgement about the incredulity of this scientific fact about water, without necessarily referring to an experiential quality. And so, to avoid the charge of incoherence, the illusionist could suggest that the relevant sense of seeming is not an experiential state, but is a cognitive state, such as a judgement or a belief. I henceforth refer to this as the cognitive strategy.

In order for the cognitive strategy to be noncircular, it cannot appeal to conscious experience in its characterisation of seeming. Accordingly, proponents of illusionism suggest

that seeming is a cognitive state that is amenable to a physical or functionalist analysis. For example, Frankish suggests:

Illusionists may hold that introspection issues directly in dispositions to make phenomenal judgments—judgments about the phenomenal character of particular experiences and about phenomenal consciousness in general ... Whatever the details, they must explain the content of the relevant states in broadly functional terms, and the challenge is to provide an account that explains how real and vivid phenomenal consciousness seems. (Frankish, 2016, p. 14)

Likewise, Kammerer suggests that a judgement or belief can be analysed as a physical or functionalist state. He writes:

... one could construct a functional and scientific concept of appearance, which would define an appearance as a momentary and non-cognitively penetrable disposition to believe something ('belief' being defined in a purely functional way too). (Kammerer, 2021, p. 859)

According to the cognitive strategy, then, one does not really have conscious experience, but one merely has a cognitive disposition to judge that one has conscious experience, where this cognitive disposition is a physical or functionalist notion that is nonexperiential.

The cognitive strategy is also complemented by Dennett's suggested methodology for examining the mind, which he calls heterophenomenology. He characterises this as follows:

It involves extracting and purifying texts from (apparently) speaking subjects, and using those texts to generate a theorist's fiction, the subject's heterophenomenological world. This fictional world is populated with all the images, events, sounds, smells, hunches, presentiments, and feelings that the subject (apparently) sincerely believes to exist in his or her (or its) stream of consciousness. (Dennett, 1991, p. 98)

The suggestion here is that one should regard one's own mental state from a third-person perspective, akin to how one might regard the utterances and actions of others. Such an approach would involve one applying a physical or functionalist analysis to one's own mental state without appealing to first-person subjectivity. Accordingly, one's judgement or belief that one has conscious experience can be explained without invoking conscious experience.

While the cognitive strategy may facilitate the explanation of and prediction about what one believes and says about conscious experience, I argue that it does not do the required work for the illusionist. Ultimately, I contend that the cognitive notion of seeming fails to undermine the reality of conscious experience. This is due to the following two related problems.

The first problem with the cognitive strategy is that it does not target the reality of conscious experience itself, but rather targets the justifiability of one's higher order judgement about conscious experience. As noted above, the cognitive strategy aims to offer a physical or functionalist account of why and how one is cognitively disposed to judge that one is conscious. However, providing such a causal explanation of how a judgement is formed is different from scrutinising the ontology of phenomenon that the judgement is about, and so does not necessarily undermine the truth of the judgement. To assume otherwise would be to commit a genetic fallacy. It is entirely possible that one's cognitive disposition to judge that one has conscious experience can be explained through a physical or functionalist analysis and still for it to be true that one actually has conscious experience. Therefore, explaining a judgement about conscious experience is insufficient to undermine the reality of conscious experience that

the illusionist wishes to scrutinise. We could concede everything that the cognitive strategy says about how a judgement about conscious experience is formed and still accept that conscious experience itself is real.

Indeed, it is even conceivable that a subject could have a conscious experience without having a higher order judgement or belief about that conscious experience. For instance, consider a newborn infant who does not yet have the cognitive capacity to form such an introspective judgement or belief, but who is nonetheless conscious. There is a first-person experiential perspective associated with the infant. However, given that the infant does not entertain any judgement or belief about having a first-person experiential perspective, the infant would be free from any introspective illusion about having a conscious experience. In this case, the cognitive strategy is simply unavailable to the illusionist, because the infant does not have the cognitive capacity to form the higher order judgement or belief that would comprise a cognitive seeming. This example underscores the way in which conscious experience and the judgement or belief about conscious experience come apart. Providing a physical or functionalist explanation of how a judgement or belief about conscious experience is formed is a different task from scrutinising the reality of conscious experience. In the case where no such physical or functionalist explanation is forthcoming because the judgement or belief is absent, the reality of conscious experience remains a further issue to be considered.

Another example of how a conscious experience can occur without a judgement about the conscious experience is provided by Charles Siewert (2007), who notes that the colour of an object may be judged to be uniform despite variations in the appearance of the colour under different lighting conditions. For example, consider that I am looking at a white box under a bulb that initially emits white light at  $t_1$  but then gradually changes so that it emits red light at  $t_2$ . Here, I continue to judge the box to be white at  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ , even though I experience the appearance of the colour to vary gradually from white at  $t_1$  to red at  $t_2$  as the lighting conditions change. This reveals a distinction between my experiencing something to be some way and my judging something to be some way. At  $t_2$ , I have a red experience without having a corresponding red judgement. Hence, despite there being no red judgement at  $t_2$  to explain, the reality of the red experience at  $t_2$  remains a fact to be considered.

The second problem with the cognitive strategy is that it is empirically inadequate, because it fails to account for the first-person subjectivity of mentality. As noted above, the cognitive strategy claims that there is no conscious experience, but there is only the judgement or belief that there is conscious experience. However, as Michelle Liu notes, “*experiencing* Q as X and *believing* Q to be X are, intuitively, phenomenologically distinct” (Liu, 2020, p. 103). While the formation, propositional content, and causal role of a judgement or belief can be explained and assessed in the third-person, the kind of state that is ordinarily called a conscious experience has a distinctly first-person mode of presentation. That is to say, such a state does not simply obtain in some impersonal “view from nowhere” (Nagel, 1986), but presents to an individuated first-person experiential perspective. It is in virtue of this first-person subjectivity that the presence of consciousness is fundamentally discrete and all-or-none, as the content of a mental state may vary in quality and intensity but the subject who experiences this state exists as a basic first-person unit whose private experiential field is essentially distinct from other subjects. What this suggests is that appealing to the presence of a judgement or belief in conscious experience is insufficient to capture the manner in which the kind of state that is ordinarily called a conscious experience actually appears, because the appearance of such a state has a first-person mode of presentation that is very different from the third-person accessibility of a judgement or belief.

To illustrate this experiential difference, we can consider Siewert’s (1998) discussion of blindsight vision. In blindsight vision, a lesion in the primary visual cortex results in the ability to perceive and form a judgement about a visual stimulus but without any accompanying

visual experience. By contrast, ordinary vision involves the ability to perceive and form a judgement about a visual stimulus but also involves an accompanying visual experience. And so, there is an experiential difference between blindsight vision and ordinary vision even though they involve the same sort of visual judgement. The illusionist might object by suggesting that the judgement involved in ordinary vision is much richer than the judgement involved in blindsight vision. In response, Siewert asks us to contrast blindsight vision with the ordinary vision of a person who has blurry visual acuity. Here, the blurry ordinary vision may involve a judgement that is no richer than the judgement involved in blindsight vision. Nonetheless, there remains an experiential difference between them, insofar as the judgement in ordinary vision is accompanied by an appearance from the first-person perspective, whereas the judgement in blindsight vision is accompanied by no appearance from the first-person perspective. Hence, appealing to third-person information about the richness of the judgement fails to account for the first-person datum that makes this experiential difference.

Having clarified the nature of the difference between experiencing and judging, we can now consider what a system that judges that there is conscious experience without having any conscious experience might be like. If one applies Dennett's (1991) heterophenomenology, it is conceivable from a third-person perspective to envisage a system that is nonconscious, but nonetheless has the mistaken judgement that there is conscious experience. For example, by applying the famous thought experiment by David Chalmers (1996), I could conceive of having a zombie twin who is physically and behaviourally indistinguishable from me, but is entirely nonconscious. Given that my zombie twin and I are physically indistinguishable, all of the same neurological and cognitive processes that take place in me also take place in my zombie twin. When I form the judgement that there is conscious experience, my zombie twin also forms the judgement that there is conscious experience. However, despite having the cognitive disposition to judge that there is cognitive experience, my zombie twin has no conscious experience at all. My zombie twin merely has the illusion that there is conscious experience, where an illusion is a cognitive state that can be described and explained from a third-person perspective through a physical or functionalist analysis. And so, from a third-person perspective, it is possible to explain why and how my zombie twin forms the judgement that there is conscious experience without having to invoke conscious experience in the explanation.

Suppose, then, that one asks the question of what it would appear like from a first-person perspective for there to be no conscious experience at all but nonetheless for one to have the judgement or belief that there is conscious experience. The answer is that it would appear like nothing. As noted above, the cognitive strategy purports that seeming is nonexperiential. It is characterised as a cognitive state that can be captured exclusively by a third-person physical or functionalist analysis. Thus, if seeming is a purely physical or functionalist notion that does not involve first-person conscious experience, as the illusionist claims, then such a state would appear like nothing in the first-person. All of the cognitive processing would take place "in the dark" (Chalmers, 1995, p. 203).

However, the trouble for the illusionist is that this fails to capture the distinctly first-person manner in which mentality actually appears. As a subject, I know that mentality does not appear like nothing. Rather, I know that I have a first-person existence which appears like something. The exclusively third-person picture suggested by illusionism cannot capture this first-person manner of being, and so illusionism is false. This recalls Chalmers' simple refutation of illusionism:

1. People sometimes feel pain.
2. If strong illusionism is true, no one feels pain.
3. Strong illusionism is false. (Chalmers, 2018, p. 53)

Put more generally, illusionism claims that all there is to a purported conscious experience is a nonexperiential judgement that can be exhausted by a third-person account, but this would imply that there is nothing from a first-person perspective. Given that there is such a first-person mode of presentation that is distinct from a neutral third-person space, it follows that illusionism is false.

While Chalmers (2018) endorses realism about conscious experience, he concedes that the illusionist could object that his argument begs the question, insofar as it claims that there is pain when perhaps it might only be the case that it seems that there is pain. In response, I argue that the problem of empirical inadequacy discussed above renders this objection unsatisfactory. As Frankish notes, the key challenge for illusionism “is to provide an account that explains how real and vivid phenomenal consciousness seems” (Frankish, 2016, p. 14). The trouble, though, is that the illusionist lacks the capability to do this. What makes conscious experience appear uniquely “real and vivid” is its first-person subjective mode of presentation. Given this, an adequate account that explains how “real and vivid” conscious experience appears would need to account for its distinctive first-person mode of presentation. However, as noted above, the cognitive strategy used by the illusionist restricts itself exclusively to explaining cognitive and behavioural processes exclusively in third-person terms of structures and dynamics. Such third-person structural and dynamical information can only yield further third-person structural and dynamical information, but does not yield information about why or how there appears to be something in the first-person. Therefore, explaining the formation of a judgement or belief that there is conscious experience does not suffice to explain how “real and vivid” conscious experience appears.

The above shows that the cognitive strategy does not do the required work for the illusionist. The illusionist cannot deny the reality of first-person subjectivity, because this first-person subjectivity is the specific feature that makes conscious experience appear “real and vivid”, which is precisely what the illusionist needs to explain. In order to explain how “real and vivid” conscious experience appears, the illusionist must necessarily presuppose the existence of first-person subjectivity. However, this would defeat the illusionist claim, because it would amount to invoking conscious experience.

The illusionist might raise the objection that an account that explains how “real and vivid” conscious experience appears does not have to invoke conscious experience itself, but could invoke something that is sufficiently like conscious experience in the relevant respect. For example, Frankish claims that the illusionist:

... may hold that introspection generates intermediate representations of sensory states, perhaps of a quasiperceptual kind, which ground our phenomenal judgments (Frankish, 2016, p. 14).

The suggestion here is that there is no conscious experience, but there is a state that represents conscious experience.

In response, I argue that whether or not such a representational state can successfully explain how “real and vivid” conscious experience appears depends on whether or not it involves first-person subjectivity. If the representational state does not involve first-person subjectivity and is just another physical or functionalist state that can be described exclusively in the third-person, then the illusionist encounters exactly the same problem discussed above. That is to say, the representational state would fail to explain why conscious experience appears to be so “real and vivid” in the first-person. If, however, the representational state does involve first-person subjectivity, then it may be able to account for how “real and vivid” conscious experience appears from a first-person perspective, but such a representational state would just



be conscious experience. Given that first-person subjectivity is the defining essence of phenomenal consciousness, invoking a representational state that involves first-person subjectivity simply amounts to invoking consciousness. This would again render illusionism incoherent as per the obvious argument, because it has to presuppose the reality of conscious experience in order to explain how conscious experience can be an illusion. As noted by Balog:

... it would be pointless to deny that experience has qualitative, subjective properties only to allow introspective representation of experience to have them. (Balog, 2016, p. 49)

The illusionist would be smuggling in conscious experience through the back door.

And so, I have shown in this section that the cognitive strategy of the illusionist fails to undermine the reality of conscious experience. Through the cognitive strategy, the illusionist tries to avoid the charge of incoherence by moving from an experiential conception of seeming to a cognitive conception of seeming. However, while the cognitive strategy offers a physical or functionalist analysis of the judgement that there is conscious experience, it does not target the reality of conscious experience itself. Furthermore, the cognitive conception of seeming is unable to explain the purported illusion. Given that the judgement that there is conscious experience is purported to be exhausted by a third-person account, it is incapable of capturing the manner in which conscious experience appears “real and vivid” from a first-person perspective. If all there is to a purported conscious experience is a judgement that can be analysed exclusively in the third-person, then mentality would appear like nothing in the first-person, but this is refuted by the datum that mentality appears like something in the first-person. Therefore, illusionism is false because it is empirically inadequate. Both the realist and the illusionist have to contend with the datum of individuated first-person subjectivity which is different from the neutral third-person objective space, but only the realist can account for it sufficiently by acknowledging that conscious experience is real.

### **The Paradox of Phenomenal Judgement**

Although the cognitive strategy fails to undermine the reality of conscious experience, it does nonetheless raise a significant epistemological problem. The cognitive strategy suggests that the judgement that there is conscious experience can be explained without having to appeal to conscious experience itself. Such a judgement is in the domain of cognitive psychology, and so is amenable to a causal explanation in a physical or functionalistic manner. This implies that conscious experience is causally irrelevant to the judgement that there is conscious experience.

In light of the above, one can arrive at a clearer understanding of what the illusionist argument does and does not do. As I showed in the previous section, the illusionist argument does not work as an argument against the reality of conscious experience. That is to say, it does not amount to an argument about the truth of the proposition that conscious experience is real. Rather, the above suggests that the illusionist argument really amounts to an argument about justification. The problem that it raises concerns how a judgement about conscious experience can possibly be justified, given that the conscious experience has no causal role in the formation of the judgement. If conscious experience is causally irrelevant to the judgement that there is conscious experience, then the truth of the judgement would be a coincidence.

As noted above, the lack of justification does not necessarily undermine the truth of the judgement. Consider, for example, that I am walking through a desert, and as the result of wishful thinking in the context of severe thirst, I form the belief that there is water ahead. Fortunately, it turns out that there is water ahead, and so my belief is true. However, the truth of the belief here is somewhat coincidental. Compare this with the scenario where I form the belief that there is water ahead because I had previously been to that spot and had seen an

abundance of water there. In this latter scenario, the presence of water ahead has a role in the causal explanation of my belief that there is water ahead, insofar as the process of belief formation was influenced by my perceiving the water. This causal explanatory relation provides a justification of the belief, because the fact that I have perceived water ahead serves as evidence that there is water ahead. By contrast, in the former scenario involving wishful thinking, the process of belief formation is causally independent from the actual presence of water. Hence, there is no causal explanatory relation to justify the belief, even though the belief turns out to be true.

Likewise, the cognitive strategy of the illusionist suggests that the judgement that there is conscious experience, even though it may be true, is unjustified. This is because the process of judgement formation is causally independent from the actual presence of conscious experience. Again, there is no causal explanatory relation to justify the judgement.

This is a significant epistemological problem, but it is not a new problem. Rather, it is a reiteration of an old problem in the philosophy of mind, which is known as the paradox of phenomenal judgement. The paradox of phenomenal judgement is articulated by Chalmers as follows:

We have seen that consciousness itself cannot be reductively explained. But phenomenal judgments lie in the domain of psychology and should be reductively explainable by the usual methods of cognitive science. There should be a physical or functional explanation of why we are disposed to make the claims about consciousness that we do, for instance, and of how we make the judgments we do about conscious experience. It then follows that our claims and judgments about consciousness can be explained in terms quite independent of consciousness. More strongly, it seems that consciousness is explanatorily irrelevant to our claims and judgments about consciousness. (Chalmers, 1996, p. 177)

Here, a phenomenal judgement is a judgement about conscious experience. This might include “conscious experience is real”, “conscious experience seems ineffable”, or “conscious experience must be nonphysical”. The paradox of phenomenal judgement concerns the tension between the fact that the phenomenal judgement is about conscious experience and the fact that conscious experience has no causal role in the formation of the phenomenal judgement.

It is not difficult to see how the paradox of phenomenal judgement is reiterated by the illusionist argument. As discussed above, the cognitive strategy of the illusionist does not specifically undermine the reality of conscious experience, but targets the justification of the judgement about conscious experience by suggesting that such a judgement can be explained in a physical or functionalist manner without appealing to conscious experience. Likewise, the paradox of phenomenal judgement targets the justification of a phenomenal judgement by noting out the causal explanatory irrelevance of conscious experience to the formation of the phenomenal judgement. And so, given that the most defensible form of the illusionist argument amounts to the paradox of phenomenal judgement, to address the paradox of phenomenal judgement would be to refute the most defensible form of the illusionist argument.

### **A Solution to the Paradox**

There are different ways to address the paradox of phenomenal judgement. The first broad approach is to accept that a phenomenal judgement requires no justification. For example, it could be contended that conscious experience is not a defeasible feature whose reality can be scrutinised, but rather is a necessary condition of possibility for a certain sort of knowledge. This recalls Descartes (1641/1993) argument that one cannot doubt the existence of one’s mind,

because the existence of one's mind is a necessary foundation for knowing and doubting. It also recalls Immanuel Kant's notion of transcendental apperception:

There cannot be any knowledge within us nor can knowledge be connected and unified within itself without unity of consciousness preceding all empirical data and serving to make possible all representation of objects. This pure, original, and unchangeable consciousness I call 'transcendental apperception'. It is clear that it deserves the name since even the most pure and objective unity, the unity of a priori concepts (space and time), is possible only by virtue of intuitions being related to transcendental apperception. (Kant, 1781/1993, A107)

Under this approach, a judgement about the reality of conscious experience requires no justification, because the reality of conscious experience is epistemically foundational. It must be taken as true that consciousness exists necessarily for knowledge to be possible.

Such an approach is significant because it undercuts the illusionist's appeal to heterophenomenology. As noted earlier, Dennett (1991) suggests that one can apply a third-person physical or functionalist analysis to one's own mental state without appealing to first-person phenomenology. However, this neglects that fact that the scientific knowledge on which such a physical or functionalist analysis is based is ultimately informed by observational evidence that is acquired through first-person experience. And so, heterophenomenology does not undermine first-person phenomenology because it uses knowledge whose acquisition is dependent on first-person phenomenology.

The second broad approach is to solve the paradox of phenomenal judgement by showing how a phenomenal judgement can be justified. There are different ways in which this might be done. An obvious way might be to undercut the paradox of phenomenal judgement by denying that conscious experience has no causal explanatory role in the formation of a judgement about conscious experience. For example, Avshalom Elitzur (1989) proposes a form of interactionist dualism, whereby conscious experience has an active causal role in the formation of the judgement. Accordingly, the judgement about conscious experience is justified by the causal explanatory relevance of conscious experience to its formation. While this is a legitimate solution, I will not be pursuing it further in this paper. Rather, my aim is to address the illusionist argument as charitably as possible in its strongest form, and so I will concede that conscious experience has no causal explanatory role in the formation of a judgement about conscious experience.

The challenge, then, is to show how a phenomenal judgement can be justified given that conscious experience has no causal explanatory role in its formation. Given the lack of a causal relation between conscious experience and a phenomenal judgement, any relation between them that can serve as a justification of the phenomenal judgement would have to be a noncausal relation. Herein, I defend the view that acquaintance is such a noncausal relation that can provide a justification of a phenomenal judgement.

Acquaintance is a notion associated with Bertrand Russell, who proposes that "we have acquaintance with anything of which we are directly aware, without the intermediary of any process of inference or any knowledge of truths" (Russell, 1912, p. 78). The important point to note here is that acquaintance involves direct awareness. It pertains to the way in which a phenomenon simply presents to a subject in the first-person. This can be contrasted with indirect knowledge, which is inferential and propositional. Various philosophers have suggested that acquaintance could comprise the appropriate sort of noncausal relation between conscious experience and a phenomenal judgement that could provide a justification of the phenomenal judgement. For example, Chalmers writes:

What is it that justifies our beliefs about conscious experiences, if it is not a causal link to those experiences, and if it is not the mechanisms by which the beliefs are formed? I think the answer is clear: it is *having* the experiences that justifies the beliefs. For example, the very fact that I have a red experience now provides justification for my belief that I am having a red experience. Change the red experience to a different sort of experience, or remove it altogether, and the chief source of justification for my belief is removed. (Chalmers, 1996, p. 196)

Another proponent of this view is Richard Fumerton, who proposes that:

... one has a noninferentially justified belief that *P* when one has the thought that *P* and one is acquainted with the fact that *P*, the thought that *P*, and the relation of correspondence holding between the thought that *P* and the fact that *P*. (Fumerton, 1996, p. 75)

Likewise, Siewert (1998) proposes that one has “first-person warrant” for one’s judgement or belief about one’s conscious experience, while Laurence Bonjour suggests that “a foundational belief results when one directly sees or apprehends that one’s experience satisfies the description of it offered by the content of the belief” (Bonjour, 2003, p. 191).

The key thesis being defended here is that one’s being acquainted with a conscious experience in the first-person is sufficient to justify one’s judgement or belief about that conscious experience. However, this requires further explication. In order for the above to be a satisfactory solution to the paradox of phenomenal judgement, two things must be demonstrated. First, it needs to be shown that acquaintance is genuinely a noncausal relation. Second, it needs to be shown how it is possible for such a noncausal relation to fulfil a justificatory role.

A resource for meeting the first challenge is the demonstrative attention account of knowledge by acquaintance proposed by Brie Gertler (2001). This suggests that a phenomenal judgement is able to refer to a conscious experience by way of an introspective demonstrative. A comparison with a perceptual demonstrative can be made. For example, when I make the judgement “that house seems like it has an interesting history”, the perceptual demonstrative “that house” refers to a particular house whose presence and appearance contribute to its seeming to me that there is a house that has an interesting history. Similarly, when I make the judgement “this conscious experience seems so real and vivid”, the introspective demonstrative “this conscious experience” refers to a particular conscious experience whose presence and appearance contribute to its seeming to me that there is a conscious experience that is real and vivid.

However, there is a crucial difference between a perceptual demonstrative and an introspective demonstrative. In the case of a perceptual demonstrative, the referent causally contributes to the judgement of how it seems to the subject. By contrast, in the case of an introspective demonstrative, the referent’s contribution to the judgement of how it seems to the subject is not causal. Rather, according to Gertler (2001), the referent is embedded in the judgement of how it seems to the subject. This embedding relation involves a phenomenal judgement taking up the content of the conscious experience into itself, such that the content of the judgement includes the content of the conscious experience. An analogy can be drawn with linguistic quotation. The conscious experience is quoted by the phenomenal judgement, much like how a phrase can be embedded in a larger sentence by using quotation marks. And so, a conscious experience contributes directly to the content of a phenomenal judgement in virtue of its being embedded in the phenomenal judgement.

The embedding relation is noncausal, because the embedded token comprises part of the embedding token. Following David Hume's (1748/2000) analysis of causation, Gertler (2001) notes that a causal relation is standardly taken to hold only between distinct events. However, in the case of acquaintance, the phenomenal judgement takes up the content of the conscious experience as part of it. Therefore, the relation between the conscious experience and the phenomenal judgement is not a relation between two distinct events, but is a mereological relation between a part and a whole. Such an approach is also used by Tyler Burge (1988) to account for reflexive judgement more generally. Reflexive judgement, such as when one reflects on one's own mental state, involves a second-order introspective state taking up the content of the first-order introspected state as part of it. This, again, is a noncausal relation, because the first-order introspected state comprises part of the second-order introspective state.

We have seen, then, that acquaintance can be understood as a genuinely noncausal relation. The above analysis also makes us better equipped to meet the second challenge of showing how it is possible for such a noncausal relation to fulfil a justificatory role. Given that the embedded token partly constitutes the embedding token, the presence of that particular embedding token entails the presence of the embedded token. This entailment relation makes the presence of an embedded token explanatorily relevant to the presence of an embedding token with particular content. And so, while a conscious experience may not have a causal role in the formation of a phenomenal judgement, it nonetheless has an explanatory role, insofar as it accounts for why the phenomenal judgement has the particular content that it has.

It is in virtue of this explanatory relevance that the conscious experience justifies the phenomenal judgement. The truth of a judgement or belief about conscious experience is no longer a coincidence, because the presence of conscious experience is relevant to the content of the judgement or belief about conscious experience. If one had not been acquainted with that conscious experience, then the token that the judgement or belief embeds would be missing.

The above analysis approach provides a promising solution to the paradox of phenomenal judgement. It shows how a phenomenal judgement can be justified by conscious experience, even though conscious experience does not have a causal role in the phenomenal judgement's formation. Moreover, the analysis further undercuts the cognitive strategy of the illusionist by showing that the experiential notion of seeming and the cognitive notion of seeming are tied together in the case of conscious experience. In such a case, the judgement or belief that comprises the cognitive notion of seeming embeds the conscious experience that comprises the experiential notion of seeming. As Gertler notes:

*... when an introspective judgment about experience qualifies as knowledge by acquaintance, the aspect of how things epistemically seem that is expressed in that judgment is constituted by how they phenomenally seem—that is, by the phenomenal reality. (Gertler, 2012, pp. 107–108)*

Therefore, the illusionist cannot claim that the notion of seeming that is involved in the illusion of conscious experience is a nonexperiential cognitive state, because the cognitive notion of seeming invokes the experiential notion of seeming in the case of conscious experience. Again, this renders illusionism incoherent as per the obvious argument.

## **Conclusion**

I have presented a philosophical case against illusionism about conscious experience. The illusionist wants to claim that there is no conscious experience, but it only seems like there is conscious experience. If an experiential notion of seeming is assumed, then illusionism is incoherent, because an illusion presupposes the reality of conscious experience. If a cognitive notion of seeming is assumed, then illusionism is empirically inadequate, because a third-

person account of a nonexperiential judgement or belief fails to capture why conscious experience appears like anything at all from a first-person perspective. Therefore, illusionism is false and phenomenal realism is true. Nonetheless, although it fails to undermine the reality of conscious experience, the illusionist argument does raise a significant epistemological problem, which amounts to an old problem in the philosophy of mind called the paradox of phenomenal judgement. This concerns the question of how a judgement about conscious experience can possibly be justified, given the causal explanatory irrelevance of conscious experience to the formation of that judgement. I have defended an approach to solving the paradox of phenomenal judgement that draws on acquaintance. Such an approach presents a way in which conscious experience can influence the content of a phenomenal judgement in a noncausal manner. Accordingly, it allows the realist to show how a phenomenal judgement can be justified by conscious experience, even if it is conceded that conscious experience does not have a causal role in the formation of a phenomenal judgement.

The argument I have provided is significant, because it provides a vindication of philosophical phenomenology. As noted earlier, the illusionist claim would seem to imply that phenomenological enquiry into the nature of conscious experience rests on a mistake. This would include much work on phenomenological psychopathology. Herein, I have aimed to alleviate this worry by showing that illusionism is false and that phenomenal realism is true. Given that conscious experience is real and that phenomenal judgement is justified, we can be assured of the soundness of phenomenology as foundation for philosophical enquiry.

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