

CONSCIOUS THINKING

A Descriptive Account of Cognitive Phenomenology

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INTRODUCTION

0.1. Conscious experiences

We have various conscious experiences. We have conscious experience of the world when we see colors, smell perfumes, touch a piece of silk or hear the sound of a trumpet. We are also consciously experiencing the world in desiring an ice cream, longing for some company or hoping to recover from illness. And we are also conscious of the world in the many ways we feel about it. We fear, adore or are indifferent to snakes, cats and dogs. We are disgusted, irritated or bored by neighbors. But in addition to all these sensory perceptual, conative and affective conscious experiences, we have the further experience of consciously thinking. We judge, doubt or infer that things are thus and so. And we also engage in reasoning, pondering or meditating about countless of things.

The purpose of this thesis is to build a descriptive account of conscious thinking. In this introduction I will sketch the contours of the project. In the conclusion, I will outline the resulting account of what it is like to think.

0.2. The problem of conscious thoughts

What is conscious thinking? What it is like to think? Suppose it occurs to you that you forgot your mobile phone at home. How would you describe your conscious experience? What are the distinctive features of this experience in virtue of which it is an episode of *conscious thinking*?

In contemporary philosophy of mind, there is a controversy concerning this last question. On the one hand, some philosophers say that conscious thoughts have no conscious features at all or if they are associated to any conscious features, then these conscious features derive from conscious experiences that are not thoughts.

On the other hand, some philosophers claim that in addition to all these conscious features deriving from other kinds of conscious experiences, conscious thoughts have their own features that do not derive from other kinds of experiences. Thus, conscious thinking really constitutes a kind of conscious experience just as visual perception or pain experiences are kinds of experiences by virtue of how things visually appear or how it feels to be in pain.

In the literature, this debate is referred to as “the problem of cognitive phenomenology”. I will also call it “the problem of conscious thoughts”. Here is a way to formulate the problem:

The problem of conscious thoughts:

Are there conscious thoughts just as there are conscious episodes such as sensory perceptions, conative episodes and affective episodes?

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Related to the problem of conscious thoughts, is a second problem. If there is a problem of conscious thoughts, then how should we answer it? Thus we have another problem about cognitive phenomenology:

The problem of the problem of conscious thoughts:

How should we solve the problem of conscious thoughts?

In this thesis, I will argue that some conscious thoughts have conscious features in virtue of which they constitute a kind of experience just as sensory perceptions form a kind of experience. By providing an answer to the first problem, I will also arrive at an answer to the second problem.

In contemporary literature, when philosophers speak of “cognitive phenomenology”, the word “phenomenology” means the *conscious feature* of a mental episode. It has the same meaning as “phenomenal character” which is also often used to refer to this subjective and qualitative aspect of our conscious experiences. Furthermore, a mental episode is said to be conscious in the sense that *there is something it is like for the subject to have that episode*.¹ Accordingly, “phenomenology” here does not have the meaning of an approach to philosophy.² On the other hand, “cognitive” refers to that which pertains to *thoughts* and is to be contrasted with sensory perceptual episodes but also conative episodes like desire, wishes and hopes and affective phenomena like emotions, sentiments and moods. Paradigmatic cognitive episodes, or thoughts, are episodes like judgement, belief, doubt, acceptance, recollection, realization, or processes like reasoning and deliberating.

Opponents to cognitive phenomenology argue that the conscious features of conscious thoughts can wholly be *derived from* or *reduced to* conscious features of other kinds of conscious experiences. They will typically argue that all conscious features of thoughts derive from or are reducible to conscious features of episodes of visualizations or inner speech, some kind of emotions and, in some cases, bodily sensations. For someone who denies that conscious thoughts constitute a distinctive kind of conscious experience, episodes of visualizations and inner speech are not distinctive conscious features of thoughts in that they are very much like quasi-perceptual episodes of seeing or hearing. What it is like to visualize something or to produce a stretch of inner speech is very much like what it is like to see something or to hear some stretch of speech.

The general assumption of an opponent to cognitive phenomenology is that, on the one hand, the conscious features of visualizations, inner speech, emotions and bodily sensations are unproblematic and sufficient for all the consciousness of our thoughts. On the other hand the opponent will take the view of a friend of cognitive phenomenology to be somewhat extravagant.

¹ Nagel (1974).

² Strawson (2011: 286-7).

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He will typically ask “What are these distinctive conscious features of thoughts?”, “What would remain if we’d removed all these conscious features of visualizations, inner speech, emotions or bodily sensations?”³

☞ ☞

How do we determine whether conscious thoughts have their own distinctive conscious features over and above visualizations and episodes of inner speech? Proponents of cognitive phenomenology have put forward several arguments to show that there are such additional conscious cognitive features. The two most discussed arguments are the *contrast case argument*⁴ and the *self-knowledge argument*⁵.

The contrast argument. Suppose there are two subjects who hear a stretch of speech in French. Suppose further that the two subjects are in the exact same environment and that they are identical with the exception that one knows French and the other does not. Two questions should then be considered: Do the two subjects have the same overall conscious experience? And, do they also have the same sensory perceptual conscious experiences? The argument proceeds with two observations. First, the two subjects do not have the same overall conscious experience – the experience of French is different for the one who knows French. Second, both subjects have the same sensory perceptual experiences since, after all, they hear the exact same sounds.

If all this is correct, the next question is: What difference distinguishes the overall experiences of these two subjects? Friends of cognitive phenomenology argue that the best way to explain this difference is that the subject who knows French undergoes a conscious episode of *understanding* that the other does not. Since both have otherwise the same sensory perceptual experiences, the conscious difference between the two subjects has to be a non-sensory perceptual difference that is most likely a matter of distinctive conscious cognitive features of understanding. Obviously, since an episode of understanding is a kind of thought, then if there are some conscious episodes with distinctive conscious cognitive features of understanding, then there are some thoughts with their own distinctive conscious features.

The self-knowledge argument. Suppose you suffer from a terrible headache. It seems that in this unfortunate case, you know it in a straightforward way. You do not need to observe yourself in the mirror and see that you look a little bit pale and remember that you did drink too much alcohol and, on the basis of all this, come to the conclusion that you have a headache. This does not even make sense. You know *immediately* on the basis of *how your head hurts* – that is, it just feels like you have a headache. Consequently, first, if you immediately know that you are having

³ Tye (2003: 79).

⁴ Strawson (1994), Siewert (2011).

⁵ Goldman (1993), Pitt (2004).

a pain experience, and, second, that you could not know that you have this experience of pain unless the episode of pain had its own specific painful conscious aspects, then it follows that the episode of pain has its own painful conscious aspects.

Friends of cognitive phenomenology will build an argument for the existence of conscious thought that is similar to the model of self-knowledge of an episode of pain. When a thought occurs to us, we also have immediate access to what we are thinking. But again, how are we able to know what we are thinking in such a direct manner? It seems that the best way to explain how we know what we think is by resorting to what we consciously have in mind. Accordingly, the main point of the argument is that since we know immediately what we think and since we could not know what we think in such a direct manner unless what we think is distinctively conscious, we have good reason to think that what we are thinking is conscious in its own distinctive manner. Therefore there are conscious thoughts with their own distinctive conscious features.

0.3. A solution to the problem of conscious thoughts

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will argue that the contrast argument and the self-knowledge argument fail to establish convincingly that there are thoughts with their own conscious features. I do not have decisive objections that rebut these two arguments and my intention in any case is not to discard cognitive phenomenology. My aim is rather only to highlight some shortcomings of these arguments and how at best they only establish that some thoughts have *some* conscious aspect.

The problem that both arguments share is that the conscious aspects associated with conscious thoughts lack of sufficiently *detailed* and *positive* descriptions. In the case of the contrast argument, there is no positive description of the understanding experience; we are told that understanding a stretch of speech is non-sensory in that it outstrips all the conscious aspects associated with the experience of hearing speech. But it is unclear why these phenomenal features are not just further sensory perceptual features. Why is the difference between the two subjects not a further difference in what they *hear*?

In the case of the self-knowledge argument, the appeal to the capacity of self-knowledge is insufficient to guarantee that conscious thoughts have their own distinctive conscious features. Conscious thoughts are characterized through this argument only in terms of the way they differ from each other and with respect to other conscious episodes. But nothing positive is said about their intrinsic conscious character. Opponents to cognitive phenomenology like to say that if conscious features are the ground of our self-knowledge, then visualizations and episodes of inner speech are enough. One comes to know what one is thinking through what one is visualizing and saying to oneself.

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Fortunately, the source of the failure of the two arguments immediately suggests a way to solve the problem of conscious thoughts. If the problem that plagues the main arguments for cognitive phenomenology is that they are under-described and if conscious thoughts are conscious because they have their own conscious features in virtue of which they constitute a conscious kind, then one should right away enroll for the task to elaborate a detailed and positive account of these conscious features of thoughts. This is what I will do in the rest of the thesis.

In the next four chapters, I will focus more specifically on four conscious aspects associated with conscious thoughts:

(MT1) All conscious thoughts have an *intentional* phenomenal aspect

(MT2) Some conscious thoughts have a phenomenal aspect of a *doxastic mode*

(MT3) Some conscious thoughts have a phenomenal aspect of *agency*

(MT4) Some conscious thoughts have a phenomenal aspect of *instantaneity*

To proceed systematically, with respect to each of these phenomenal aspects, I will discuss three questions:

- (i) What reason do we have to think that there is such a conscious aspect?
- (ii) What is the nature of this conscious aspect?
- (iii) Does this aspect give us a reason to think that conscious thoughts have their own kind of consciousness?

Through an examination of these four theses, it will become apparent that conscious thoughts do constitute a distinctive kind of conscious experience. More specifically, it is in virtue of their intentional phenomenal aspect (and to some extent their phenomenal aspect of agency) that conscious thoughts constitute their own kind of experience. Most fundamentally it is the way we *have something in mind* in a conscious thinking that sets thoughts apart from other kinds of experiences. To *have in mind* a given object is a *sui generis* way of experiencing the world that is different from the way an object can *look, taste, smell* or *feel*.



One objection to this project is that it is not clear how one should proceed to achieve this aim. How are we supposed to find out what the distinctive conscious features of thoughts are? Should we rely on introspection? If so, how reliable are the results we will get by introspection? It seems that many will not be convinced and will be unwilling to embark on this project.

I admit I have no particular methodological procedure to propose. But this should not be a worry for two reasons. First, in contemporary literature we find extensive descriptions of

various conscious aspects of visual perception. What it is like to see an object?⁶ What it is like to see an object as mind-independent?⁷ What it is like to see the particularity of an object?⁸ Are objects visually experienced as constant through changes of their appearances?⁹ Do we perceive kinds of objects and other high-level properties?¹⁰ In what sense are our visual experiences transparent?¹¹ All these aspects of visual experiences are discussed at length and skepticism toward their possibility and significance is rare. However, if the problem of conscious thoughts is the question of whether some thoughts are conscious in the same sense as perceptions are conscious and if one thinks – as I do – that there is cognitive phenomenology, then nothing should prevent one from starting the project to describe conscious thinking.

A second reason not to be taken aback by worries about our capacities to identify the features of conscious thought is that many friends of cognitive phenomenology do already provide positive descriptions of conscious thought. For instance, Siewert (1998) discusses a form of indeterminacy of the content of conscious thoughts. Strawson (2003) defends the view that all occurrences of thought-contents are experienced as passive. Nes (2012) describes the thematic unity that binds visualizations and episodes of inner speech associated with our thoughts. Nes (2015) gives an account of conscious inference. Crane (2013) and Klausen (2013) discuss conscious belief. Chudnoff's study (2013b) is an extended account of the phenomenology and epistemology of intuitions. Chudnoff (2015: 99) describes holding a proposition in mind. Kriegel (2013c) characterizes the episode of entertaining a proposition. Kriegel's (2016) work is a dense attempt to grasp various aspects of conscious thoughts.

The upshot of all this is that meaningful theoretical descriptions of conscious episodes are possible, both in the case of sensory perceptual episodes and conscious thinking. Of course, although many methodological questions are raised by the philosophical study of conscious experiences, we need not answer all of them to give an account of conscious thinking.¹²

0.4. What the thesis is not about

My diagnosis of the weakness of the two arguments for cognitive phenomenology has a straightforward consequence for the way one should answer the problem of the problem of conscious thoughts. By offering a detailed description of the *conscious features* of thinking, I will emphasize certain issues and exclude others. One can then distinguish alternatives to my approach.

⁶ Dretske (1969), Siegel (2006c).

⁷ Spener (2012).

⁸ Gomes & French (2016), Soteriou (2000).

⁹ Siewert (2006), (2012).

¹⁰ Bayne (2009), Siegel (2006a).

¹¹ Harman (1990), Siewert (2004), Tye (2002).

¹² But see Kriegel (2007), Siegel (2007), Siewert (2007).

First, one may be concerned by the existence of conscious thoughts within the larger context of theories that attempt to give an integrated account of both the intentional and conscious aspects of the mind. This option is illustrated by the work of Horgan et al. when they discuss cognitive phenomenology in relation to what they call “separatism” and/or “inseparatism”.¹³ According to Horgan et al., intentional mental episodes can also be conscious episodes, and conscious episodes are also intentional episodes.¹⁴ In contrast to such larger projects, the present thesis has a much more limited aim. I will not discuss at length the conscious aspects and intentionality of mental episodes that are not thoughts. In chapter 2, however, I will discuss whether the conscious aspects of thought can adequately be characterized as intentional, but this will remain a modest contribution to such larger projects. In particular, I will not supply the reader with anything close to a theory of intentionality.

Second, one should also distinguish the present way of treating the problem of cognitive phenomenology from an historical approach. There are various ways to understand the idea of an historical approach, and I will not spell them out. Instead, I will emphasize how my project stands to some such approach. Basically, I will discuss the problem of conscious thoughts as it is discussed in contemporary literature without relying on any historical figure or tradition. The way the problem of cognitive phenomenology is discussed nowadays has its origin in the contributions of Goldman (1993), Strawson (1994/2010) and Siewert (1998). Most participants in the debate do not (consciously) look for conceptual inputs from other periods and contexts other than analytical philosophy of mind of the last 50 years.¹⁵ Most essays in the volume of Bayne and Montague (2011) are representative of this kind of approach to cognitive phenomenology.¹⁶ Accordingly, I will not discuss views of traditional phenomenologists, nor will I attempt to analyze why there is such absence of interest for what might otherwise seem to be the first source to consult.

Finally, a large part of the contribution to the problem of cognitive phenomenology overlaps issues concerning self-knowledge. Again, my aim is not to provide a theory of self-knowledge concerning conscious thoughts. In the first chapter, I will discuss Pitt’s self-knowledge argument for cognitive phenomenology. In the third chapter, related to the phenomenal aspect of psychological modes or attitudes, I will also consider a few further questions concerning self-knowledge of belief and judgment. But treatment of these questions will remain limited and I will, for instance, not consider competitive accounts that do not base self-knowledge on conscious features.

¹³ Horgan & Tienson (2002).

¹⁴ See also Kriegel (2013b).

¹⁵ See also Siewert (2011: 238-43).

¹⁶ But see Breyer & Gutland (2016).

Intertwined with interrogations concerning self-knowledge are all the methodological issues that question our philosophical capacities to grasp the nature of conscious experience. As I have already argued, contemporary philosophy of mind proves that we do not need a second-order understanding of our practices to make progress in our attempt to theoretically describe conscious experiences. Accordingly, I will simply reject objections that question the introspective warrants I have for the claims I will present. I presume that discussions of the conscious aspects of visual experiences amply illustrate how one can rationally discuss conscious experiences.

One upshot from all this is that I do not consider my main opponents to be deniers of cognitive phenomenology. If my diagnosis of the two main arguments for cognitive phenomenology is correct, the first culprits are the usual friends of cognitive phenomenology. This is not to say that I always disagree with those who already defend the existence of conscious thinking. My point is only that just as visual experiences have multifarious conscious aspects that can and are amply discussed, conscious thinking is immensely rich and can similarly be the object of discussions and disagreements without calling into question the primary assumption that it exists. Later on, once we have a better grasp of what it is like to think, we can come back to all those who have doubts about cognitive phenomenology and see how they can accommodate our findings. But this further step is not part of this thesis.

0.5. A roadmap

The thesis has five chapters and a short conclusion. The first chapter motivates and is presupposed by all the others. The topics of chapters two to five can, in principle, be addressed independently, but in accordance with the views I favor, it turns out that they are somewhat related. In short, chapters two to five all contribute to an attempt to sketch a general picture of what it is like to think.

In the first chapter, the long 1.1 section is concerned with clarifying the main thesis of cognitive phenomenology. Section 1.2 contains the examination of the two main arguments for cognitive phenomenology and their shortcomings. In the section 1.3, I explain more precisely, how we should conceive of the problem of conscious thoughts.

In the second chapter, section 2.2 explains what it means to say that the conscious aspect of thoughts is intentional. I also posit the best way to characterize the phenomenal character of conscious thought is in terms of “having something in mind”. I review a few reasons to endorse the thesis that the phenomenal character of conscious thought is intentional. In section 2.3, I sketch an account of having something in mind. The main feature of having something in mind is that one abstract properties of the thing one has in mind. In section 2.4, I then show that the way

one abstract properties of an object one has in mind reveals a fundamental non-sensory perceptual aspect of the phenomenal character of conscious thought.

In chapter three, I examine phenomenal aspects related to the psychological mode of belief or judgment. In section 3.1, I introduce doxastic episodes and distinguish the modes of belief, judgement and entertaining a proposition. In section 3.3, I identify a phenomenal aspect that could be described as a doxastic phenomenal aspect. I consider the possibility that this phenomenal aspect is the phenomenal aspect of belief. I argue that it cannot be a phenomenal aspect of belief. In section 3.4, I consider the suggestion that the phenomenal aspect I identified earlier is a phenomenal aspect of judgement. I argue then that it cannot be a phenomenal aspect of judgement. In section 3.5, on the basis of the previous results, I argue that there are no phenomenal aspects of judging or believing and that what philosophers call “conscious belief” or “conscious judgement” are episodes of entertaining a proposition. I conclude the chapter by suggesting that the episode of entertaining that consists in having something in mind is the phenomenal aspect that is distinctive of conscious thought.

Chapter four is about active and passive ways of grasping a thought-content. In section 4.2, I clarify the relation between the problem of cognitive phenomenology and the phenomenology of agency. In sections 4.3-4.6, I discuss in detail an argument by Galen Strawson that purports to show that all occurrences of thought-content are passive occurrences. In section 4.3 I present Strawson’s argument. In section 4.4 I discuss in what way deciding to think a particular thought that p always implies that the thought that p occurs passively. In section 4.5, I critically discuss the main accounts of agentive experiences and argue that it is necessary for conscious active thinking that a thought is experienced as connected to reasons and also that it is experienced as caused by the subject. In section 4.6, I consider different cognitive situations from which a subject engages into conscious active thinking that depart from what is assumed by the Strawsonian argument. Finally, in section 4.7, I discuss the question of whether the phenomenal aspect of agency of conscious thought reveals a non-sensory phenomenal aspect.

Chapter five discusses the instantaneous aspect of the event of grasping a thought-content. Section 5.1 clarifies the notion of “instantaneity”. In Section 5.2, contrary to orthodox discussion about the instantaneous character of judgement or thought, I present the reasons to believe that there is a phenomenal aspect of instantaneously grasping a thought-content. The strategy I follow is to deflate the mysteriousness surrounding the claim that conscious thought is instantaneous.

Finally, in the conclusion, I recapitulate the main results of this thesis and suggest a few ways one could advance the study of conscious thinking.

Chapter One – The Problem of Cognitive phenomenology

1.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce *the problem of conscious thoughts* or *the problem of cognitive phenomenology*. In the second section of the chapter, I will clarify the thesis that figures at the heart of the problem of cognitive phenomenology. In the third section, I will present and discuss the two main arguments for the thesis of cognitive phenomenology. On the basis of my discussion of these arguments, in the fourth and last section, I will suggest a new formulation of the problem of cognitive phenomenology that will then set the stage for the rest of the thesis.

1.2. The thesis of cognitive phenomenology

The basic idea. There have been various formulations of the problem of cognitive phenomenology¹⁷ – some I will discuss later –, but the basic idea at the heart of the debate over cognitive phenomenology is well expressed in Strawson's (1994/2010) statement that:

"[...] thinking a thought or suddenly remembering something or realizing that the interval between the perfect squares increases by 2 is as much of an experience as feeling pain when one has burnt one's finger or seeing a raven flying low over bracken." (p.3-4).

There are in fact two different ideas that need to be highlighted in this quotation. The first is that thinking, remembering or realizing *are experiences*. The second is that each of these episodes are *as much of an experience as* feeling pain or seeing something.

Let's start with some preliminary remarks. First, in contemporary philosophy of mind, it is usually admitted that there is a sense in which "experience" is synonymous to "conscious mental event". Accordingly, to say that thinking, remembering or realizing are experiences is just to say that they are conscious mental events. However, the notion of "experience" that is assumed in philosophical circles is, in one sense, broader than the ordinary notion. For non-philosophers, it is often part of the meaning of "experience" that it is an event with a significant *value*. Thus, one will say that to give birth to a child is an experience whereas to see the asphalt of the road while waiting on the bus is not. But, for philosophers, both are experiences in the sense that both are also conscious mental events. However, in another sense, it is narrower since there is also a dispositional understanding of "experience" that is not directly related to consciousness. (For instance, we speak of an old man's experience.) Also, although in everyday language, it is natural to individuate conscious episodes in terms of psychological kinds, experiences are naturally individuated in terms of their objects in addition of their individuation in terms of psychological

¹⁷ Carruther & Veillet (2011), Horgan & Tienson (2002), Pitt (2004), Shield (2011), Siewert (1998), (2011), Strawson (2011), Tye & Wright (2011).

kinds. While one will typically talk of musical or culinary experiences, it would be at best strained to talk of musical or culinary consciousness.

I suggested that there is an understanding of “experience” according to which it is equivalent to the notion of a “conscious mental event”. However, although many philosophers seem to assume that experience or consciousness is necessarily of the ontological category of an *event* or *process*¹⁸ this is not something that we can take for granted. Thus, in order not to presuppose anything, I will use the notion of an “episode” to cover different ontological categories such as the categories of states, events or processes.

Strawson’s first idea is that thinking, remembering and realizing are conscious episodes. I will call such episodes “thoughts” and they belong to a large family that also includes the following other members:

List 1. Judging that *p*, thinking that *p*, believing that *p*, believing in *x*, holding *p* truth, realizing that *p*, remembering that *p*, understanding *x*, predicting that *p*, it occurring to one that *p*, being confident that *p*, being convinced that *p*, being sure (certain) that *p*, taking it that *p*, speculating that *p*, suspecting that *p*, surmising that *p*, conjecturing that *p*, hypothesizing that *p*, doubting that *p*, assuming that *p*, accepting that *p*, having a hunch that *p*, guessing that *p*, conceiving that *p*, wondering whether *p*, considering *p*, inferring that *p*, concluding that *p*, and various extended processes like reasoning, drifting aimlessly in thought, deliberating about what to do, reflecting, pondering, mulling over, musing and meditating.¹⁹

Thoughts are not just to be contrasted with feeling pain or seeing something. I will contrast thoughts with the rest of mental episodes that include at least the following:

List 2. *Sensory perceptual episodes* like seeing, hearing, smelling, touching; *bodily sensations* such as feeling pain, feeling cold, headache, tickles and itches; *quasi sensory perceptual episodes* like *visualization* involved in some form of imagination, for instance, or *auralization* involved in so called episodes of inner-speech, etc.; *conative* episodes such as desiring, wishing or hoping; and *affective episodes* such as various *emotions*, *sentiments* and *mood* episodes involving, for instance, disgust, anger, jealousy, love, feeling of being depressed or lighthearted.

The second idea that appears in Strawson’s quotation – that some episodes of List 1 are as much of experiences as conscious episodes of List 2 – should be understood in the sense that there is a notion of “experience” or “consciousness” that applies to mental episodes such as thinking, remembering or realizing in the same *generic sense* as it applies to episodes such as feeling pain or seeing something. But, I want to emphasize that this second idea is *neither* that conscious thinking, remembering and realizing *are* conscious episodes of List 2 *nor* that they *feel* like pain or like seeing something. By analogy, a man is a human being in the same sense as a woman is a human being but by claiming this I am not suggesting that a man is a woman or that a man looks like a woman.

The first idea in the quotation from Strawson expresses one version of what I will call the “Thesis of Cognitive Phenomenology” and which will be the main concern throughout this thesis,

¹⁸ O’Shaughnessy (2000), Soteriou (2007).

¹⁹ Kriegel (2015: 38-9), Smithies (2013a:744).

and the second idea expresses what I will call “The Analogy Thesis” and which will help in understanding how to interpret the Thesis of Cognitive Phenomenology.

The Starting Thesis:

(T01) Some thoughts (i.e. episodes of List 1) are conscious episodes (or experiences)

The Analogy Thesis:

(T02) Some thoughts (i.e. episodes of List 1) are conscious episodes (or experiences) just like feeling of pain and seeing (i.e. episodes of List 2) are conscious episodes (or experiences)

In order to be able to evaluate the Thesis of Cognitive Phenomenology, we need to get a better understanding of what thoughts and consciousness are.



Problems about consciousness. In the recent literature about consciousness, several different distinctions have been drawn with respect to our everyday notion of “consciousness”.²⁰ Two of them are fundamental for the problem of cognitive phenomenology. A first distinction is between a *subject’s* being conscious and a *mental episode* being conscious. The second distinction, with regards to conscious episodes, is between *phenomenally* conscious episodes and *non-phenomenally* conscious episodes.

The first distinction concerns the *bearer* of consciousness. A subject’s being conscious is sometimes referred to as “creature consciousness” or “organism consciousness”.²¹ For this project, it is only the notion of a mental episode’s being conscious that is relevant. And, although, there are several questions one would need to address about the relation between a subject’s being conscious and a mental episode’s being conscious, I will nevertheless leave them aside and focus exclusively on an episode being conscious.²²

Block (1995) defends an influential proposal concerning the second distinction.²³ Block makes a distinction between what he calls “phenomenal consciousness” and “access consciousness”. Concerning phenomenal consciousness, he writes:

“First, consider phenomenal consciousness, or P-consciousness, as I will call it. Let me acknowledge at the outset that I cannot define P-consciousness in any remotely non-circular way. [...]. The best one can do for P-consciousness is in some respects worse than for many other concepts, though, because really all one can do is point to the phenomenon [...]. Nonetheless, it is important to point properly. [...]. So how should we point to P-consciousness? One way is with rough synonyms. As I said, P-consciousness is experience. P-consciousness properties are experiential ones. The totality of the experiential properties of a state are “what it is like” to have it. Moving from synonyms to examples, we have P-conscious states when we see, hear, smell taste, and have pains. P-conscious properties include the experiential properties of sensations, feelings, and perception, but I would also include thoughts, desires, and emotions. A feature of P-consciousness that is often missed is that differences in intentional content often make a P-conscious different. [...]. So far, I don’t take myself to have said anything terribly controversial. The controversial

²⁰ Block (1995), Chalmers (1996: Chapter 1), Kriegel (2009: Chapter 2), Rosenthal (2002).

²¹ Rosenthal (1997), Lycan (1996).

²² See Kriegel (2009: chapter 2).

²³ See also Chalmers (1996: Chapter 1).

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part is that I take P-conscious properties to be distinct from any cognitive, intentional, or functional properties.” (p.230)

And about his non-phenomenal notion “access-consciousness” Block writes:

“I now turn to the non-phenomenal notion of consciousness that is most easily and dangerously conflated with P-consciousness: access-consciousness. A state is access-conscious (A-conscious) if, in virtue of one’s having the state, a representation of its content is (1) inferentially promiscuous [...], that is, poised for use as a premise in reasoning, (2) poised for rational control of action, and (3) poised for rational control of speech. [...]. I see A-consciousness as a cluster concept, in which (1) – roughly, reportability – is the element of the cluster with the smallest weight, though (3) is often the best practical guide to A-consciousness.” (p.231)

In what follows, I will mainly be concerned with what Block calls phenomenal consciousness. Conscious thoughts are *phenomenally* conscious thoughts. Accordingly, I will not discuss access consciousness or the relation between phenomenal consciousness and access consciousness.²⁴

It is important to distinguish sharply between two kinds of tasks, with respect to phenomenal consciousness, which are required not just concerning the problem of cognitive phenomenology but for all philosophical problems related to phenomenal consciousness. On the one hand, the first task is to find a way to *introduce* phenomenal consciousness in a neutral manner. The challenge is to fix the reference of the notion of “phenomenal consciousness” in a way that is not partial to any party and that will allow opponents to discuss the same phenomenon without talking over each other. On the other hand, a second task that nevertheless presupposes the first is to *give an account* of phenomenal consciousness. But the two tasks are not independent from each other – one is just the prolongation of the other.

In Block’s quotation above, the task of introducing phenomenal consciousness consists of the problem of “pointing to the phenomenon”. The problem appears because Block believes that we *cannot define* phenomenal consciousness in a non-circular way. Therefore, in order to get the discussion about phenomenal consciousness started, we need to find another way to introduce *what we are talking about*.

Block’s quotation includes three suggestions concerning how to introduce phenomenal consciousness. The first is to use the expression “what it is like” – made popular by Nagel (1974) – to pick out phenomenally conscious episodes.²⁵ The second is to rely on synonyms like “experience”. As we have already seen, one undergoes a phenomenally conscious episode just in case one is having an experience. And the third suggestion is to use examples.

Other philosophers have made proposals. A fourth suggestion, from Kriegel (2015: 47), is to introduce phenomenal consciousness through the notion of an “explanatory gap”. A given property will then be a phenomenally conscious property to the extent that there is such an explanatory gap between that property and some physical property. A fifth suggestion from

²⁴ Crane (2013), Kriegel (2009: chapter 2).

²⁵ Siewert (2011), (2013).

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Siewert (2013) is to resort to the coincident sense of “experience”. “Something is “an experience” in the sense that all and only conscious states are, just when it *coincides with someone’s experiencing it.*” (p.201-2). A sixth recommendation, also from Siewert (2013: 203), is to introduce phenomenally conscious episodes by contrasting them with episodes that lack phenomenal consciousness. For that purpose, phenomenally conscious episodes are then contrasted with episodes of blindsight.

Which way of introducing phenomenal consciousness is preferable? It seems to me that there is no absolute best way to introduce phenomenal consciousness. The choice should be guided by the philosophical question we are dealing with and also by the type of opponents we are ready to engage with.

With regard to these points, it is important to keep in mind that my thesis (i) aims first of all to discuss a *phenomenological problem*, namely *how things are for a subject in a given experience* and (ii) that the types of opponents I am engaging with all accept the existence of phenomenal consciousness. What follows from this is that, first, phenomenal consciousness should not be introduced in a way that would prejudge certain *phenomenological* problems and, second, it is not my aim to argue against philosophers who deny the existence of consciousness.

My suggestion is then to rely on (i) examples of conscious episodes that (ii) are picked out as phenomenally conscious by the nagelian locution “what it is like” adequately restricted. I take it that the expression “what it is like” is well suited for my project inasmuch as although it permits to identify phenomenally conscious episodes it nevertheless remains silent on the more specific nature of the different types of phenomenally conscious episodes. Further, Siewert (2011: 243) suggests a more sophisticated way of introducing phenomenal consciousness that adds to the use of the nagelian expression and epistemic condition. “We can say: there is something it’s like for one to have Φ just when it is a feature suited for a certain kind of *subjective knowledge* or *curiosity*. That is to say, it is a feature of which one can either correctly *claim to have*, or sensibly *want to have* a knowledge of *what feature it is*, which requires one have or can imagine having that very feature.” (p. 245) I will not develop this point but I assume that this epistemic dimension is an important and intuitive insight that should be incorporated into any way of introducing phenomenal consciousness.

To start with the examples, here is a list of mental episodes I take to be conscious in the relevant phenomenal sense:

List 3. To *see* the blue sky while lying on a beach, to *hear* the noise of the wind in the trees, to *feel* the peaks of a hedgehog, *feeling nervous* about a job interview, to have a *headache*, to *feel fear* from an ugly dog, to be *disgusted* by a greasy hamburger, to *taste* a durian fruit, to *smell* Swiss cheese, to *imagine touching* the peaks of a hedgehog, to *realize* one has forgotten his valet at home, or to *understand* a pun.

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Second, my suggestion is that these mental episodes are phenomenally conscious in the sense that there is something it is like to undergo these episodes:

(D01) A mental episode *M* of List 3 is phenomenally conscious iff there is something it is like for the subject to undergo *M*

Introducing phenomenal consciousness via the locution “what it is like” faces however several objections. A first threat is that this locution spreads phenomenal consciousness too generously to episodes we would not want to count as conscious.²⁶ First, one can meaningfully say that there is something it is like to weigh 150kg or that there is something it is like to be tall, although *weighing 150kg* or *being tall* are certainly not phenomenally conscious episodes. I will come back to this point later, but for now my answer is that we should distinguish between the case where there is something it is like to undergo a given episode *in virtue* of undergoing *another episode* and the case where there is no such other episode in virtue of which there is something it is like to undergo a given episode. Accordingly, in the case of being tall, if there is something it is like to be in that state, it’s in virtue of, say, *seeing* things from a higher point of view and having various *bodily sensations* related to this particular condition of being tall and therefore it is not strictly speaking being tall that is conscious. Incidentally, this distinction allows also to explain why realizing that one has forgotten something or understanding a pun figured on the list of conscious episodes. One may have wondered why these mental episodes were on List 3 since they are thoughts and that would have been to settle the question of cognitive phenomenology. But, the crucial point is that even opponents to cognitive phenomenology accept that there is something it is like to realize or understand something in this unconstrained use of the “what it is like” locution. More on this later.

When one has found a satisfactory way to introduce phenomenal consciousness, the challenge is then to give an account of its nature. There are various kinds of theories that aim to provide such an account: intentionalist theories (also known under the names of “representationalism” or “representationism”), higher-order theories or qualia theories and others.²⁷ However, it seems to be useful to make a further distinction within the general framework in which these theories appear. Each of these theories provides two “sub-accounts” that are not always clearly distinguished. One account is phenomenological and the second account is non-phenomenological.

The phenomenological account that is provided by each of these theories can be understood as an extension of the problem of introducing phenomenal consciousness. As I noted earlier, when it comes to introducing phenomenal consciousness at some point the way we characterize it becomes controversial. This is, so to speak, where one starts to offer a proper phenomenological

²⁶ Siewert (2011: 243-7).

²⁷ Van Gulick (2014).

account of phenomenal consciousness. And the main purpose of such a phenomenological account is then to articulate theoretically in detail what it is like for a subject to undergo conscious episodes.

There are many phenomenological problems. Perhaps the problem that comes first and, to some extent, includes the problem of cognitive phenomenology concerns the question of whether phenomenal consciousness has fundamentally an *intentional nature*. But there are still many other more specific phenomenological problems that concern various aspects or various kinds of experiences. For instance, there are questions about the richness of perceptual experiences²⁸, there are questions about the nature of the content of agentive experiences²⁹ or moral experiences.³⁰ And there are also different questions about the structure of phenomenal consciousness.³¹ Is there, for any given conscious episode, a form of self-awareness that is part of the conscious episode? In what sense are all our different kinds of experiences unified into a single stream of consciousness?³² Are conscious episodes transparent or diaphanous?³³

With regards to existing accounts of phenomenal consciousness, one must note that, on the one hand, some theories offer poorly elaborated phenomenological accounts of phenomenal consciousness or at least they do not appear explicitly as a proper phenomenological account of consciousness. In an extreme case, for instance, when a philosopher simply denies phenomenal consciousness, the problem of giving a phenomenological account becomes in a sense identical to the task of introducing phenomenological consciousness. On the other hand, some theories such as intentionalist theories or even some higher-order theories do aim to offer properly elaborated phenomenological accounts.

In abstract terms, one starts a non-phenomenological account of phenomenal consciousness, when one starts to wonder about the relationship between a phenomenally conscious episodes and non-phenomenally conscious episodes. A phenomenological account is not sufficient to account for phenomenal consciousness. It is not enough to give an account of what it is like to undergo a given mental episode only *as it is for the subject*; one should also provide an account of phenomenally conscious episodes *tout court*.

A typical way to set the main problem of a non-phenomenological account is to ask about the relationship between phenomenally conscious episodes and physical episodes of the subject. And, although many phenomenological accounts of phenomenal consciousness are developed with both eyes kept on non-phenomenological questions, it is also important to acknowledge that in most cases, it is not straightforward what the implications of given phenomenological

²⁸ Hawley & Macpherson (2011).

²⁹ Bayne (2008), Horgan, Tienson & Graham (2003), Smith (1992).

³⁰ Kriegel (2008), Horgan & Timmons (2005), (2008), (2010).

³¹ Kriegel (2009: 172).

³² Bayne & Chalmers (2003).

³³ Harman (1990).

accounts are for non-phenomenological issues. In the particular case of cognitive phenomenology, for instance, many proponents of it have, however, claimed that the existence of cognitive phenomenology makes a physicalist account of phenomenal consciousness more difficult.³⁴

Where exactly in the philosophical study of consciousness should we locate the problem of cognitive phenomenology? In contemporary philosophy, this is not entirely clear. To some extent, the problem is closely related to the problem of introducing phenomenal consciousness. The problem is often put as whether or not one thinks that *there is* cognitive phenomenology, without much concern for the details of the specific nature of what it is like to think. Later in this chapter, I will argue that the problem of cognitive phenomenology is better conceived as a substantive phenomenological problem and cannot just be equated with a problem of introducing a kind of phenomenal consciousness.



The phenomenal character of thoughts. The way I introduced phenomenal consciousness was based on examples of conscious episodes that are picked out by the locution “what it is like”. On this basis, we can reformulate the Starting Thesis as the Weak thesis:

The Weak Thesis:

(T03) Some thoughts are such that there is something it is like for the subject to have these thoughts

Some terminological simplifications will help. First, I will define the widely used notion of “phenomenal character” in the following manner:

(D02) An episode x has a phenomenal character iff there is something it is like for a subject S to have or undergo x

In the introduction, I used the notion of a “conscious aspect” as synonymous with this notion of “phenomenal character”. And, as mere stylistic variations, I will also assume that “a conscious thought”, “a thought with a phenomenal character” and also a “phenomenally conscious thought” are all exact synonyms. In light of all these clarifications, The Weak Thesis can then be reformulated as the thesis that *some thoughts have a phenomenal character*.

Is the Weak Thesis the correct interpretation of the Thesis of Cognitive Phenomenology? It will not take long, however, to see that the answer is “no”. The reason is simply that most opponents to cognitive phenomenology accept the Weak Thesis.³⁵ And they accept it because they take it that all cases where there is something it is like for a subject to think something there is some *accompanying* conscious episode of List 2 in virtue of which there is something it is like to have the thought. Let’s say that this is the answer of the *First Opponent* to cognitive phenomenology.

³⁴ Horgan & Tienson (2002), Pitt (2004).

³⁵ Carruthers & Veillet (2011), Tye & Wright (2011).

According to the First Opponent, if there is something it is like to think that the weather is nice, it is wholly in virtue of, for instance, an accompanying visualization of a blue sky or of an auralization of a stretch of speech such as “Nice weather!” and/or of some further bodily sensations or perhaps emotional experiences.³⁶ The contentious question is whether conscious thoughts have a phenomenal aspect *over and above* the phenomenal character of these sensory perceptual episodes or affective episodes.

The problem with the Weak Thesis is the same problem we had already encountered earlier while introducing the expression “what it is like”: unrestricted, the nagelian expression spreads consciousness too generously. We need to restrict it in a way that excludes the possibility that conscious thoughts *wholly derive* their phenomenal character from distinct co-occurring conscious episodes. And the motivation for this stems from the Analogy Thesis: visual perceptions and pain experiences do not derive their phenomenal characters from distinct accompanying conscious episodes; it should be the same for conscious thoughts.

I suggest thus the distinction between *derivative* and *non-derivative* phenomenal characters³⁷:

(D03) An episode *M* has a derivative phenomenal character iff (i) there is something it is like to undergo *M* and (ii) there is an episode *N* distinct from *M* such that it is wholly in virtue of what it is like to undergo *N* that there is something it is like to undergo *M*

(D04) An episode *M* has a non-derivative phenomenal character iff (i) there is something it is like to undergo *M* and (ii) there is no episode *N* distinct from *M* such that it is wholly in virtue of what it is like to undergo *N* that there is something it is like to undergo *M*

For a First Opponent to cognitive phenomenology, conscious thoughts are conscious only in the sense that they have derivative phenomenal characters. The specific nature of the derivative phenomenal characters will depend on the kind of conscious thought or the kind of conscious aspect of a thought. But, in general, the strategy of the First Opponent is to say that all phenomenal aspect associated with episodes of List 1 are derivative phenomenal aspects of conscious episodes of List 2. Typically, First Opponents will appeal to the phenomenal characters of episodes of visualizations or auralizations but, depending on the phenomenal aspect at issue, they might also appeal to the phenomenal characters of bodily sensations or affective episodes. Arguably, the phenomenal characters of visualizations and auralizations are akin to the phenomenal characters of visual or auditory perceptions. For terminological convenience, when speaking of the phenomenal characters of visualizations or auralizations, I will thus speak of “sensory perceptual phenomenal characters”. And, also, if often I will only mention sensory perceptual phenomenal characters as possible derivative phenomenal characters for conscious thought, this is only for terminological simplicity and not to suggest

³⁶ Robinson (2005), Tye & Wright (2011).

³⁷ Siewert (2011: 243-7), Dodd (2014).

that other kinds of phenomenal aspects of episodes of List 2 cannot be such derivative phenomenal characters.

With these clarifications in place, here is a new formulation of the Thesis of Cognitive phenomenology:

(T04) Some thoughts have a non-derivative phenomenal character

However, it should quickly be clear that this cannot be the correct interpretation of the Starting Thesis. The reason for this is that some opponents to cognitive phenomenology will argue that some visualizations or auralizations do not simply *accompany* conscious thoughts but can even *constitute* or, at least, *partially constitute* the thought itself. Let's call the proponent of such an answer the *Second Opponent* to cognitive phenomenology.³⁸

One may, nonetheless, have a doubt that a Second Opponent is in fact really an *opponent* to cognitive phenomenology. Isn't the basic question whether some thoughts have – non-derivatively – a conscious aspect?

No. A Second Opponent is an opponent to cognitive phenomenology. The reason for this stems again from the Analogy Thesis. I assume that the Analogy Thesis implies that the Thesis of Cognitive Phenomenology should not be understood as the thesis that some thoughts have the *same* type of phenomenal characters as the phenomenal characters of episodes of List 2.

If being non-derivative is not enough to characterize the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts, what is lacking? A natural suggestion at this point is to say that conscious thoughts have phenomenal characters that are *non-sensory* perceptual or, more generally, not phenomenal characters of any kind of episodes of List 2. As I already mentioned, this is also part of what the Analogy Thesis recommends. What it is like to think is not exactly alike what it is like to undergo a given episodes of List 2.

This gives us a new version of the Thesis of Cognitive Phenomenology:

(T05) Some thoughts have a non-derivative and non-sensory phenomenal character

But, again, this is not enough. Indeed, consider the so-called “structural features” of conscious episodes such as the transparency or unity of consciousness.³⁹ Arguably, these phenomenal aspects are not sensory perceptual phenomenal aspects (they concern general structural aspects that are not distinctive of any particular kind of conscious episodes). Furthermore, since it is unlikely that such structural phenomenal aspects can be derived from other mental episodes, it could be, for all we know, that thesis **(T05)** could be true simply because some thoughts are

³⁸ Compare with Carruthers (1996), Prinz (2007).

³⁹ Bayne & Chalmers (2003), Harman (1990).

phenomenally transparent. However, this is clearly not the thesis that a friend of cognitive phenomenology wants to defend.

To get to the correct interpretation of the Thesis of Cognitive Phenomenology, we need to come back again to the Analogy Thesis. The Analogy Thesis is that some thoughts are conscious *just as much* as some sensory perceptual episodes are conscious. It follows from this thesis, I believe, that the phenomenal character of a conscious thought should be characterized as being the phenomenal character which is *distinctive of thoughts*. The assumption that we can extract from the Analogy Thesis is, I suggest, that sensory perceptual experiences have *their own distinctive kind of phenomenal character* in virtue of which they are the kind of experiences they are and it should be the same with conscious thoughts.

Some would then say that thoughts have a “*sui generis*” phenomenal character. However, this is correct only if properly qualified. The structural features of being unified or transparent could also be *sui generis* phenomenal aspects in some sense. What we want is a *sui generis* phenomenal character that is *distinctive to a certain psychological kind of episode*. Structural episodes, contrary to episodes of thoughts, do not constitute such a *psychological kind* of episode but are rather *properties of one or several such psychological kinds of episodes*.

Here is then the way I suggest we should understand “*sui generis*”:

(D05) *x* is a *sui generis* phenomenal character iff *x* is the phenomenal character distinctive to a certain psychological kind

But, I think that we can specify even more precisely what the notion of “*sui generis*” means. It seems one can also say that conscious thoughts have phenomenal characters that are *homogenous* in the sense that all phenomenal characters of all types of conscious thoughts *share something with* each other that makes them different from any other kind of conscious episode. I take this point to also follow from the Analogy Thesis: if we are to talk of a *kind* of consciousness or experience, then we are to talk of phenomenal characters that are *bound together* by some common phenomenal core aspect in virtue of which they constitute a distinctive kind of experience or consciousness.

To clarify the preceding point, it might be helpful to consider a version of the Thesis of Cognitive Phenomenology defended by Pitt (2004: 5). For Pitt, “Each type of conscious thought [...] has a proprietary, distinctive, individuating phenomenology”. And, according to Pitt, a thought has a *proprietary* phenomenal character (or phenomenology) just in case the phenomenal character is different from the phenomenal character of any other sort of mental episode and has a *distinctive* phenomenal character (or phenomenology) just in case it is different from the phenomenal character of any other thought. And it is individuating just in case the phenomenal character (or phenomenology) constitutes the content of the thought.

An odd consequence of Pitt's thesis is that a given phenomenal character of a conscious thought that p could be phenomenally more similar to the phenomenal character of a pain than to the phenomenal character of conscious thought that q . And this is possible because for all Pitt says, the phenomenal character of a thought that p is different from the phenomenal of other conscious thoughts and other conscious episodes. And to the extent that he does not specify *how different* they are from each other, nothing prevents the thought that p to have a phenomenal character that is closer to the phenomenal character of a pain than to the phenomenal character of the thought that q .

If the phenomenal characters of conscious thoughts are homogenous, we can then avoid the problem that affects Pitt's thesis of cognitive phenomenology. If the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts is homogeneous, then all conscious thoughts have a phenomenal signature of a certain psychological kind that make them phenomenally "more distant" from any other conscious episodes of another psychological kind. Consequently, if the phenomenal character of a given thought is homogenous, it could not be closer to the phenomenal character of an episode of pain than to the phenomenal character of any other conscious thoughts.

Having said this, I want to stress that to say that the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts is homogeneous is only to put an abstract constraint on a kind of phenomenal character. There might then still be different competitive accounts of what binds together all the phenomenal characters of all conscious thoughts.

The upshot from all this is then that we can reformulate what we mean with the notion of a *sui generis* phenomenal character in the following way:

(D06) x is a *sui generis* phenomenal character iff x constitutes the phenomenal signature of a certain psychological kind

Although I believe we have now reached a convincing conception of the conscious aspect of thoughts, our notion of "thought" is still solely fixed by the examples of List 1. Can we do better?

There are several natural candidates for a criterion for thoughts.⁴⁰ A recent way of thinking of this issue is that a mental episode is a thought just in case it has a world-to-mind *direction of fit*.⁴¹ A thought like a belief has a world-to-mind direction of fit in the sense that it has to adapt itself to the world. In contrast, a desire has a world-to-mind direction of fit in the sense that it is the world that has to adapt itself to the desire.

However, although it is plausible that thoughts have a mind-to-world direction of fit as a necessary condition, it is also likely that this is not sufficient. A visual episode of seeing that the ball is red seems very much like a belief to also have a world-to-mind direction of fit. Consequently, we need to find further features that distinguish thoughts from visual episodes.

⁴⁰ See also Chudnoff (2015), Kriegel (2015: 41-7), Siewert (2011).

⁴¹ Searle (1983), Kriegel (2015: 41).

And there are many candidates to carry out that role. For instance, a mental episode *M* with a world-to-mind direction of fit is a thought just in case⁴²:

- *M* has a conceptual content or involves conceptual activity
- *M* has a distinctive intelligible content
- *M* has a distinctive high-level properties content
- *M* has a distinctive independent from sensory objects content
- *M* is spontaneous
- *M* is not produced by the sensory system

However, I will not discuss these candidates to find the mark of thoughts. In line with my phenomenological approach to the problem of cognitive phenomenology, I believe we can substantiate our notion of “thought” in phenomenological terms. Consider mental episodes of List 1. In the sense of the Weak Thesis of Cognitive Phenomenology, it is true that some of these episodes are sometimes phenomenally conscious. Accordingly, my suggestion is to elaborate a more substantive notion of “thought” – starting from the examples of List 1 – in phenomenal terms that are acceptable for both advocates and opponents to cognitive phenomenology.

I suggest we begin by distinguishing between two kinds of conscious thoughts. A first kind is such that, necessarily, for any given member *C* of this kind, if one undergoes *C*, then one also undergoes some *specific* kind of sensory perceptual episode. I count, as members of this kind, several thoughts that are often discussed in the context of the debate over cognitive phenomenology. Cases of speech understanding, perception of duck rabbit figures and demonstrative thoughts all fall in this first kind of conscious thought. Necessarily, if one undergoes a speech understanding episode, then one undergoes some specific episode of hearing sounds. Similar considerations can be made for visual perceptions of duck-rabbit figures and demonstrative thoughts. From now on I will call these kinds of thoughts “cognitive episodes”.

The second kind of conscious thoughts I will be concerned with can be characterized by its *independence* from co-occurring sensory perceptual experiences. Examples of such kinds of thoughts are thoughts that just pop up when one realizes, for instance, that one has forgotten something at home. Most examples of “iconic thoughts” in Siewert (1998: Chapter 8) also belong to these kinds of thoughts. And similarly, in empirical research, there are cases of “stimuli independent thoughts” that are discussed that I take also to belong to this class of thoughts.⁴³

I will then call this second category of conscious thoughts “intellectual episodes”. And, assuming that “thought” is the overarching term that covers both cognitive and intellectual episodes, one can now define an intellectual episode as a thought that simply is not a cognitive episode. It should also be noted that nothing I have said so far implies that conscious intellectual

⁴² Chudnoff (2015), Kriegel (2015).

⁴³ For instance Mason et al. (2007).

episodes can occur in the absence of *any* co-occurring sensory experiences. It is a further question whether they benefit from such form of independence or not.⁴⁴

Again, I want to stress that these two kinds of thoughts should be recognizable by all parties involved in the debate over cognitive phenomenology. All these episodes have phenomenal aspects that are acceptable for both friends and opponents to cognitive phenomenology. For instance, the phenomenal aspects of cognitive or intellectual episodes can be – at least partially – characterized in terms of visualizations or auralizations, various bodily sensations and other affective episodes and then further specified in terms of their relations to other co-occurring sensory perceptual episodes.

What is more, there are even further possible characterizations of these two kinds of conscious thoughts that still remain neutral regarding the central issue of cognitive phenomenology. For instance, among intellectual experiences, some occur pretty unexpectedly while others constitute end points of conscious *actively* directed processes of reflection. Perhaps more contentious, one could also make a distinction between intellectual experiences that figure inside or outside the focus of our attention. And, if one is skeptical about conscious thoughts outside the focus of attention or in the background of one's mind, this would still be strictly speaking an issue that is orthogonal to the problem of cognitive phenomenology. One can accept that there are such thoughts outside the focus of attention and either claim that their phenomenal character is ultimately derivative of the phenomenal character of sensory perceptual episodes or accept cognitive phenomenology. Or, one could reject these background intellectual experiences and still reject or accept cognitive phenomenology.

Gathering all our results, we can then formulate the following Thesis of Cognitive Phenomenology:

(T06) Some episodes *M* of List 1 (cognitive and intellectual episodes) are such that there is something it is like to undergo them which is also such that (i) there is no distinct mental episode *N* such that what it is like to undergo *M* wholly derives from what it is like to undergo *N*, and (ii) what it is like to undergo *M* is not what it is like to undergo any mental episode of List 2 and (iii) what it is like to undergo *M* constitute the phenomenal signature of a certain psychological kind

The theses of the problem of cognitive phenomenology. Thesis **(T06)** is very cumbersome and a welcomed abbreviation of it would be the thesis that some thoughts have a non-derivative, non-sensory and *sui generis* phenomenal character. I suggest we take the even shorter “cognitive phenomenal character” to stand for this first abbreviation. Thus, we now have our Minimal Thesis:

The Minimal Thesis:

(M) Some thoughts have a cognitive phenomenal character

⁴⁴ See also Chudnoff (2015: Chapter 5).

I take it that The Minimal Thesis is the weakest Thesis of Cognitive Phenomenology accepted by friends of cognitive phenomenology and rejected by its opponents.

The Minimal Thesis can be contrasted with different modifications of it that have appeared in the literature. Roughly, there are two possible ways to modify The Minimal Thesis: either by modifying the conception of the *phenomenal character of* conscious thoughts or by modifying the conception of the nature and role of *episodes of thoughts*.

A thought is not necessarily a phenomenally conscious episode but if there is something like for the subject to undergo that episode then the thought is a phenomenally conscious thought. In the literature, many different views appear with regards to the *relation* between episodes of thoughts and phenomenally conscious episodes of thoughts. Among the possible relations we find, for instance, constitution, causality, grounding or identity. Furthermore, the relation is not always conceived as holding between two episodes of the same ontological category; it is common to think that it is a relation of exemplification between an episode of thought and a phenomenal character which is then taken to be a phenomenal *property*.

The different possible ways to conceive of the relation between the thought episode and the conscious episode or the conscious property raise different ontological questions that by and large remain unaddressed – and rightly so – within the debate of cognitive phenomenology. However, this does not mean that one should ignore entirely this ontological dimension. Consider for instance Carruthers & Veillet (2011: 38) who take the question of cognitive phenomenology to be the question of whether for some phenomenally conscious events “it is true that a thought occurring at the same time (perhaps as a constitutive part of those events) makes a constitutive, as opposed to a causal contribution to the phenomenal properties of those events?”⁴⁵ Now, although this is certainly an interesting question, it is unlikely that it will be accepted by all friends of cognitive phenomenology. Horgan & Tienson (2002), for instance, make it clear that they believe that phenomenal consciousness is in some sense prior or more fundamental than intentionality. They argue that “there is a pervasive kind of intentionality that is constitutively determined by phenomenology alone.” (p.520) But if one holds such a view, then the Thesis of Cognitive Phenomenology cannot be that a thought sometimes *constitutes* a phenomenally conscious event because the relation of constitution is not symmetrical and should go the other way around; Horgan and Tienson are better construed as holding the thesis that some phenomenally conscious event sometimes constitutes an intentional event.

It should, therefore, be clear that a lack of consideration for the ontological dimension of the Thesis of Cognitive Phenomenology may lead to tendentious theses. For my part, I don't want to take a stance with respect to these different possible positions. My suggestion so far has been to start with episodes of List 1 that can be picked out *as* phenomenally conscious episodes in a

⁴⁵ See also Siewert (2011: 248), Nes (2015: 607).

neutral manner. In that sense, I am trying to avoid referring to thoughts conceived non-phenomenologically and accordingly I don't have to formulate the Thesis of Cognitive Phenomenology in terms of such ontological relations between conscious episodes and non-conscious episodes. And to the extent that questions about these ontological relations seem to immediately raise contentious issues, the neutrality of my starting point has some advantage.

Another non-phenomenological modification of the Minimal Thesis targets its *scope*. *Some thoughts* have a cognitive phenomenal character says the Minimal Thesis. This is all fine but which thoughts? One thing that should not be questioned is that not *all* thoughts have a cognitive phenomenal character. Among the thoughts gathered on List 1, some of them are not always and not necessarily phenomenally conscious. A subject is naturally said to believe many things even when he is fast asleep. Similarly, a subject can be said to regret something his whole life even though it is not something that he will consciously entertain his whole life.

When one talks of different kinds of thoughts, one can think of different thoughts according to the kind of *psychological modes* or *attitudes* they involve or according to the kind of *content* they involve.⁴⁶ Judging that the ball is red, doubting that the ball is red or regretting that the ball is red are different thoughts in the sense that they involve the different *modes* or *attitudes* of *judging*, *doubting* and *regretting*. But judging that the ball is red, judging that the ball is blue and judging that the ball is green are all different thoughts in the sense that they involve the different contents of *the ball is red*, *the ball is blue* and *the ball is green*. Consequently, when we wonder about the scope of the Minimal Thesis the question is whether thoughts of whatever kind of mode or attitude can be phenomenally conscious or only whether thoughts with some kinds of modes or attitudes can be phenomenally conscious. Similarly, with respect to contents of conscious thoughts, the question is whether there is some restriction with respect to the kinds of contents that can be the contents of conscious thoughts.

The aim in this thesis is modest and I will consider (in Chapter 3) only a very limited number of *modes* and *attitudes* (judging, believing and entertaining). In Chapter 2, I will discuss some kinds of constraints that govern the contents of conscious thoughts. A complete answer to the question of the scope would, however, require much more work.

One can extend the Minimal Thesis in terms of the number of phenomenal aspects that constitute a given cognitive phenomenal character. And, although an account of cognitive phenomenal character as constituted by just one phenomenal aspect is in principle possible, to my knowledge, no friend of cognitive phenomenology has ever defended such a position. Presumably, according to a view of this sort, a cognitive phenomenal character would be

⁴⁶ Searel (1983: Chapter 1), Crane (2007).

something like an invariant non-intentional cognitive quale or an additional cognitive “humming”.⁴⁷

The most common view among friends of cognitive phenomenology is then that cognitive phenomenal characters of conscious thoughts are complex phenomenal aspects. There are then different ways to modify the Minimal Thesis depending on the conception of the complexity of cognitive phenomenal characters. The most natural and simple conception of a complex phenomenal character is the one put forward by Horgan & Tienson (2002). According to these philosophers, a cognitive phenomenal character is made up by two phenomenal aspects: the phenomenal aspect of a *psychological mode* or *attitude* and the phenomenal aspect of an *intentional content*. Such a conception follows from the acceptance of the Thesis of Conscious Intentional Thoughts that we will discuss in the next chapter.

But we can distinguish many more phenomenal aspects in a cognitive phenomenal character. In the literature, we find different contributions that have targeted various aspects of conscious thoughts. First, virtually all philosophers involved in the debate about cognitive phenomenology discuss the case of speech understanding. Second, Crane (2013), Horgan & Tienson (2002), Klausen (2008), Peacocke (1998), Silins (2012), Valaris (2014) discuss the phenomenal aspects of the modes of belief and judgement. But other philosophers have also focused on different modes. For example, Kriegel (2013c), (2015) discusses entertaining a proposition. Furthermore, Chudnoff (2011), (2013) develops an account of intuition experience in a larger epistemological context. Nes (2016) discusses conscious inference.

Third, some philosophers have also been interested in other phenomenal aspects of conscious thoughts that exceed the simple dichotomy between psychological mode and intentional content. There are, for instance, the phenomenal aspects related to the *active* or *passive* way a conscious thought can be brought about. Dorsch (2009), Proust (2009) or Strawson (2003) discuss these aspects although it is not directly within the context of the problem of cognitive phenomenology.

Another phenomenal aspect of conscious thoughts that is discussed within the context of cognitive phenomenology concerns the *temporal extension* of a conscious thought. Chudnoff (2015: Chapter 4), Soteriou (2007) and Tye & Wright (2011: 341-3) give some of the main contributions on this topic. However, it must be noted that within the debate over cognitive phenomenology, philosophers tend to take the instantaneity of thoughts and judgements to speak *against* the existence of cognitive phenomenology. Others, conversely, developing a view of the traditional phenomenologist Adolf Reinach (1911/1982), have simply taken the instantaneous character as a phenomenal aspect of some conscious thoughts.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ See Siewert (2011: 249), Levine (2011: 113).

⁴⁸ See Mulligan & Smith (1986) and Mulligan (2003: 202).

Fourth, still another way one can modify the complexity of a cognitive phenomenal character concerns its relations to co-occurring sensory perceptual episodes. For instance, several friends of cognitive phenomenology claim that cognitive phenomenal characters are somehow intimately unified to sensory perceptual phenomenal characters. According to Siewert (2011: 249), for example, “[o]ccurrent conceptual thought is typically (maybe sometimes even necessarily) *unified* with either sensory or imagery experience.”⁴⁹ Others, on the contrary, seem to think that cognitive phenomenal characters benefit, at least in principle, from some independence from sensory perceptual phenomenal characters; cognitive phenomenal character can occur in their absence.⁵⁰

Before going any further, here are then the main theses we have distinguished so far:

The Starting Thesis:

(T01) Some thoughts are conscious episodes (or experiences)

The Analogy Thesis:

(T02) Some thoughts are conscious episodes (or experiences) just like feeling pain and seeing are conscious episodes (experiences)

The Weak Thesis:

(T03) Some thoughts are such that there is something it is like for the subject to have these thoughts

The Minimal Thesis:

(M) Some thoughts have a cognitive phenomenal character

Opponents to cognitive phenomenology accept The Starting Thesis and the Weak Thesis although they reject the Minimal Thesis. I distinguished a First Opponent from a Second Opponent. The former thinks that no thought has a non-derivative phenomenal character whereas the latter thinks that a thought can have a non-derivative phenomenal character but rejects that it can be a non-sensory perceptual and *sui generis* phenomenal character.

It must be noted that opponents to cognitive phenomenology are not only eager to object to arguments in favor of cognitive phenomenology but also offer direct objections against cognitive phenomenology.⁵¹ As I explained in the introduction, I will not be able to give justice to all of these objections.

1.3. Arguments for cognitive phenomenology

In the recent literature on cognitive phenomenology, a significant number of arguments have been put forward.⁵² But, two of them have attracted more attention than others. The first is the

⁴⁹ See also Dainton (2000), Chudnoff (2015: Chapter 5).

⁵⁰ Horgan (2011), Kriegel (2015).

⁵¹ Carruthers & Veillet (2011), Prinz (2011), Tye & Wright (2011).

⁵² Chudnoff (2013), (2015), Horgan (2011), (2013), Goldman (1993), Horgan & Tienson (2002), Klausen (2008), Kriegel (2015), Pitt (2004), (2011), Shield (2011), Siewert (1998), (2011), Strawson (1994), (2011).

Contrast Argument involving speech-understanding episodes⁵³ and the second is the *Self-knowledge Argument*.⁵⁴

The contrast argument. There are several versions of the contrast argument.⁵⁵ In broad outline, the argument consists of a scenario involving two subjects S_1 and S_2 in the same environment. S_1 and S_2 (i) experience the same stretch of speech in French, and (ii) S_1 and S_2 are perfect twins with the exception that only S_1 knows French. The argument is then the following:

The Contrast Argument:

- (1) S_1 and S_2 undergo the same overall sensory perceptual experience
- (2) S_1 and S_2 undergo different overall experiences
- (3) If S_1 and S_2 undergo different overall experiences and the same overall sensory perceptual experiences, then the phenomenal difference between both their overall experiences is a non-sensory perceptual phenomenal difference
- (4) If the phenomenal difference between both their overall experiences is a non-sensory perceptual phenomenal difference, then the phenomenal difference between both their overall experiences is a cognitive phenomenal difference of understanding (i.e. S_1 has an experience of understanding)

Therefore,

- (5) The phenomenal difference between both their overall experiences is a cognitive phenomenal difference of understanding (i.e. S_1 has an experience of understanding)

Therefore,

- (6) Some thoughts have a cognitive phenomenal character

In order to assess the argument, we need to clarify the meaning of “understanding”.

There is at least a double distinction that needs to be kept in mind concerning the notion of “understanding”. First, there are different uses of the notion of “understanding” depending on the type of *objects of understanding*. One can understand people, situations, sentences and theories. Accordingly, we can distinguish between *linguistic* objects of understanding (words, sentences, etc.) and *non-linguistic* objects (people, situations, etc.). Second, in any account, understanding is some kind of psychological or epistemic episode. However, one can distinguish between two kinds of such episodes: one is a dispositional and non-conscious episode of understanding while another is a conscious occurrent episode. The distinction can be illustrated with, on the one hand, my occurrent understanding of the sentence “It is snowing” that is uttered by someone standing next to me. And, on the other hand, the dispositional understanding of the

⁵³ Siewert (1998), (2011), Strawson (2011).

⁵⁴ Goldman (1993), Pitt (2004).

⁵⁵ Chudnoff (2013), (2015), Horgan (2011), O’Callaghan (2011), Moore (1953: 58-9), Siewert (1998), (2011).

sentence “Il neige” that currently nobody around me is uttering and that is far from what is occupying my mind; in this sense, I can also be said to understand a given sentence in French.

The double distinction I just drew should be fairly uncontroversial. But, there is a more contentious distinction that is especially relevant in the context of the Contrast Argument. We can construe the notion of “understanding” in two different manners: either as a *two terms* relation: a *subject* “getting” a *meaning* or *content* constituted by a proposition, or, as a *three terms* relation: a *subject* grasping the *meaning p* of a given *sentence*. According to the first construal, to understand a sentence which expresses the proposition that *p* is just to get the proposition that *p*. According to this second construal, when one understands a given sentence, one grasps the relation between the sentence *and* the meaning constituted by a proposition *p*.

There are two things to notice with respect to this further distinction. One is that the construal of an understanding episode as a three terms relation can obviously ultimately also be understood as the getting of a proposition (i.e. the proposition *this sentence S means that p.*) A second point to notice is that if we treat the case of speech understanding to be a propositional attitude like a judgment, and if we think that understanding a stretch of speech is just a matter of getting a proposition, then it becomes unclear in what sense by using the contrast case one is really arguing for the existence of a distinctive experience of *understanding*. Presumably, every conscious thought is a *getting* of a proposition. Accordingly, the contrast case should not be understood as establishing that there is a distinctive kind of cognitive experience of *understanding* but only the generic experience of *getting a proposition* which could be part of other kinds of conscious thoughts.

The upshot of these aforementioned observations is that although it should be clear that the argument is about experiences of linguistic objects, we should be careful to make clear in what sense the understanding episodes is construed: either as an episode of getting a proposition or as an episode of understanding.

One can also distinguish between different versions of the Contrast Argument according to two further elements. One element consists of the type of linguistic object that is involved and helps to create the contrast. Another element is the epistemic access that we have to the contrast.

First, concerning linguistic objects, one finds in the literature examples that rely on understanding single words, sentences or even whole texts. Chudnoff (2013) gives an example of a long paragraph from which it is difficult to get the meaning until one is told that it is about kites. Once one is told that it is about kites, the way the understanding “spreads over” the text is clearly different from the experience of understanding a single word like “moon”.

Furthermore, as it already occurred with the distinction between understanding a stretch of speech and getting a proposition, one can wonder what exactly constitutes the contrast between understanding and not understanding. O’Callaghan (2011:792), for instance, distinguishes

between a contrast case that aims to highlight a contrast with a *specific meaning* and a contrast case that highlights only some *generic meaningfulness*. Presumably, Strawson (1994/2010) had in mind that understanding experiences involved specific meanings. However, solely on the basis of his example with Jack and Jacques, things remain underspecified; the phenomenal contrast may very well just be constituted by a phenomenal aspect of *generic meaningfulness*. And it is because of this that O'Callaghan (2011: 796) constructs his own contrast case between homophones like "pole" and "poll" with the intention to bring out the specific meanings associated to these expressions. If the phenomenal difference between understanding and not understanding was only a matter of generic meaningfulness, there would be no phenomenal difference in the case of homophone like "pole" and "poll". But, since one can imagine a switch where there is a genuine phenomenal difference between the case where one understands the sounds "pəʊl", first in the sense of "pole", and then of "poll", this suggests that it is not only a matter of generic meaningfulness which would remain the same in both cases.

The distinction between experiences of generic meaningfulness and specific meanings opens up a whole lot more possible candidates of phenomenal aspects that could constitute, or partly constitute, the phenomenal difference between understanding and not understanding. Consider, for instance, the example of the sentence discussed by Siewert (2011: 261) "I am so hot". Why does one understand it as a case of someone saying *I am erotically attractive* and not just something about one's bodily temperature? One possible factor that may contribute to one grasping the sentence in one sense rather than the other is that one also grasps the *utterer's intentions*. But then if one is ready to acknowledge a phenomenal layer of meaningfulness and/or specific meanings, why not also accept that the grasping of an utterer's intentions contributes to the phenomenal switch that occurs when one understands "I am so hot", first, as someone bragging, and then, in the flat sense of someone talking of his bodily temperature?

Siewert's example can reveal another possible phenomenal aspect that contributes to the phenomenal difference between understanding and not understanding. Suppose that in some circumstances when one is saying "I am so hot!" it is clear that one is also asking for somebody to open the window. But, in this case, the sentence "I am so hot!" *non-literally* means *open the window* in addition to having the literal meaning of *I am so hot*. But then, for those who think that there are experiences of specific meanings, it looks very much like there can be a double phenomenal layer of specific meanings: the non-literal meaning and the literal meaning of a sentence.

But there are even further possible phenomenal aspects of understanding experiences. Indeed, consider again the case of someone asserting "I am so hot!" with in mind the meaning *I am erotically attractive*; suppose further that this utterance is also conclusive evidence that the utterer is about to leave the marital home and thus that someone is about to suffer. In this case,

it is not only that one understands stretches of speech, one is also *non-linguistically* understanding an objective *situation* – someone is about to suffer – by understanding the sentence “I am so hot!”.

Further, all these phenomenal aspects are not the only ones that could constitute an experience of speech understanding. In fact, all the possible phenomenal layers we have reviewed so far constitute phenomenal aspects that an opponent to cognitive phenomenology is likely to reject. What needs to be added is the sensory perceptual aspects that deal with the hearing of the speech sounds. For instance, there are all the different phenomenal aspects that are part of any kind of experience of a sound (experience of pitch, loudness, timber, etc.). And next to these, one can also add phenomenal aspects associated with sensory perceptual experiences of language (ex. phonemes, syntactic properties, etc.) but also of the visualizations and auralizations that may accompany speech understanding experiences.

Furthermore, contrast cases vary also according to the kind of access we have to the crucial phenomenal contrast. Strawson’s initial contrast was drawn between two distinct subjects Jack and Jacques. Siewert (2011), however, asks us to consider a contrast that occurs within the bounds of a single subject. Namely, the idea is that one considers a contrast that occurs within one’s own experience. O’Callaghan (2011) sets up a case involving sinewave speech which is an artificial speech signals that is at first difficult to recognize as speech. “With help from some prompts, however, it can be grasped as speech and understood. A big phenomenal shift occurs once you start to hear it as comprehensible speech instead of as a bunch of non-linguistic blips and boops. Moreover, there is a discernible but much less pronounced shift when the sinewave speech is in a foreign language you do not understand.” (p.787) There is room for disagreement about the nature of the contrast one is able to create with such signals of sinewave speech, but the point behind O’Callaghan’s suggestion is that it allows to create a contrast that is accessible within the experience of a single subject *and* within a very short temporal interval.

The differences between these accesses to the crucial phenomenal contrast are relevant once we wonder about our epistemic warrants for such claims of phenomenal contrasts. The assumption behind Siewert’s cases and O’Callaghan’s setting of the contrast case seems to be that the more direct our access to the phenomenal contrast, the better our warrant is for claiming that there is such a contrast. Later I will, however, suggest that this kind of access is perhaps unnecessary.

With respect to all the preceding distinctions, two questions emerge: first, are contrast cases involving speech understanding episodes really giving us reasons to think that there are *understanding* experiences and not just experiences of *getting* a proposition? Second, what exactly is the phenomenal aspect that, according to the friend of cognitive phenomenology, constitutes the phenomenal difference between understanding and not understanding?

The answer to the first question is that there are good reasons to think that the usual contrast cases give evidence for experiences of getting proposition but not for understanding experiences. I take it that an episode of understanding is essentially a relational episode; it's a matter of putting into relation different contents and not just of getting one content. It is not a propositional attitude. This becomes apparent once it is clear that when some subject *S* understands *x* or that *p* one can always mention something else *in virtue* of which *S* understands *x* or that *p*. If Sam understands Mary, then it is because he knows how she feels. If Sam understands that Mary is not coming back, it is because he saw her with Sally. If *S* understands *x* or that *p*, then if there is not something else in virtue of which one understands *x* or that *p*, then *S* does not understand *x* or that *p*. There is no simple understanding *x* or that *p*.

Accordingly, if one wants to highlight a genuine *experience of understanding* a sentence *Z* which means *p*, then the contrast that would highlight the understanding experience should take place between, on the one hand, a case where one has an experience of the sentence *Z*, an experience of *p*, and an experience of *Z meaning* that *p*, and, on the other hand, a case where one has an experience of *Z* and an experience of *p*, but *no* experience of *Z meaning* that *p*.⁵⁶ What needs to be made apparent is the experience of the *relational aspect* – essential to the understanding episode – that, in the case of speech understanding, I take to be the *...meaning ...* relation and that holds between the sentence *and* the meaning constituted *p*.

But, the usual set up of the contrast cases clearly is never built to bring out such a contrast. This is also apparent in premise (1) of the Contrast Argument: both subjects *S*₁ and *S*₂ have the same sensory perceptual experiences. But, if it is essential to the understanding experience, as I am assuming it here, that one grasps that a *sentence* is meaning something, then presumably the two sensory perceptual experiences of the sentence are not the same for *S*₁ and *S*₂. It is hard to see how one can have an experience of a *sentence* meaning something without there being a phenomenal difference *in* the sensory perceptual experience of hearing the sentence. A contrast argument that aims to make salient a genuine experience of speech understanding needs to highlight that an experience of understanding involves an experience of a *sentence* meaning something in addition of the intellectual or cognitive “getting of a proposition”.

It is however worth taking note that even if the contrast cases discussed in the literature on cognitive phenomenology cannot be interpreted as supporting the existence of *understanding* experiences, they are still enough – thanks to the experience of getting a proposition – to provide some support for the Minimal Thesis. Presumably, the getting of the proposition can still be reasonably construed as a kind of episode that belongs to List 1.

My answer to the second question is therefore that the original contrast case can reasonably be interpreted only as supporting the view that the phenomenal difference between

⁵⁶ See also Nes (2016: 103-4).

understanding and not understanding is a matter of *generic meaningfulness*. At least, nothing in the set-up of Strawson's original case implies that the crucial phenomenal difference between understanding and not understanding is anything else. In order to demonstrate the existence of specific meanings, one would need to either change the contrast case as does, for example, O'Callaghan (2011) who uses homophones or Horgan & Tienson (2002) who use ambiguous sentences or add further arguments like Siewert (2011: 256) who appeals to a form of self-knowledge argument.

However, I take it that there are also uncontentious uses of homophones or ambiguous sentences where it is pretty clear that the phenomenal difference between understanding and not understanding can be construed as a matter of an experience of specific meanings. Opponents to cognitive phenomenology will obviously disagree but, at this stage, the point is that from the perspective of advocates of cognitive phenomenology there are contrast cases that purport to establish that one has experiences of specific meanings. The efficiency of these contrast cases will be assessed shortly.

Having said this, although it was probably not part of the initial construal of the contrast case argument that the phenomenal difference between understanding and not understanding is a matter of generic meaningfulness, this still seems enough to support the Minimal Thesis. Arguably an experience of *some* meaning is something that does not belong to the conscious episodes of List 2.

Finally, whether in addition of generic meaningfulness and specific meanings, we should take understanding episodes to involve further phenomenal layers such as, for instance a layer of non-literal meaning. It is however not something that can be assumed to be established by the Contrast Arguments. The exact number and nature of the further possible phenomenal layers that can constitute, or partly constitute, experiences of speech understanding is a question for further research that I cannot undertake here.

The upshot of our discussion is then that the conclusion of the Contrast Argument as it is usually presented by friends of cognitive phenomenology is best understood as a thesis about the existence of some experiences of *getting some meanings* which is best characterized as an experience of *generic meaningfulness* or *specific meanings* depending on the details of the set-up of the contrast case.

Here is, again, a version of the Contrast Argument in which I have added the way one should interpret our notion of "understanding".

*The Contrast Argument**:

- (1) S_1 and S_2 undergo the same overall sensory perceptual experience
- (2) S_1 and S_2 undergo different overall experiences

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(3) If S_1 and S_2 undergo different overall experiences and the same overall sensory perceptual experiences, then the phenomenal difference between their overall experiences is a non-sensory perceptual phenomenal difference

(4) If the phenomenal difference between their overall experiences is a non-sensory perceptual phenomenal difference, then the phenomenal difference between their overall experiences is a phenomenal difference of getting some meanings

Therefore,

(5) The phenomenal difference between their overall experiences is a phenomenal difference of getting some meanings

Therefore,

(6) Some thoughts have a cognitive phenomenal character

There are different objections to the Contrast Argument. The first premise, that S_1 and S_2 undergo the same overall sensory perceptual experience, is the most commonly rejected premise. This will also be my target. The second premise according to which S_1 and S_2 undergo different overall experiences is less often criticized. Strawson (1994/2010: 8) considers and rejects the possibility that S_1 and S_2 have the same overall experiences and that the difference is only dispositional. Premises (3) and (4) are subject to fewer criticisms; (4) is often not explicitly articulated. But, as we have seen earlier, a non-sensory phenomenal difference is not necessarily an intellectual or cognitive phenomenal difference.

Thus, the objection I will develop has also as target premise (1). Roughly, the idea is that S_1 and S_2 do not *hear* the same things and that the difference between their overall experiences is a difference in hearing. One can distinguish two versions of this objection. The versions will differ with respect to the sensory perceptual phenomenal aspects one takes to constitute the phenomenal difference between S_1 and S_2 . One version will try to account for this crucial phenomenal difference in terms of experiences of “low-level properties”. The notion of an “experience of low level properties” is most often encountered in the context of visual experiences.⁵⁷ Suppose a subject S sees an apple. Is the phenomenal character of S 's visual experience of the apple exhausted by the phenomenal characters of its experience of properties of color, shape and location? Or can S literally also have a visual experience of the property of *being an apple* or the properties of *being a fruit* or *edible*? If visual experiences are restricted to be experiences of low-level properties, then one is only able to visually experience color, shape, location, motions, etc. (i.e. low-level properties). If one can also visually experience the properties of *being an apple*, *being a fruit* or *being edible*, then one is also experiencing high-level properties. The distinction between visual experiences of low-level or high-level properties is then easily transposed from the case of visual experience to the case of auditory experiences.

⁵⁷ Bayne (2009), Siegel (2006).

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Accordingly, a theory that aims to account for the phenomenal difference between getting something and not getting something in terms of an experience of low-level properties will appeal to experience of audible properties such as pitch, timbre, and loudness.

In addition of low-level properties of speech sounds, an opponent – a First Opponent – to cognitive phenomenology may also appeal to other experiences of List 2 in order to account for the experience *getting some meaning*. For instance, he might resort to shifts in attention, accompanying emotional or bodily experiences, or certain accompanying visualizations and auralizations.

Are such kinds of low-level features sufficient for the phenomenal difference between getting and not getting something? The challenge seems insuperable. The obstacle is that it is part of the most natural way of characterizing the phenomenal character of an experience of understanding speech that one makes reference to these episodes with terms involving *conceptually rich* contents. When one gets some specific meanings, there is no other way to characterize the experience as involving the concepts of these specific meanings. And since it is obvious that one can get specific meanings involving concepts different from concepts related to low-level audible properties, it will quickly prove impossible to capture the experience of getting something in terms of experience of low-level properties. In other words, the basic problem is that it is conceptually impossible to give an account of an experience of specific meanings in terms of an experience of pitch, timbre or loudness.

In fact, the opponent to cognitive phenomenology is pressed to argue that one of the subjects is making an introspective error or confabulating in reporting the content of his experiences. But for the reasons advanced in the introduction, I am not keen to discuss this kind of objection.

A second way to object to premise (1) is to appeal to auditory experiences of high-level sensory perceptual properties. Although there might be disagreement on the exact nature of high-level properties, the most natural account would claim that speech understanding is nothing else than an *auditory experience* of meaningfulness or of specific meanings.

To see things more concretely, let's consider one of the contrast arguments of Siewert (2011) and let's assess it in terms of the second objection to the contrast argument. Here is the way Siewert summarizes his argument:

“What it's like to read a passage *with* understanding positively differs from what it's like to read the same passage *without* understanding. This difference will be reducible to a merely sensory phenomenal difference, only if we can isolate separable sensory features in each such case of understanding, and imagine having them in a hypothetical case without understanding, in which we find what that would be like is *just the same*. But efforts to identify these separable sensory features and secure the relevant judgment of phenomenal sameness do not pan out. So *Reducibility is rejected*.” (p.257)

And here is what Siewert understands by “merely sensory features”:

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"[...] let's call "*merely*" sensory features those whose possession by a subject during a time is insufficient for the occurrence at that time of some conceptual activity. Plausibly, there are merely sensory features. For it is plausible that, for example, colors, shapes, positions, movements, distances, and sizes, can appear somehow to a being who simply cannot voluntarily *classify* colors, shapes, etc., in a sense that requires the capacity to make *inferences* and *analogies* relevant to understanding these classifications, or who at least is not *then and there* so classifying them." (p.237)

The challenge for the opponent to cognitive phenomenology is, therefore, the following: we have to find some merely sensory features that constitute the phenomenal difference between understanding and not understanding and that can also occur outside of such understanding experience and still be the same. The argument is basically that we cannot find such merely sensory features.

The second objection against this argument is the *hearing meanings account* of understanding experiences. Basically, when one understands a stretch of speech one *hears* what it said. Such an account implies thus the rejection of the assumption that only merely sensory features are the phenomenal aspects that an opponent to cognitive phenomenology can resort to in order to reject cognitive phenomenal characters. And, the main motivation for such an account is, I suggest, primarily *phenomenological*.

This will appear more clearly once we consider a point we have already briefly encountered: friends of cognitive phenomenology tend to think that conscious thoughts are *intimately related* to sensory perceptual episodes. For instance, according to Siewert (2011: 249) "Occurrent conceptual thought is typically (maybe sometimes even necessarily) *unified* with either sensory or imagery experience. Occurrent differences in ways of thinking are often, in some sense, intimately bound to experienced differences in verbal expression, whether silently imaged or publically perceptible." And for Dainton (2000: 12) "It would be wrong to suppose that understanding-experience occurs separately from our perception of speech and writing. [...]. I do not hear your words as mere sounds at all. In hearing you talk, I hear meaningful words and sentences. Meaning is as much a phenomenal feature of what I hear as the timbre and pitch of your voice."

In Dainton's own words, one *hears* meaningful words! *Phenomenologically speaking*, meanings or meaningfulness are experienced just like pitch and timbre. Consequently, what a friend of cognitive phenomenology needs is an account of how a cognitive phenomenal aspect can be intimately related to a sensory perceptual phenomenal aspect and still be distinctively *cognitive* or *intellectual*. In the absence of such an account, it is unclear why, on *phenomenological grounds*, one is justified to take the phenomenal character of understanding experiences to be non-sensory and thus a proper *cognitive* phenomenal character.

To come back to Siewert's specific argument, if merely sensory features are not the only possible phenomenal aspects in terms of which one can give an account of the phenomenal character of understanding experiences, then it should not be possible that one finds all the

same sensory perceptual phenomenal aspects *in* and *outside* understanding experiences. On the opponent's view I am defending, the phenomenal aspect related to the experience of hearing meaning *cannot* occur independently of such an experience of understanding.

However, there are several objections that one can raise against the hearing meanings accounts of understanding experiences.⁵⁸

Firstly, one may object that there are non-phenomenological reasons to reject the hearing meanings account. For instance, one can argue that meanings are abstract objects and that one cannot have sensory perceptual experiences of such non-spatial and non-temporal objects. However, to repeat my aim, my primary intention is to look for a phenomenological adequate characterization of cognitive experiences and, consequently, I will exclusively focus on this experiential dimension.

Secondly, some will object that the hearing meaning account is just a verbal move. Basically, the hearing meaning account just grants all the phenomenal differences that are highlighted by the Contrast Argument but then tags the whole episode as a "sensory perceptual episode of hearing meanings". Therefore, both the friend and the opponent to cognitive phenomenology would agree on every phenomenal difference and just disagree on the way we name these phenomenal differences.

This objection is convincing. Still, it does not resolve everything; we need to know how to categorize understanding experiences with respect to List 1 and List 2. We need to find a principled way of categorizing a conscious mental episode as a thought in contrast to other kinds of mental episodes. And basically, the virtue of the hearing meanings account of understanding experience is to make apparent the fact that, with respect to understanding experiences, we have no good reasons to consider some conscious episodes as either distinctive conscious thoughts or as *conceptually rich* sensory perpetual episodes. We need further considerations to have a principled way of using the distinction between conscious thoughts and episodes of List 2. This is, in fact, the main lesson I want to draw from the objection from the hearing meaning account.

Thirdly, one can object that the hearing meaning account reveals a mistaken assumption we had in formulating the Minimal Thesis. According to this thesis, some thoughts have a non-derivative, non-sensory and *sui generis* phenomenal character. But, one could argue that, as the previous quotations of Dainton and Siewert made obvious, the fact that conscious thoughts seem intimately related or unified to sensory perceptual episodes *is* evidence that it was wrong to suppose that conscious thoughts have a phenomenal character that is non-sensory perceptual. According to views suggested by Dainton and Siewert's points, our Minimal Thesis is too strong in the sense that it requires the consciousness specific to some thoughts to be distinctively *non-*

⁵⁸ See also O'Callaghan (2011).

sensory perceptual. But, one will argue, this assumption is groundless: what cognitive phenomenology is all about is whether some *conceptual* or *cognitive activities* are sometimes phenomenally conscious and not whether some conceptual or cognitive activity is phenomenally conscious *in a non-sensory perceptual way*.

Whether one is ready to accept this objection depends probably on whether one is ready to accept the Analogy Thesis. Namely, the thesis conscious thoughts are conscious in the same sense as sensory perceptual episodes are conscious. If we allow conscious thought to have a phenomenal character akin to the phenomenal character of conscious episodes of List 2, I don't see how they could also constitute their own kind of experience.

But I take it that there are reasons to accept the Analogy Thesis and consequently also the Minimal Thesis. And, again, the main motivation is primarily phenomenological. I believe that there is a way to describe understanding experiences as "non-sensory perceptual" which is defensible. As I will try to demonstrate in Chapter 2, even though conscious thoughts are perhaps always or even necessarily unified in some sense to sensory perceptual experiences, there is nevertheless a way in which they are also completely independent from any other conscious episodes and thus constitute their own kind of consciousness.

There are then several conclusions I want to draw from my discussion of the Contrast Arguments. First, contrary to what appears in contemporary literature, examination of the various versions of the Contrast Argument reveals that it is not straightforward what conclusion the argument is supposed to establish. What is the phenomenal difference between understanding and not understanding? Is it a matter of generic meaningfulness or of specific meanings? Or, is it constituted by some additional phenomenal layers? Is it really an experience of understanding and not just of getting something? Etc.

But, the main conclusion with respect to the Contrast Argument is that we have no reason to take the phenomenal difference between understanding and not understanding to be a distinctively *cognitive* phenomenal difference because it is not clear in what sense the phenomenal character of an understanding experience (or an experience of getting something) is non-sensory perceptual. The upshot is not that the hearing meanings accounts wins the dispute but only that we need further reasons to see why we should think that an understanding experience has a distinctively *cognitive* phenomenal character. In other words, the Second Opponent and the friends of cognitive phenomenology are for the moment on a par and we need to investigate further to find out who is right.



Self-knowledge argument. Pitt (2004) has given the most developed version of the Self-knowledge Argument. A slightly modified version of Pitt's argument goes as follow:

Conscious Thinking

Self-knowledge Argument:

- (1) It is possible immediately to identify one's occurrent conscious thoughts
- (2) It would not be possible immediately to identify one's conscious thoughts unless each type of conscious thought had a proprietary, distinctive and individuating phenomenal character

Therefore,

- (3) Each type of conscious thought has a proprietary, distinctive and individuating phenomenal character

Therefore,

- (4) Some thoughts have a cognitive phenomenal character

As mentioned earlier, according to Pitt, a phenomenal character is *proprietary* in the sense that what it is like to think the thought is different from what it is like to be in any other sort of conscious mental state. Additionally, the phenomenal character of particular conscious thoughts is *distinctive* in the sense that it is different from what it is like to think any other conscious thought. And finally, the phenomenal character of a particular thought is *individuating* in the sense that it constitutes the content of the thought.

My objection to this argument will target Pitt's definition of the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts. I will object to the transition from (3) to (4). Although it might look like Pitt's notion of a proprietary, distinctive and individuating phenomenal character is much stronger than our notion of cognitive phenomenal character, it turns out that it is also weaker in a certain sense. It is stronger in the sense that Pitt takes this phenomenal character to *constitute* the content of the thought (i.e. it is individuating). This sounds pretty much like the Thesis of Conscious Intentional Thoughts, discussed in the next chapter, which is a phenomenal extension of the Minimal Thesis. However, Pitt's notion of phenomenal character is weaker in the sense that having such a proprietary, distinctive and individuating phenomenal character does not imply having a *cognitive* phenomenal character. The reason is simply that a proprietary, distinctive and individuating phenomenal character is not necessarily a non-sensory perceptual phenomenal character.

In order to establish this, I will show that a thought can have a proprietary, distinctive and individuating phenomenal character – or at least something very close to this – that is nevertheless a sensory perceptual phenomenal character. The following is a suggestion from Prinz who writes about Pitt's argument:

"The argument is clever, but there is a natural reply: we know what we are thinking by means of verbal imagery. The impression that we can distinguish one thought from another and from other mental states can be easily explained on the assumption that we identify thoughts by inner speech. Sentences can be distinguished from other forms of imagery, and distinct thoughts can be distinguished verbally, even when they might be visualized in similar ways (compare "The cat is on the mat" and "The mat is under the cat").

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The claim, again, is not that words constitute comprehension, but that they are handy bookkeepers that tell us what we are thinking under conditions when imagining thought contents in some other way might be difficult or inefficient.” (p. 187)

The plan is thus to show that sensory perceptual phenomenal characters associated with episodes of inner speech are enough for grounding our capacity for immediate knowledge of the content of our thoughts. But as I will explain soon, we need not follow Prinz’s suggestion in all respects. There are, in fact, different ways to develop the idea that we know our thoughts in virtue of episodes or inner speech. And also, one does not need to restrict oneself to the case of auralizations but one could also appeal to visualizations in order to account of our self-knowledge of conscious thoughts.

My interest in developing this objection is not to defend the idea that an account of self-knowledge which appeals to the phenomenal character of episodes of inner speech or visualization is the best account of our self-knowledge of thought contents.⁵⁹ There are various accounts of self-knowledge that do not appeal to the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts at all and that I will not discuss.⁶⁰ My aim is just to show that *if* certain epistemic capacities for self-knowledge require the existence of some phenomenal character, then we have no good reason to think that this phenomenal character needs to be a *cognitive* phenomenal character.

There are three epistemic capacities that are highlighted by the Self-knowledge Argument. The capacity to distinguish conscious thoughts from other kinds of conscious mental episodes, the capacity to distinguish one thought from all other conscious thoughts and the capacity to immediately identify the content of a thought. My suggestion is thus that there is some sensory perceptual phenomenal character that would permit these epistemic capacities.

However, it is especially the last epistemic capacity that is the most challenging for our attempt to show that a proprietary, distinctive and individuating phenomenal character can fail to be a cognitive phenomenal character. I will assume that it is plausible that visualizations or auralizations of episodes of inner speech are enough to differentiate one conscious thought from other conscious mental episodes or other conscious thoughts. I take it that the difficulty is to show how the phenomenal character of these episodes can *constitute contents*. For the sake of simplicity, I will exclusively focus on the challenge of how phenomenal characters can constitute contents and leave the question of how inner speech is enough to distinguish one thought from other thoughts and mental episodes for further work.

As I have already briefly suggested, there are reasons to think that in the case of *some* thoughts, visualizations seem to be able to constitute their contents or part of their contents. For, as Siewert (1998: 264-74) notices, undergoing a visualization is sufficient for *being assessable for*

⁵⁹ See Byrne (2008), Cassam (2011).

⁶⁰ Gertler (2011).

accuracy or truth which is what characterizes intentionality as we will see in the next chapter. “If you visualize something as Texas-shaped, then you will visualize more or less accurately, depending on the ways in which the type of shape you visualize conforms to what is most truly Texas-shaped, that is, depending on how Texas-shaped the shape you visualize is.” (p.267).

However, even though it might be possible that some visualizations constitute some contents of thoughts, it is a familiar point that there are clear cases where this is impossible. How can we visualize a negation? How can we visualize a content such as *everything that exist is physical*? How would we differentiate such content from a content like *necessarily everything that exist is physical*? Consequently, although one may grant that *some* visualizations can constitute some contents this is largely not enough.

There are at least three different ways one can suggest that the phenomenal character of auralizations of episodes of inner speech can constitute the content of our thoughts. However, I must already admit that on some developments of Prinz’s suggestion, it is not exact to say that the phenomenal character of episodes of inner speech *constitute* the content of the thought. But I will argue that this concession is acceptable.

The three different versions of the account according to which the phenomenal character of inner speech constitute or is at least closely associated to the content of thoughts vary depending on how one conceives of an episode of inner speech. A natural general account of inner speech consists in regarding such mental episodes as analogous to episodes of hearing outer speech. An important difference is that episodes of inner speech tend to occur in sub-sentential episodes. One is not constantly formulating complete and well-articulated sentences although one is also able to do this when, for instance rehearsing mentally something one is about to assert. Hence, episodes of inner speech are often experiences of items such as “Now!” or “Let’s go!” even though one can also articulate full sentences.

According to a first account, episodes of inner speech have a phenomenal character of an experience of low-level properties. That is, what it is like to hear oneself talking in inner speech is an experience of auralized audible properties (pitch, tone, etc.) of one’s inner speech. However, such an account will clearly not be convincing to explain how we can immediately know what we are thinking. The problem is similar to what we have seen in the case of understanding experiences: such kinds of account cannot explain how a sensory perceptual character can constitute a thought content. The low-level properties associated with the phenomenal character of an episode of inner speech are clearly insufficient for constituting almost all contents of thoughts. Therefore, a low-level properties account of the phenomenal character of an episode of inner speech is not enough to reject Pitt’s argument.

A variation of this first account would modify the relation between the phenomenal character of episodes of inner speech and the content of thought. Instead of taking the phenomenal

character of episodes of inner speech to constitute the content of thought, the relation between the two would rather be that of the former *providing an access* to the latter.⁶¹ This seems to be what Prinz has in mind when he speaks of episodes of inner speech as “handy bookkeeper” for what we are thinking at a given moment. The proposal under consideration would then keep a low-level properties account and episodes of inner speech and take these episodes to provide us with access to thought contents. A negative downside of such a proposal is that strictly speaking the phenomenal character of the conscious thought (i.e. of episodes of inner speech) would not constitute the content anymore and consequently we would not know immediately what we are thinking. However, it is unclear to what extent immediacy is a desideratum that has to be respected in any case. Second, what notion of “immediacy” is supposed to be preserved? Is it epistemic immediacy or phenomenological immediacy that is most important? It seems plausible to me to claim that although our justification for what we think is mediated by an episode of inner speech, phenomenologically speaking the process still remains experienced as immediate. It is not as if one had to go through a temporarily extended conscious process of first scrutinizing the episode of inner speech in order to access the content of the thought.

A third possible account that tries to meet the challenge of how sensory perceptual phenomenal characters can constitute the contents of thoughts is to argue that auralizations of episodes of inner speech are not just experiences of low-level audible properties. In this view, an experience of inner speech consists not only of the experience of such low level quasi audible features characterizing occurrences of inner speech, but just as a hearing meanings account of understanding experiences includes meanings among audible properties, an experience of inner speech would also be an experience of meanings. Consider, for instance, a quotation, extracted from Carruthers (1996), which suggests that words imaginatively heard are “imbued with content”.

“When I think, 'The world is getting warmer', by imagining that sentence, my image is immediately and non-inferentially imbued with content, just as if I had heard that sentence uttered aloud. Sentences in a language one understands are always heard under a particular interpretation, in such a way that we seem to *hear* the meaning of the utterance. The same is true of the images which constitute our thoughts — the content of the thought is heard in its form.” (p.229)

Similarly, for the case of the hearing meanings account of understanding experiences, if an episode of inner speech includes meanings in a sensory perceptual manner, then there is no clear reason why all thoughts contents could not be constituted by a sensory perceptual phenomenal character. When a content is not constituted by visualizations, some Second Opponents to cognitive phenomenology, might then argue that episodes of inner speech with sensory perceptually *imbued meanings* constitute the contents of conscious thoughts.

⁶¹ Clark (1998), Martínez-Manrique & Vicente (2010).

This third account fits well with our overall argumentative dialogue: if a friend of cognitive phenomenology is unable to reject the hearing meaning account in the case of understanding experiences and if the auralization of episode of inner speech parallels the case of the account of hearing meanings, then unless there is a difference between the case of hearing meanings and the experiences of inner speech, the Self-knowledge Argument will not suffice to establish that some thoughts have a cognitive phenomenal character.

One advantage of this account is that it can accommodate some kind of immediacy that is part of our self-knowledge. If the meanings are part of the sensory perceptual character of episodes of inner speech, then we have an immediate access to our thought contents. And this would be exactly parallel to the case of hearing outer speech where we immediately get what people mean.

However, a serious problem for all three accounts that appeal to inner speech constituting or giving access to thought content is the possible existence of imageless and wordless thoughts.⁶² However, although I am sympathetic to these cases of pure imageless or wordless conscious thoughts, I will try not to appeal to such episodes since they bring in significant questions about introspection that I prefer to leave aside in this thesis as I explained in the introduction.

Having said this, one may still be unpersuaded by the preceding considerations. It might still seem to some that sensory perceptual phenomenal characters of episodes of inner speech are unsuited to play the role they have to play in our account of self-knowledge. It is just unconvincing to suggest that we know what we think through episodes of inner speech.

However, although it is certainly true that there are many difficulties in the suggestion that episodes of inner speech give access to or constitute the contents of thoughts, the picture sketched by Pitt is not without its own problems. For, consider Pitt's own account of the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts. Basically, Pitt's account of the phenomenal character of conscious thought is *defined* by the three epistemic roles that are required for our self-knowledge of the contents of our thoughts. But that seems like an ad hoc solution to the nature of the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts. It seems that we could expect from Pitt an account of the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts that is *independent* from the three epistemic capacities he identifies and that can be shown as better suited than sensory perceptual phenomenal characters to explain these three epistemic capacities. Until Pitt provides us with an account of the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts that has some independence from its epistemological role in self-knowledge, it is unclear why his position is better than the one of Prinz.

And, as I pointed earlier, appealing to these three epistemological roles to define the phenomenal character of conscious thought is so abstract that for all we know we could be talking of phenomenal characters that belong to conscious episodes of List 2. As we have already

⁶² Binet (1903), Hurlburt & Akhter (2008), Siewert (1998), Ribot (1913), (Woodworth 1906).

seen, Pitt's account of the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts is made uniquely in terms of *differences with respect to other* conscious thoughts and conscious episodes. But, again, there is no mention of *how* different these different conscious episodes are from each other. Consequently, the phenomenal character of thought that *p* could be much closer to the phenomenal character of an episode of pain than to the phenomenal character of a thought that *q*. But this is phenomenologically highly implausible. The problem with Pitt's account is thus that all it requires are differences between the phenomenal characters of different kinds of mental episodes and thoughts. But clearly this is not enough. We know that there are intrinsic phenomenal differences between different conscious episodes and unfortunately Pitt says nothing about these.

Finally, Pitt might object that Prinz's account is nevertheless hopeless – visualizations and inner speech can't constitute contents of thoughts – and that, as a consequence of this, we are forced to conclude by default that the phenomenal character of a conscious thought is a cognitive phenomenal character. But, assuming that working with visualization and inner speech is really hopeless, the problem with this strategy is that it might work only if we are certain that it is *some phenomenal character* of our conscious thoughts that we need in order to explain our immediate knowledge of our conscious thoughts. And, as I mentioned earlier, there are alternative theories of self-knowledge that do not rely on any kind of phenomenal character in order to explain our self-knowledge of conscious thoughts.⁶³



The general conclusion I want to draw from the two main arguments for cognitive phenomenology is then that they fail to establish that some thoughts have a *cognitive* phenomenal character. Both the Contrast Argument and the Self-Knowledge argument fail to show that some conscious thoughts have non-sensory phenomenal character. At best, these arguments have shown that conscious thought have *some* phenomenal character, but it remains to be seen whether it is really a distinctive *non-sensory perceptual* and thus a *cognitive* phenomenal character.

In the next section, I will explain how the failure of these two arguments indicates something problematic with the way cognitive phenomenology is usually discussed. The upshot will be a new way of conceiving the problem of cognitive phenomenology that I will then discuss in the rest of the thesis.

⁶³ See Levine (2011), Shoemaker (2009).

1.4. The problem of cognitive phenomenology

The two main arguments for the existence of conscious thoughts fail to show that the phenomenal character of a conscious thought is distinctively *cognitive*. However, these failures reveal something significant about the nature of the problem of cognitive phenomenology.

In the introduction, I briefly made a proposal concerning the source of these difficulties that affect the two main arguments for cognitive phenomenology. I suggested that it is the vague account of the conscious aspect associated to conscious thoughts that is the obstacle for recognizing that there are conscious thoughts. But I believe that we can also give a more elaborated diagnostic of the source of the failure of the two main arguments.

Firstly, it is worth appreciating that vague characterizations of the conscious aspects of thoughts are a widespread phenomenon in contemporary literature on cognitive phenomenology. What friends of cognitive phenomenology usually say about the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts falls into three categories. The phenomenal character of conscious thought is (i) in some sense *elusive*, (ii) described in *negative* terms, and/or, as I already mentioned, (iii) described in very *general terms* of cognitive kinds.

The claim that the phenomenal character of conscious thought is somehow elusive is usually made in contrast with sensory perceptual experiences such as pain or visual experiences for example. You can't miss pain or color experiences although it is much more difficult to grasp the conscious character of thought. A good example of the way contemporary philosophers describe the cognitive phenomenal character of conscious thought is what Strawson writes in the preface of the second edition of his book *Mental Reality*:

"I have for example substituted 'insubstantial' for 'diaphanous' in the attempt to characterize the hard-to-pin-down nature of the cognitive phenomenology of conscious thought [...]. 'Diaphanous' was understood to mean 'transparent in the sense of being completely invisible to experience' (in a way that is now standard in philosophy), whereas I was aiming to characterize something which is genuinely experienced, and which can even have a character of great determinacy, but which seems gauzy, strangely hard to grasp, when one turns one's theoretical attention to it." (p. xv)

Others say that it is "unimpressive" (Kriegel 2011: 91-2), "difficult to describe" (McHugh 2012:148) or previously, James (1889:324) noted that "[b]elief, the sense of reality, feels like itself – that is about as much as we can say."⁶⁴ The elusiveness of cognitive phenomenal characters has thus two aspects. One is that it has a kind of "diminished" form of existence; it is insubstantial. The other – probably a consequence of the first – is that cognitive phenomenal characters are likely to escape theoretical characterizations.

The second common way of describing the conscious character of thoughts is closely linked to the Contrast Argument. The negative characterization of the phenomenal character of

⁶⁴ See also Hume (1739-40/1978: Book I, Part III, Section VII).

understanding experiences that comes with the Contrast Argument is that it is a *non*-sensory perceptual phenomenal character. This appears also clearly in the discussion that stems from the Contrast Argument. An important segment of Siewert (2011)'s version of the Contrast Argument consists precisely in *ruling out* several possible ways an opponent to cognitive phenomenology may be tempted to argue that sensory perceptual phenomenal aspects do constitute the phenomenal difference between understanding and not understanding.

The implicit assumption, behind the third usual way of describing conscious thoughts – in general terms of cognitive kinds – seems also to involve a form of skepticism with respect to the possibility to give substantive theoretical descriptions of phenomenal characters. There is something it is like to *think* or to *judge* but to say more than this is impossible. Galen Strawson seems to write for many when he notes that “The only way in which we can try to convey the content of the experience of understanding such sentence to each other is simply by repeating them [...]”⁶⁵

The lack of substantive characterizations of the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts is thus a pervasive feature of contemporary literature. I think that we can understand why this is so if we come back to the Minimal Thesis. According to the Minimal Thesis some thoughts have a phenomenal character that is non-derivative, non-sensory and *sui generis*. And (i) “non-derivative” means roughly “does not derive from other mental episodes”, (ii) “non-sensory perceptual” means roughly “not of the kind of these mental episodes of List 2”, and (iii) “*sui generis*” means roughly “that is distinctive to a certain kind of psychological episode”.

A little examination of these notions reveals that the phenomenal character taken to be distinctive of thoughts is always individuated in terms of *mental episodes* of List 1 and 2. This corresponds to the characterization of conscious thoughts in general cognitive terms that I have pointed out earlier. And this is precisely an aspect of the vague characterization that leads to the failure of the main arguments for cognitive phenomenology. The lack of substantive characterizations of conscious thoughts that was at the origin of the problem that affected the Contrast Argument and the Self-knowledge Argument is built in from the start in the way we conceive of phenomenally conscious episodes.

The upshot from all this is then that we should not think of the problem of cognitive phenomenology just in terms of whether there is such a thing while assuming a vague conception of cognitive phenomenal characters as *elusive* and describable in *negative* and *general cognitive* terms. What we need is to elaborate a more substantive conception of what cognitive phenomenology really is. Above, I made a distinction between two tasks concerning phenomenal consciousness. The first task is to introduce the phenomenon and the second is to give an account of it – a phenomenological account and a non-phenomenological account. In

⁶⁵ Strawson (1994: 182), Pitt (2004).

terms of this distinction, the problem of cognitive phenomenology cannot just be equated with a problem of introducing conscious thoughts. The lesson from the failure of the two arguments for cognitive phenomenology is precisely that in order to properly introduce the phenomenon it seems that we need to articulate, or at least to start to articulate, a more substantive phenomenological account of what it is like to undergo conscious thoughts. Concretely, this means that we have to develop a phenomenological extension of the Minimal Thesis. If we want to know whether *there is* something it is like to think then we need to say *what it is like to think*. In this thesis, I will thus take the problem of cognitive phenomenology to be the problem of giving a substantive phenomenological account of what it is like to think. My suggestion is to develop such an account by examining four phenomenological extensions of the Minimal Thesis:

(MT1) All conscious thoughts have an *intentional* phenomenal aspect

(MT2) Some conscious thoughts have a phenomenal aspect of a *doxastic mode*

(MT3) Some conscious thoughts have a phenomenal aspect of *agency*

(MT4) Some conscious thoughts have a phenomenal aspect of *instantaneity*

One reason why I focus on these four phenomenal aspects is that they have already been discussed in the literature although not always directly in the context of the usual arguments for cognitive phenomenology. A second reason is that arguably all these aspects correspond to central features of thoughts.



In the remainder of this chapter, I will answer to objections that one can raise against the project I just sketched. It is very likely that the preceding optimistic considerations will raise the following worry: *How are you going to proceed to elaborate a more substantive phenomenological account of what it is like to think?*

A first motivation for asking this question is that many will think that the phenomenal character of whatever kind of experience is ineffable and consequently that the aim of elaborating a substantive phenomenological account of conscious thought is hopeless. It is not just that the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts is elusive but that any kind of phenomenal character is not the kind of thing that one can verbally express. How, for instance, would you verbally convey the phenomenal character of an experience of pain?

It is not my aim to resolve all the methodological issues surrounding how one can capture the phenomenal character of conscious episodes and thus I will limit my comments on the problem of the ineffability of experiences. Roughly, I think we can reject the claim that we cannot tell what the positive intrinsic character of a conscious thought is on the basis of the Analogy Thesis. If one considers the recent philosophical work on visual experience, one will notice that many

have defended various claims about the intrinsic nature of phenomenal characters of visual experiences. But if, following the Analogy Thesis, the phenomenal character of conscious thought is of the same generic kind as the phenomenal character of sensory perceptual episodes, then, if one is able to tell what the distinctive conscious features of perceptual experiences are like, one should expect that something similar is possible for conscious thoughts.

Here are three examples of substantive phenomenological accounts of some aspects of visual experiences. First, Elijah Chudnoff (2013) claims that visual experiences have presentational phenomenology. That is, he argues, that what is distinctive of visual experiences – and, in his account, also of some other kinds of experiences – is that it is as if one is directly *presented* with objects of one's environment. His more sophisticated account is then the following:

“What it is for an experience of yours to have presentational phenomenology with respect to *p* is for it to both make it seem to you that *p* and make it seem to you as if this experience makes you aware of a truth-maker for *p*.” Chudnoff (p.38)

Second, Dretske (1969) characterizes a sense in which we perceive an *object* with the following thesis:

“*S* sees_n *D* = *D* is visually differentiated from its immediate environment by *S*” (Dretske 1969: 20)⁶⁶

Third, and for different purposes, Siewert (2012) points out the phenomenon of *object constancy*. As one moves around a spherical object for instance, the way the object looks changes, although the object does not look to change as a spherical object.

“As I look at different things the way things look to me – how they appear – changes. And yet, often enough, what I am looking at does not appear to change (in color, shape, size, location).” (Siewert (2012: 139)

It is not my intention to discuss these various claims – and, actually, one will find many more claims like these⁶⁷. But, it is enough to note that these claims are theoretically sophisticated (some use technical terminology like “truthmakers”) and are defended at paper length. The main point I want to make is simply that if one can meaningfully discuss various aspects of visual experience, then barring any reason to think otherwise, the same should be the case for conscious thoughts.

Obviously, one may argue that although visual experiences and conscious thoughts are phenomenally conscious in the same generic sense, one of the properties that differentiate perceptual experiences from conscious thoughts is precisely the property of being ineffable. For instance, one could object that the elusive nature of cognitive phenomenal characters is the reason why the distinctive conscious character of conscious thoughts escapes our theoretical grasp. But this objection does not survive close scrutiny. First, I suggest that the elusive nature of

⁶⁶ See also Siegel (2006).

⁶⁷ Harman (1990), Spener (2012).

cognitive phenomenal character consists in its “diminished” form of existence that then grounds the difficulty to give a theoretical description of it. But, one wants to hear more about the “diminished” form of existence of cognitive phenomenal characters that would then establish the impossibility of capturing it in theoretical descriptions. Consider again Pitt’s Self-knowledge Argument: on this account it is implicit that there is a sense in which the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts is not elusive at all. If it were, we could not know in such an immediate manner what we are thinking. In consequence, all friends of cognitive phenomenology who accept a Self-Knowledge Argument *à la* Pitt should accept that there is a sense in which cognitive phenomenology is not an elusive phenomenon. Second, even in the case of sensory perceptual experiences, it seems that certain aspects of these experiences are elusive. The phenomenon of sensory perceptual constancy that Siewert (2006, 2016) tries to characterize, for instance, is to some extent also an elusive phenomenon that can be contrasted with pain experiences – one just has to think of the many different accounts there are of the phenomenon of object constancy.⁶⁸ If the phenomenon were obvious, then there would not be so many disagreements. Further, even pain has elusive aspects: when we have a strong headache, do we literally experience a negative evaluative property? Whether we literally experience evaluative properties has no easy and obvious answer and thus even pain experiences have elusive aspects.

Consequently, unless there is something distinctive to the elusiveness of conscious thoughts that prevents them from being described, there is no reason not to engage in the project to develop a substantive phenomenological account of conscious thoughts.

Assuming that the preceding points allow at least the project to get off the ground, one may nevertheless wonder how one will develop a phenomenological account of conscious thoughts. The question seems pressing especially now that I have shown that the Contrast Argument and the Self-Knowledge Argument have defects. How am I going to proceed? What is the methodology I will assume in order to answer these questions?

A first natural suggestion is to rely on introspection. One just has to introspectively attend to one’s own conscious thoughts in order to answer the questions concerning the different phenomenal aspects of conscious thoughts.⁶⁹

But there are many problems with this suggestion. First, one objection is that conscious thoughts are special mental episodes that cannot be introspectively grasped as they are. One cannot think *and* introspect one’s own thinking; as soon as one is introspecting a thought, if it continues to exist at all, it is different from what it used to be. Second, some philosophers think that introspection is unreliable and cannot be trusted to discover truths about experiences.⁷⁰ Third, there are insurmountable disagreements that plague not just the particular case of

⁶⁸ Matthen (2010: 226-7).

⁶⁹ Horgan & Tienson (2002).

⁷⁰ Schwitzgebel (2008).

conscious thoughts but many other disputes about other conscious aspects of our overall experience.

Fourth, and this is the main objection, if by introspection one means a temporarily limited mental episode that involves attention and is directed upon an occurrent conscious episode, then it is dubious whether introspection is really needed to discover truths about phenomenal characters. This is in fact already what happens with the Contrast Argument and the Self-knowledge Argument. First, let's consider the Contrast Argument. According to Kriegel (2015: 30), the two first premises in the Contrast Argument are "introspectively uncontroversial". But if S_1 and S_2 are different subjects, it cannot be that the two first premises are *introspectively* obvious in the narrow sense of introspection I am assuming (Kriegel might have a broader conception of introspection in mind). The reason for this is that one cannot introspectively access the differences between two experiences of two *distinct* subjects. The way Siewert (2011) or O'Callaghan (2011) construct their own Contrast Argument with respect to a single subject, would allow saying that the crucial phenomenal difference between understanding and not understanding is introspectively accessible. But with two distinct subjects the two first premises cannot be established introspectively.

There is much more to say on this, but I assume that if Strawson's (1994/2010) version of the argument was initially convincing – in fact nobody ever complains about the inhospitable set-up of the argument with respect to introspection – then this is the sign that the argument appeals to other mental capacities than simple introspection.

Furthermore, in case of the Self-knowledge Argument the use of introspection is dubious too. At least that's what Kriegel (2015) claims. The Self-knowledge Argument "[...] contains no phenomenological premises. Its first premise is epistemological and its second explanatory. Neither makes any claim about any phenomenal property actually being instantiated. The only propositions that make such a claim are the conclusions. Thus although the conclusions are phenomenological, no premise requires appeal to introspection." (p.33) There is room for disagreement with Kriegel's observations. For instance, the first premise which states that we know immediately what we are thinking may be based on a phenomenological insight. But one could resist this by arguing that the immediacy is epistemic and not phenomenological.

The upshot is thus that by the argumentative standards already in force in the debate over cognitive phenomenology, it is not the case that the problem about conscious thoughts is a problem of introspection and I want to share that assumption. (A welcomed consequence from this is that worries about the reliability of introspection – a common theme in the debate about cognitive phenomenology – lose some of their forces too.)

Another suggestion comes from the terminology in which the debate over cognitive phenomenology is often set up. Many philosophers talk as if the problem of cognitive

phenomenology is a problem of *reduction*. Roughly, from this point of view, the question is whether the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts is *reducible* to the uncontentious phenomenal characters of other mental episodes such as sensory perceptual episodes.

But, since reduction is a familiar phenomenon in philosophy of sciences and philosophy of mind, one could hope to extract a methodology suitable for the case of cognitive phenomenology that is based on the examples from these other domains where we have a much better grasp of the methodology. The suggestion is then basically that the problem of cognitive phenomenology should be conceived in terms similar to those used with respect to the problem of whether the mind is reducible to physical episodes or whether biology is reducible to physics.

There is certainly an inoffensive sense that the problem of cognitive phenomenology is a problem of reduction. There is nothing troublesome with the idea that an opponent to cognitive phenomenology's aim is to demonstrate that truths of what it is like to think are reducible to truths about what it is like to undergo various sensory perceptual episodes – assuming that “reducible” means something like “nothing over and above”.

However, there are also significant differences between cognitive phenomenology and other cases of reductions. First, in the cases of usual reductions of scientific theories or of the mind, it is often assumed that physics or physical episodes constitute a *more fundamental level* than, say, biology and mental episodes. In these more familiar cases of reductions, there is a *layered conception of the world* that is assumed to be absent in the context of the problem of cognitive phenomenology.⁷¹ In what sense is the sensory perceptual phenomenal character more fundamental than the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts? In fact, to make sense of the idea that there is an interesting analogy between the problem of cognitive phenomenology and other more familiar problems of philosophy of science or of philosophy of minds, one would need to adopt an extreme form of reduction: eliminativism. Eliminativists about the mind simply deny that there are any mental episodes. Similarly, opponents to cognitive phenomenology simply deny that there are any cognitive phenomenal characters. But then I think that we are back to our initial problem which is that we do not have in hand a positive and substantive account of what a cognitive phenomenal character is. And unless we have such an account, it seems premature to adopt eliminativism.

Recently, Kriegel (2015) has suggested a direct and precise way of arguing for a substantive account of cognitive phenomenal characters. His suggestion is to produce “phenomenological Ramsey sentences”:

“A Ramsey sentence is produced by collecting a large number of “platitudes” about that which one wishes to elucidate, stringing them into a long conjunction, replacing occurrences of the “elucidandum” with a free variable, and prefixing the whole thing with the existential quantifier. (Importantly, “platitude” here

⁷¹ Kim (2002).

need not mean an obvious or *pedestrian* statement; it only means a statement about *surface features* of the elucidandum's referent.) The result is a complex description which may be satisfied better or worse by different eligible referents of the elucidandum. Suppose now that the platitudes appealed to are all phenomenological, in the sense that they cite phenomenal features. Then the result may be thought of as a *phenomenological* characterization of the target phenomenon." (p.64)

But Kriegel's suggestion is unfortunately unacceptable. First, he seems also to assume some ineffability principle and the phenomenological Ramsey sentences are thus supposed to provide us with a means to circumnavigate this problem⁷². But since there is no reason to accept a unilateral form of ineffability, the need for such phenomenological Ramsey sentences is already questionable. Second, what exactly is supposed to be a surface feature of a conscious thought? The way Ramsey sentences are usually built up, is by extracting the platitudes from folk psychology or from psychological theories. But, do we have platitudes about the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts? This is far from clear. It seems that if we want Ramsey sentences to have any kind of phenomenological accuracy, we need to have another source from which we could get these platitudes and which already guarantee some accuracy. In short, Kriegel's proposal seems to presuppose that we have already a way to find phenomenological platitudes about conscious thoughts. If so, whatever the interest of constructing phenomenological Ramsey sentences, what we need in the first place are some significantly accurate accounts of various phenomenal aspects of conscious thoughts.

Finally, a last possible suggestion is to rely on empirical psychology. After all, what is distinctively philosophical in the question of whether some thoughts have a distinctive cognitive phenomenal character? It seems that we just have to check out in the world what it is like for folks to undergo conscious thoughts.

A first reply to this is that, as we have seen with the notion of "consciousness", there are a significant number of distinctions that need to be made, if one is to be in position to raise any kind of question with respect to consciousness. The main notions involved in the debate over cognitive phenomenology surely need some conceptual clarifications that require distinctive philosophical skills.

Second, although the Thesis of Cognitive phenomenology I have presented is implicitly taken to concern the actual world, one might wonder how things are in other possible worlds. Is it a necessary feature of conscious thoughts that if they have a phenomenal character, then it is a *cognitive* phenomenal character? Is it a necessary feature that, if there are thoughts at all, then there are some conscious thoughts? Etc. There are thus many questions about modal properties of thoughts that cannot exclusively be decided on the basis of the results of empirical research. Therefore, at this level also, philosophical inquiry might be necessary for full understanding of conscious thoughts.

⁷² Kriegel (2015: 63).

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The two points I just made are however not meant at all to exclude the contributions of empirical psychology to the question of what the phenomenal character of our thoughts are like. Later, I will thus flag some questions about given phenomenal aspects of cognitive phenomenal characters that by and large can be investigated empirically.

Finally, since the most obvious candidates for an appropriate methodology to build up a phenomenological account of conscious thoughts fail, one may wonder how we are going to proceed. What is the methodology I will adopt to develop a phenomenological account of conscious thoughts?

My suggestion at this point is that there is no *single* methodology that can help us in our project. Or more exactly, there is one, but it is simply philosophical methodology which involves many different things. And, of course, one can have doubts about philosophical practice but the task to clear up such doubts belongs to another thesis. Here I will restrict myself to mention two rules of thumb that I take to be fruitful if followed in phenomenological inquiries.

The first is to focus on phenomenal aspects of an experience that are acceptable by the different parties involved in a debate. The phenomenal aspect that constitutes the difference between understanding and not understanding is a good example. Friends and opponents accept that in some sense there is such a phenomenal difference. The four phenomenal aspects I will consider are precisely this kind of phenomenal aspect.

The second rule of thumb worth following is to try to sketch alternative descriptions of a given phenomenal aspect. Sometimes the most efficient way to argue for a given description of a phenomenal aspect is to contrast it with alternative descriptions that when put on the table make it clear that certain options are unacceptable. But this is just another way to express what was the main point of this chapter which is that if we want to understand how there can be conscious thoughts we need to come up with better characterizations of what it is like to think.

Chapter Two – Conscious content

2.1. Introduction

What are the reasons to think that the phenomenal character of conscious thought is intentional? What is the distinctive intentional nature of the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts? Does the intentional phenomenal character of conscious thought reveal a non-sensory perceptual aspect and thus provide some support for the Minimal Thesis?

These are the questions we will discuss in this chapter. It builds on the results of the first chapter. If the Contrast Argument and the Self-knowledge argument provide some evidence that some thoughts have *some* phenomenal character, it remains to be seen whether it is a distinctive *cognitive* phenomenal character.

In section 2.2, I will explain what it means to say that the phenomenal character of conscious thought is intentional and briefly sketch some of the reasons there are to think that the phenomenal character of conscious thought *is* intentional. In section 2.3, I will answer the question about the nature of the intentional phenomenal character of conscious thoughts. In section 2.4, I will answer the last question that concerns the non-sensory nature of the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts.

2.2. Phenomenal intentionality

Intentionality. The notion of “intentionality” is a technical notion and is often introduced with more or less metaphorical expressions such as “aboutness” or “object directedness”. We need something more precise.

Siewert (1998: 188-94) offers the following characterization of intentionality:

“[...] it is enough for a feature to be intentional, that it is a feature in virtue of which (and not merely with respect to which) its possessor is assessable for truth or accuracy. And a feature is one in virtue of which its possessor is assessable for truth or accuracy just in case: from the possession of that feature it follows that there is some condition, the satisfaction of which, together with one’s possession of that feature, entails some correlative assessment for truth or accuracy, though that condition need not include anything we can rightfully count as an interpretation of that feature.” (p.192).

Suppose you believe that there is a cat under the table. According to Siewert’s definition of “intentionality”, your belief is intentional in the sense that you are *assessable for truth* – in virtue of believing – just in case there is a cat under the table; or for *falsity* if there is no cat under the table. Similarly, a visual experience is intentional in the sense that it looks to you as if there is a cat under the table is *accurate* just in case there is a cat under the table; or, *inaccurate* if there is no cat under the table.

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For a starter, I will thus assume that we have a sufficient condition for something to be intentional:

(D06) If x is (i) a property of a subject S in virtue of which S is assessable for truth or accuracy, and x is (ii) such that there is no condition from which it derives an interpretation, then x is intentional

The claim about conscious thoughts is, then, that they have a phenomenal aspect that is assessable for accuracy or truth and following from **(D06)** this is enough for it to be intentional:

Thesis of Conscious Intentional Thoughts:

(MT1) All conscious thoughts have an intentional phenomenal aspect

With this in place, one can then adapt the notion of “intentionality” to the notions of “being directed at” or “being about”. For, one can say that what makes a thought accurate or inaccurate is what the thought is about or directed at.⁷³ To fix the terminology, we can then say that what a mental episode is about or directed at and which is also the thing in virtue of which the mental episode is assessable for accuracy is the *object* of the mental episode or, in the case of thought, is the *object of thought*. The notion of “object” is to be understood as very broad. The table in front of you but also the space below the table can both be object of thoughts. That a mental episode has an object constitutes, then, a first feature of its intentionality.

A second feature of intentionality is that an intentional mental episode is directed at an object by way of a certain kind of *psychological mode* (or just mode for short). For instance, given the object of thought Paris, one can *judge* something about Paris or *doubt* something about Paris. The difference between *judging* and *doubting* are differences in psychological modes. Furthermore, as it is made clear by the example, different modes can be directed at the same object. (A terminological note: philosophers also often use the notion of an “attitude” to refer to a mode and I will sometimes do the same.)

Finally, a third feature of intentionality is the *way* a mental episode is directed at an object. It seems that if a mental episode is directed at an object x , then the object x is necessarily *presented* or *represented in some particular way*.⁷⁴ For instance, when I think about the Moléson I can think of it as a mountain in the canton of Fribourg or as a nice place to hike. The manner of representing I am introducing is not to be confused with the psychological mode that distinguishes different types of mental episodes such as judging and doubting for example. For, I can represent in the same manner the same object although through different modes. I can represent through the same mode the same object although through different manners of representation. For terminological convenience, I will then call such manners of representations “contents” or “intentional content”.

⁷³ Siewert (1998: 192).

⁷⁴ Crane (2007), Searle (1991: 50-1).

Let's recap: there are three defining features of an intentional episode to keep in mind: its *object, mode, and content*.⁷⁵

There are different dimensions of intentional contents that deserve further discussion. One dimension concerns its format. A common view is that all intentional content is *propositional* in format. According to this view, all intentional contents are propositions which, in addition of being contents, are also the *bearers* of the truth and the false. A proposition is *what is* true or false. The view that all intentional contents are propositional is put under pressure by examples of mental episodes such as love or desire which, on the face of it, do not seem to necessarily require a propositional content – one loves or hates *someone* or *something* and not *that* someone or something *is thus-and-so*. However, in this thesis, I will only consider thoughts with propositional contents.



Appearances. On the basis of the preceding clarifications, the thesis that conscious thoughts have a phenomenal character in virtue of which one is assessable for accuracy or truth means also that one's conscious thought has a certain intentional content in virtue of its phenomenal character.

A natural way to understand the idea that conscious thoughts have intentional contents in virtue of their phenomenal character is to resort to the notions of “seeming” or “appearing”. For example, when it occurs to you that the cat is under the table (imagine a situation where the cat is out of sight), it seems or it appears to you that the cat is under the table or, alternatively, there is a way the cat appears or seems to you. According to such a view, the phenomenal character of a thought would then be the way things appear or seem to the subject.

Is such a way of characterizing the intentionality of the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts adequate?

There are at least three reasons to think that “appearing” and “seeming” are adequate to clarify the Thesis of Conscious Intentional Thoughts. The first is that *we do* use “appearing” to report some episodes of List 1. An expression such as “it appeared to me that Sam will never come” can naturally be understood to express a conscious thought.

Second, “appearing” is commonly used to characterize the phenomenal character of sensory perceptual episodes by intentionalists.⁷⁶ Accordingly, in virtue of the Analogy Thesis one might expect that, barring other contradictory evidence, things should be the same for conscious thoughts.

The third reason is that the way things appear are assessable for accuracy which is enough to be intentional and which is precisely what is required by the Thesis of Conscious Intentional

⁷⁵ Crane (2007).

⁷⁶ Byrne (2001).

Thoughts. For instance, when one says that there is a way the cat appears to a subject while consciously thinking that the cat is under the table, then one can wonder whether the way the cat appears is *accurate* or *not*.

But initial intuitive considerations might not be sufficient. There are certain differences between conscious thoughts and other conscious episodes in how they relate to appearing and seeming.

A first problem is that certain ascriptions of appearances do not always apply smoothly to conscious thoughts. In the case of a visual experience of an object *x*, it is natural to say “*x* appears to me” whereas in the case of conscious thought it sounds strained to say that, when thinking about a statue (out of sight), “the statue appears to me”. The oddness surrounding this kind of report is that it sounds almost as if one is undergoing a mystical experience where one has a direct personal contact with the object of thought. Some uses of “appear” seem to report experiences where one is *presented* with the object of experience in a way that is inapplicable to conscious thoughts.

Furthermore, for different sensory perceptual episodes there are specific expressions that pick out distinctive types of experiences. For instance, “look”, “sounds”, “smell”, “taste and “feel” can be conveniently used to capture the distinctive experiential aspects of the different modalities of sensory perceptual episodes of vision, audition, olfaction, taste, various bodily sensations or even affective episodes. What about conscious thoughts? What word is there to characterize a distinctive “intellectual or cognitive look”?

Firstly, concerning “appear” words, one may start by pointing out that not all ascriptions of “appearing” to conscious thoughts are infelicitous. Some ascriptions of “appearing” in propositional format are acceptable. From *it appears to me that the cat is under the table* it does not follow that *it is as if the cat appears to me* in the contentious sense of a mystical apparition. Furthermore, since I will be concerned mainly by conscious thoughts with propositional contents, I would be able to avoid most controversial cases. In general, a possible strategy to avoid contentious cases consists thus in arguing that all cases of “*x* appears as *F* to *S*” can be reduced to cases of “it appears to *S* that *x* is *F*” and where the latter are unproblematic.

Secondly, it is common to make the distinction between (i) an epistemic use, (ii) a phenomenal use, and (iii) a comparative use of “appear” words like “appear”, “seem”, “look”, “sound”, “feel” and “smell”.⁷⁷ So, for instance, expressions such as “the room appears very dark” or the “the room seems very dark”, in their epistemic use purport to describe a conscious thought with a certain epistemic status for the subject. Thus, *the room appears very dark* implies *I believe* the room is very dark. A defeater would however cancel the existence of such epistemic appearances.

⁷⁷ Chisholm (1957: Chapter 4), Jackson (1977).

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In the case of the phenomenal use, no such implication follows. What is described is rather an experiential episode which is compatible with one's not believing what appears to be so-and-so. Accordingly, in the phenomenal sense, if the room appears very dark to me, it does not follow that I believe that the room is very dark. I might know that I am undergoing a hallucination and accordingly believe that there is no such room.

Finally, the comparative use of an "appear" word is at play when one is saying that the way things appear does not only depend on the nature of the thing but also on the condition in which it appears. Therefore, used in the comparative sense, a sentence like "x appears F" may be replaced by a sentence of the form "x appears the way F-things appear under condition ...". In the non-comparative phenomenal use, there is no such implication. I can know that x appears F without knowing anything about things that are F. And, according to Chisholm, such phenomenal appearances are a "mark of evidence".⁷⁸

The three uses are variously related to each other. For what matters to our present inquiry, the epistemic use is independent from the phenomenal use in the sense that there can be an occurrence of the first without an occurrence of the second and the other way around. Or at least that is what happens when we think of *sensory perceptual* phenomenal uses.

But considering the usual way philosophers think of these different uses of "appear" word, there is a way of understanding how "appear" words can work in ascriptions such as "x appears F" when applied to conscious thoughts. For instance, when one says that "the room appears very dark" in the epistemic sense, it does not follow that the room appears in any *sensory perceptual* manner. However, a friend of cognitive phenomenology can argue that this does not prevent the epistemic use *to be itself phenomenal in a non-sensory way*. In other words, a report of an epistemic use of an "appear" word may very well pick out the phenomenal character of a conscious thought like a judgment. I might say "the room appears very dark" while the room is out of sight and where I am consciously entertaining a thought about the room. Therefore, contrary to the usual way of presenting the different uses of the "appear" words, one can uphold that the epistemic use is, at least sometimes, also a phenomenal use.

Third, although there seems to be no notion that is straightforwardly equivalent to sensory terms such as "look", "taste", "smell", or "feel" for the case of conscious thoughts, this is not a fatal discrepancy. For two reasons: first, in their epistemic use, some "appear" words like "look", for instance, might also be used with respect to conscious thoughts. For example, "It looks like the room is very dark" or the "room looks very dark" have perfectly acceptable occurrences that do not concern sensory perceptual episodes. (One has to think of a situation where the sentences are uttered with the room out of sight.) "Appear" and "seem" are thus not necessarily tied to any specific sensory perceptual episode and can also be adapted to conscious thoughts.

⁷⁸ Chisholm (1957).

Second, there are also other ways to describe the distinctive conscious aspects of conscious thoughts that fit smoothly with what we saw so far. For instance, when a subject *S* undergoes an episode of conscious thought about something *x*, it is natural to speak of “having *x* in a mind” or “thinking of *x* in a certain way” that focuses specifically on the conscious aspect. Consider, thus, the case of someone saying “the train is about to arrive”. It would be a natural situation in which one would ask questions about what the utterer *had in mind* concerning the train. “Did you have in mind *the train coming from the left?*” or “Did you have in mind a train *running on the surface of the earth?*”.

The main suggestion of this section is, then, that the phenomenal character of thought is best described as being exhausted by *what a subject has in mind*. What it is like to think that *p* is assessable for accuracy in the sense that having in mind that *p* is assessable for accuracy.

But we should make a distinction between a *doxastic sense* and a *phenomenal sense* of having something in mind. One can have in mind that Sam has already left in the sense that one believes that Sam has already left although one is not consciously entertaining that Sam has already left. And one can have consciously in mind that Sam already left although one does not believe that Sam has already left. This happens when one engages in conditional thinking and wonders what would happen if Sam had already left. The notion of having in mind corresponds, to some extent, to the neutral mode that philosophers call “entertaining” and that I will discuss in the next chapter.⁷⁹

As it will appear more clearly later, the main challenge concerning having something in mind, consists in being able to accurately characterize the main features of this experience. How do we do that? One non conclusive, but still reliable, indication that one has *not* something in mind is that one has to *think more*. One has to engage in active thinking more to make it clear that one has something in mind. Accordingly, the presence or absence of this experience of thinking more also indicates (more or less reliably) whether one has something in mind or not.

Further, how does it relate to sensory perceptual appearances? If the train *visually* appears, is one also having in mind the train or the arriving train? The question is whether having in mind concerns exclusively cognitive or intellectual ways of “appearing” or whether it can be used to capture other kinds of conscious experiences. I’m inclined to say that “having in mind” concerns exclusively conscious thoughts. If the train visually appears to me, if one says that one has the train in mind, then one is more naturally interpreted as saying that one was thinking about the train and not that the visually appearing train was what one had in mind strictly speaking.

Later, I will have more to say. For now, it is enough to remember that intellectual or cognitive “appearances” are *what one has in mind* and that what it is like to think is intentional in the sense that it is exhausted by what one has in mind and which is assessable for accuracy.

⁷⁹ Kriegel (2013c).

Other theses. It might be useful to contrast the Thesis of Conscious Intentional Thoughts with various other theses that are close to it but still distinct. **(MT1)** is close to what is sometimes called “intentionalism” (or also “representationalism” or “representationism”). Intentionalism can be presented as a doctrine that aims to reconcile the phenomenally conscious aspect of the mind with its intentional aspect. In very general terms, intentionalism can be introduced as the doctrine according to which all phenomenally conscious episodes are – “are” in some sense yet to be specified – intentional episodes. Understood in such a general way, intentionalism can imply the Thesis of Conscious Intentional Thoughts inasmuch as one adds a few ingredients. It is not straightforward that thesis **(MT1)** is part of an intentionalist account; one can refuse that there are any conscious thoughts. Intentionalism with the acceptance of the Minimal Thesis would imply the Thesis of Conscious Intentional Thoughts.

Further, there are different forms of intentionalism that can be distinguished depending on the way one conceives of the relation between the conscious aspect of the mind and the intentional aspect. It is common to distinguish between *Strong* intentionalism and *Weak* intentionalism.⁸⁰ According to the former, the phenomenal character of a conscious episode is *identical* to an intentional content. Following the latter, the relation between the phenomenal character of a conscious episode and an intentional content is a relation of *supervenience* and/or *determination*. The slogan for the Weak version is a relation of co-variation: no difference in phenomenal character without a difference in intentional content.

The relation between Thesis of Conscious Intentional Thoughts and the Strong and Weak versions of intentionalism is complicated. It seems that in certain interpretations **(MT1)** could be made compatible with both versions. However, it is unlikely that such an ecumenical construal is really defensible. A theme that comes up often among advocates of cognitive phenomenology is the idea that phenomenal consciousness is *more fundamental* than intentionality. For instance, Horgan and Tienson (2002) take it that there is a form of intentionality that is “constitutively determined” by phenomenal consciousness alone⁸¹. But this claim goes against the sense of the determination relation that standard Weak representationalists have in mind: according to these philosophers, phenomenal consciousness is determined by intentionality and not the other way around. And if phenomenal consciousness is more fundamental than intentionality, then both neither can be related by a relation of identity.

Should we understand **(MT1)** as involving such a supervenience/determination claim? I don’t think that we need to. Consider, for instance, a friend of cognitive phenomenology like Siewert

⁸⁰ Chalmers (2004).

⁸¹ Horgan & Tienson (2002).

(2004) who is wary to introduce any such priority relation between a phenomenal character and an intentional content of a conscious thought:

“Though in accepting my picture, one rejects theories according to which the intentional is explanatorily prior to the phenomenal, it is not clear one thereby awards this “priority” status to phenomenal consciousness instead. For I am not saying that the phenomenal explains the intentional. Rather, I am saying that it *is* intentional without being explained *by* its being so.” (p. 8).

What does Siewert mean by the view that the phenomenal “is” intentional without “being explained *by* its being so”? Should this be understood in some Strong version of intentionalism?

The way I understand Siewert position is that he takes that what it is like for a subject *S* to undergo a given conscious episode *just is* the way things appear or seem to *S*. In more epistemic terms, we could say that for a given experience, once one has grasped everything of the ways things appear to a subject, one has also grasped everything of what it is like for the subject to undergo that experience. And this is the way I want to understand the Thesis of Conscious Intentional Thought: conscious thoughts have an intentional phenomenal character in the sense that what it is like to think just is, or is “exhausted” as I will say, by what one has in mind.

A different way to conceive of the relation between the conscious aspect and the intentional aspect of the mind is based on the distinction between the intentional content and the psychological mode of a mental episode. *Pure intentionalism* is then the doctrine according to which the phenomenal character of a mental episode is identical to an intentional content *alone*. *Impure intentionalism* is the view that the phenomenal character of a conscious mental episode is identical to an intentional content *and* a psychological mode. The way I stated the difference between pure and impure intentionalism was in terms of the Strong conception of intentionalism. But obviously, one could make a similar distinction with respect to the Weak conception of intentionalism.⁸² Furthermore, one can state the difference between Pure and Impure intentionalism in terms of the way things appear to a subject. A Pure intentionalist will say that the appearing is exhausted by what appears. An Impure intentionalist will say that the appearing involves the psychological mode.

The question of whether the phenomenal character of conscious thought is to be understood in terms of Pure or Impure intentionalism will be discussed in the next chapter.

Standard intentionalism is also closely associated with naturalistic motivations. For many intentionalists, the aim is to naturalize phenomenal characters by a strategy in two stages. First, one reduces phenomenal characters to intentional properties and then, in a second stage, one gives an account of intentional properties in naturalistic friendly terms. Although it is not straightforward that a thesis like **(MT1)** is incompatible with a naturalistic outlook, friends of cognitive phenomenology at least usually distance themselves from such a project. One reason

⁸² Chalmers (2004), Crane (2007).

for this follows from the fact that they often reject the explanatory priority that intentionalists usually hold between the phenomenal and the intentional.

For my part, I will provide an account of the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts in *phenomenal terms*. I leave the question of whether the result is compatible with naturalism for further work.

Since most friends of cognitive phenomenology typically reject the explanatory priority of the intentional with respect to the phenomenal and are moderately keen to endorse naturalism, there is perhaps reason to think of them as constituting a distinct theoretical approach to phenomenal consciousness and intentionality in contrast to standard intentionalists. Uriah Kriegel suggests that there is such a distinct approach and dubs it with the name of the “Phenomenal Intentionality Research Program” (PIRP).⁸³ This program contrasts with what, according to Kriegel, was the main program to understand intentionality since the late seventies and which is the framework of standard intentionalism. This program – the “Naturalist-Externalist-Research Program” (NERP) – has as aim an understanding of intentionality that is based “on the attempt to naturalize intentionality by identifying a natural relation that holds between internal states of the brain and external states of the world when and only when the former represent the latter.”⁸⁴

In contrast, the basic idea of (PIRP) is skepticism with respect to (NERP) mainly because it assumes that “phenomenal consciousness has an essential role to play in the theory of intentionality, a role it is not accorded in (NERP).”¹² The main claim that amounts to adherence to (PIRP) is the claim that there is phenomenal intentionality and which is “[...] intentionality a mental state exhibits purely in virtue of its phenomenal character.”⁸⁵ Kriegel identifies six theses that are implicit in the burgeoning body of work constituting the Phenomenal Intentionality Research program. It is helpful to contrast **(MT1)** with these theses.

First, there is still another way to articulate the relation between phenomenal character and intentional content: intentional content is *grounded* in phenomenal character. The notion of “grounding” is a technical metaphysical notion that is expressed in natural language with expressions of “in virtue of” or “because”.⁸⁶ For instance, normative facts are said to be grounded in non-normative facts, the existence of a whole is said to be grounded in the arrangements of its part, mental facts are said to be grounded in neurophysiological facts etc. Some friends of cognitive phenomenology surely want to endorse such a claim but I will not follow them.⁸⁷ I will stick to the claim that the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts is exhausted by what one

⁸³ Kriegel (2013a).

⁸⁴ (Kriegel (2013a: 1).

⁸⁵ Kriegel (2013a : 2).

⁸⁶ Correia & Schnieder (2012).

⁸⁷ See Chudnoff (2015: Chapter 6).

has in mind. The reason for this is that the relation of grounding seems *phenomenologically* inapt to characterize the phenomenal character of conscious thought. It is inapt in the sense that grounding is a relation of priority. But, as was implicit in Siewert's quotation above, it is dubious that one can make sense of the idea that what is like to think is prior to what one has in mind. But, by saying this, I do not mean to exclude the possibility that there is *non-phenomenological* account of phenomenal characters that grounds them in something else.

Second, a somewhat more neutral way to speak of the relation between the phenomenal character of a thought and its intentional content is to say that both are *inseparable*.⁸⁸ I take it that this follows from thesis **(MT1)**. The sense in which the phenomenal character of a conscious thought is exhausted by an intentional content implies that you cannot detach the intentionality from the phenomenal character to get an independent raw intellectual or cognitive feel.

Third, phenomenal intentionality is not the only intentionality there is. Unconscious belief and linguistic expressions are also intentional episodes which presumably are not phenomenally conscious intentional episodes. For some friends of the (PIRP), phenomenal intentionality has properties that non-phenomenal intentionality lacks and is thus distinctive in some sense. This might be true but, considering that I do not examine intentionality outside the intentionality of the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts, I do not claim that it is distinctive compared to other kinds of intentionality.

Fourth, it is often argued that phenomenal intentionality is narrow in the sense that it does not constitutively depend on anything outside of the subject of experience. Horgan and his colleagues, for instance, endorse this thesis although they also accept that conscious episodes have also some externally individuated intentionality.⁸⁹ For my part, it is not clear that a thesis like **(MT1)** implies such a narrow conception of the intentionality inherent to the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts. I take it that this is a substantive question and that it cannot be decided on the basis of what we have seen so far.⁹⁰

I assume that I can treat externalist worries as a challenge in two steps. The first step consists in showing that what it is like to think is exhausted by what one has in mind. And, in a second step, I can discuss whether having something in mind can be externally individuated or not.

A contrast with the case of perception might be helpful. One can wonder whether the way things visually appear to me involve some high-level properties such as, for instance, the property of being a pine tree. But, in order to answer this question it seems not necessary to have an answer to the question of whether seeing a pine tree requires the pine tree itself to be a constituent of the visual experience itself or whether it can just consist in a representation of the

⁸⁸ Horgan & Tienson (2002).

⁸⁹ Horgan & Tienson (2002), Horgan, Tienson & Graham (2004).

⁹⁰ See Peacocke (1998).

tree. It seems that one can first provide an account of the way things appear in an experience and then wonder whether these ways of appearing need to be externalized in some way.

My ambition is then to postpone the second step for another occasion. The reason for this is that, as I explained in the introduction, I take it that the basic problem of cognitive phenomenology is to provide a positive phenomenological account to make understandable the idea of conscious thoughts. I assume that externalist considerations provide only a limited contribution to the kind of understanding needed for the problem of cognitive phenomenology as it is conceived here.

Fifth, for many philosophers, phenomenal intentionality is inherently subjective. There is a lot to say and quibble about the notion of “subjectivity”, but to the extent that a mental episode has a phenomenal character just in case there is something it is like *for a subject*, then the intentionality that is inherent to a phenomenal character includes also such a subjective aspect. In terms of “what one has in mind”, necessarily there is also *someone* who has something in mind.

Sixth, phenomenal intentionality is also taken to be basic in the sense that all forms of intentionality find their source in phenomenal intentionality. It should be clear that a thesis such as **(MT1)** does not force me to take position with respect to the question of the source of all intentionality.

I hope it becomes clear that my interest in the intentional nature of the phenomenal character of conscious thought is a pretty narrow interest that partly fits into much larger programs such as those of standard intentionalists or of proponents of Kriegel’s Phenomenal Intentionality Research Program but still is independent.

To repeat, the main point of the Thesis of Conscious Intentional Thoughts is that the phenomenal character of conscious thought is intentional in the sense that it is exhausted by an intentional content. And the kind of content at issue is what a subject *has in mind* in a distinctive phenomenal sense.



Arguments for phenomenal intentionality. I have introduced the Thesis of Conscious Intentional Thoughts and contrasted it with different neighboring theses. It is time to consider the arguments in its favor. A caveat is required. It is not my intention to fully discuss these arguments. First, most friends of cognitive phenomenology accept some thesis like **(MT1)**.⁹¹ Accordingly, in what follows I will take the Thesis of Conscious Intentional Thoughts more as a kind of common ground from which one can raise further questions rather than an end point that needs to be established. Recall that I take my main opponents to be friends of cognitive phenomenology. Second, as we will see more in detail later, once one has accepted that the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts is intentional, there are still many more

⁹¹ Horgan & Tienson (2002), Pitt (2004), Siewert (1998).

phenomenological questions that need to be addressed. And my main aim is to discuss these questions.

Following the way I introduced the notion of “phenomenal character” and “intentionality”, the problem of the intentionality of conscious thought is basically the problem of establishing that for any conscious thought about an *x*, what it is like to think about an *x* is exhausted by what one has in mind. However, one must keep in mind that some of these arguments are often developed on the basis of the consideration about sensory perceptual experiences. A full discussion of these arguments should consider the legitimacy of transferring these arguments from the case of sensory perceptual experiences to the case of conscious thoughts.

According to Horgan, Graham and Tienson (2007) there is no proof for the intentionality of the phenomenal character of our experiences. But they think that there is “a plausible position to take given the plausibility of certain other sets of propositions about the mental”. (p.475) They call one such set of propositions the “Consider your own case”. The basic idea included in this set is then the following remark:

“If you consider the case of your own conscious experience you will note, we claim, that it is representational or intentional, in the sense that what you are aware of, fundamentally, is what the experience is of, not the experience as such.” (p.475)

Basically, if you attend to the what-it-is-likeness of your conscious experience, what you are aware of is the object of your experience. In our terminology, their claim is that if you attend to what it is like to think a given thought, then fundamentally, what you will discover is *what* you have in mind.

The thesis that experiences are transparent is one of the premises that standard intentionalists appeal to in order to defend their position.⁹² The basic idea is that, in the case of vision, if you try to introspectively attend to your own experience, then the only thing you will discover are the external objects that your experience is presenting to you. The success of a transparency account of experience is then understood as pivotal with regards to the question of whether there are *qualia* – intrinsic qualities of experiences. But this is already enough to show that it is difficult to consider the intentionality of conscious thoughts in relation to the question of the transparency of experiences. There is no preliminary agreement on some previous phenomenal aspect of conscious thoughts that one can appeal to and then consider whether it only consists in object of thoughts or whether there is cognitive *qualia* residue. (It is worthy to note that Horgan and his colleagues, in the passage from which the quotation above is extracted, only consider the cases of sensory perceptual or affective episodes and do not discuss a case of a transparent thought. It would be interesting to see what they think of what appears in a conscious thought.)

⁹² Harman (1990), Tye (2002).

Another question concerns what a failure of the transparency of experience really means. Are qualia the only possible upshot? There is a different way to understand the challenge. When one says that when one attends to one's own experience that the only thing one is aware of is what appears, is this meant to exclude the appearing itself? If we attend to a conscious experience in which it appears that *p*, are we only aware of *p* or also of the *appearing* that *p*? The difference between the two possibilities is what makes the difference between the pure and impure intentionalists.⁹³ I will treat this question from a different angle in the next chapter.

In the precedent chapter, I argued that the Self-knowledge Argument does not support the Minimal Thesis; but, the objection was directed against the suggestion that some introspective capacities described in general terms were sufficient to establish the *non-sensory* character of conscious thinking. But the objection was not aimed at the *intentional* nature of the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts and thus there is perhaps still hope that **(MT1)** can be defended on the basis of a version of the self-knowledge argument that needs not discriminate between kinds of phenomenal characters.

One difficulty with this argument is that, there is still the objection that our knowledge of our own conscious mental episode is not necessarily grounded in a phenomenal character of such a kind of episode.⁹⁴ Furthermore, First Opponents to cognitive phenomenology – who appeal to episodes of inner speech constituted by low-level properties – can object that some phenomenal aspect is required to explain our introspective capacities, but that it is enough if it is constituted by the phenomenal aspect of our experience of inner speech that *gives access* to content but does not constitute content itself.

Another argument that Horgan and his colleagues have put forward in support of the Thesis of Conscious Intentional Thoughts is based on a so-called “Neo-Cartesian intuition”: just try to conceive of a phenomenal duplicate, and then you will also conceive of him as an intentional duplicate.⁹⁵

The argument is then that one should take the Neo-Cartesian intuition as correct to the extent that there is a plausible explanation of it that beats other debunking explanations. Their main claim is then also made more ecumenical by incorporating externalist elements; the intentionality of conscious episodes is not entirely phenomenal intentionality.

It is with this type of argument that all the externalist worries will kick in again. But there are, in fact, various possible sorts of responses to such externalists concerns. First, there is the sort of compatibilist position defended by Horgan & Tienson (2002), Horgan, Tienson & Graham (2004). Very briefly, the suggestion is that there are two kinds of intentionality. One grounded in phenomenal character and a second which depends on relations to external features.

⁹³ Byrne (2001), Crane (2007: 484).

⁹⁴ Levine (2011), Shoemaker (2009).

⁹⁵ Horgan, Tienson & Graham (2004). See also Loar (2003).

A second type of response to externalist pressures would be to reject the kinds of compromise granted by Horgan and his colleagues and argue that all intentionality is narrow.⁹⁶

Finally, although I know of no such attempt in print, one could try to develop a fully externalist account of the intentionality of the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts – following thus the example of such externalist accounts of the phenomenal character of sensory perceptual episodes.⁹⁷

Horgan, Graham and Tienson have also defended what might be called the “Determinacy argument”.⁹⁸ The argument is related to certain views of Quine with respect to the indeterminacy of content of beliefs and meanings. Horgan, Graham and Tienson basically take it that there are determinate facts concerning what we believe and mean. But since according to Quine – and Horgan and his colleagues grant that – physical facts cannot determinately fix the contents of beliefs and meanings, Horgan Graham and Tienson take it that unless it is a conscious aspect, or more precisely, a non-sensory conscious aspect that determinately fix the content of beliefs and meanings, there could be no determinate facts concerning beliefs and meanings. And, since a non-sensory conscious aspect here means cognitive phenomenology, we can reach the conclusion that there is cognitive phenomenology.

One could wonder whether cognitive phenomenology is the only alternative to physical determination. One could, for instance, be tempted to make an objection similar to the objection I have made against the two main arguments in favor of the Minimal Thesis.⁹⁹ That perhaps, cognitive phenomenology is not the only alternative to fix the determinacy of beliefs and meanings.

Later in this chapter, I will have a discussion on the determinacy of conscious thought that somehow parallels the quinian theme. I will argue that there is some sort of indeterminacy that afflicts all conscious contents. But, anyhow, it will be a different issue.

Let us recap. In the first chapter, I suggested that the two main arguments for cognitive phenomenology fall short of demonstrating the existence of some thoughts with *cognitive* phenomenal characters. At best, these arguments show that conscious thoughts have *some* phenomenal character. In this chapter, so far I have clarified what it means for a phenomenal character to be intentional and sketched some of the reasons that support such a view. Now, I will turn to the main part of the chapter which consists in giving a more specific account of the way we have things in mind in a conscious thought. The ultimate aim is to show that if we inspect the intentionality of the phenomenal character of conscious thought, we will find a reason why some thoughts have a distinctively *cognitive* phenomenal character.

⁹⁶ Farkas (2008). See also Siewert (1998: 292).

⁹⁷ Dretske (1996). See also Peacocke (1998).

⁹⁸ Horgan & Graham (2012), Graham, Horgan & Tienson (2007).

⁹⁹ See also Pautz (2013).

3.3. Conscious thoughts: To have something in mind

If the Thesis of Conscious Intentional Thoughts is correct, the phenomenal character of a conscious thought about an object *x* is exhausted by the way *S* has *x* in mind. In this section and the next, I will consider the two remaining questions. First, what is the nature of the way *S* has something in mind? And second, is the way *S* has *x* in mind distinctively cognitive or intellectual?

The gist of what I will suggest is that, in a conscious thought, the object of thought is *absent* in a distinctive sense that can be contrasted with the cases of sensory perceptual episodes where an object is *present*. Consider what Alston (1991) writes about sense perception:

“The most fundamental fact about sense perception, at least as far as its intrinsic character is concerned, is the way in which seeing my house differs from thinking about it, remembering it, forming mental images of it, reasoning about, and so on. It is the difference between presence (to consciousness) and absence. If I stand before my house with my eyes shut and then open them, I am suddenly with the object itself, it occupies part of my visual field, it appears to me as blue and steep roofed.” (p.14-5)¹⁰⁰

Compare this with two paragraphs from Peacocke (1998). Here is the first paragraph:

“Perceptual experiences and sensations, on the one hand, and so-called occurrent conscious propositional attitudes, on the other, differ in many respects. But there is one property they share. They both contribute to what, subjectively, it is like for the person who enjoys them. A person may try to recall who was Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia when the Soviet Union invaded. It then occurs to this person that Dubcek was the Prime Minister. It's so occurring to him contributes to the specification of what it's like for the person then. It would be subjectively different for the person if it were to occur to him (falsely) that it was Husak; and subjectively different again if nothing comes to mind about who was Prime Minister.” (p.65)

And here is the second paragraph:

“In conscious thought, by contrast, there is no object of attention (nor is it as if there is). The notion of an object of attention which is inapplicable in conscious thought is that of an *experienced* object, event or state of affairs. In mental states other than those of conscious thought, a genuine object of one's attention might be a material object; or a continuing event; or the continuing or changing features of an object or event; or an object's changing relations to other objects or events. Having a sensation is also an experience. A pain, for instance, can equally be an object of attention. But thinking is not experiencing. There are objects of thought, but an object of thought is not thereby an experienced object, and is not an object of attention in the sense in question.” (p.65).

Peacocke seems also to endorse the idea that in thoughts there is an absence in the sense that there is no “experienced object”. But, contrary to what appears in the excerpt of Alston, he also explicitly accepts in the first paragraph a thesis of cognitive phenomenology. How can that be possible?

In the case of Alston, for all we know, the absence might simply be the result of the rejection of cognitive phenomenology. If there is no cognitive phenomenology, then obviously there is no “experienced object” in thoughts. But, with Peacocke, either he endorses the Minimal Thesis in

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Tolhurst (1998: 300). See also Chudnoff (2012), (2013).

favor of cognitive phenomenology but rejects the idea that the phenomenal character of conscious thought is intentional and thereby can probably dispense himself of the idea that there is an *experienced object* in conscious thought, or, both accepts the Thesis of Conscious Intentional Thoughts *and* the idea that in conscious thoughts *there is* an object that is somehow not experienced.

I don't want to suggest that the second alternative is endorsed by Peacocke, but I do want to suggest that the view of conscious thoughts as experiences with "absent objects" is the basic idea that characterizes the phenomenal character of thought and that can help us to make the distinction between conscious thoughts and other kinds of conscious experiences. However, I do not intend to give a full account of the experience of absence that I take to be distinctive of thought. The reason for this is that experiences of absence and presence are perhaps not to be understood as a single phenomenon. They might involve several distinct experiences. For instance, in the case of presence, one could distinguish in it the experience of being temporally present, the experience of being actual (in contrast with being possible), the experience of being concrete (in contrast with being abstract), etc.¹⁰¹ Accordingly, my aim is only to focus on one aspect that I take to be part of the experience of absence that is proprietary to thoughts but I do not claim that I can give full justice to this kind of experience.

My proposal will be that in a conscious thought the way someone *S* has in mind an object *x* has absence in the sense that the way *S* has *x* in mind involves a form of *abstraction*. More precisely, my suggestion is that the way one has something *x* in mind has absence in the sense that one can think of it in abstraction from some of its properties. For instance, if you think that the ball is in the garden – while the ball and garden are out of sight – although you have in mind the ball, the garden and that the ball is in the garden, you do not need to have in mind that the ball has a shape or that it is located somewhere specific. You can think of the ball in abstraction of many of the properties you take it to have. Accordingly, strictly speaking, in a conscious thought of a ball, it is not that the ball is experienced as completely absent – there would be not thought about the ball anymore – but rather that some of its determinations are absent. In the rest of this chapter, I will thus discuss the following thesis:

The Thesis of Abstraction:

(T07) In all conscious thoughts, the way *S* has something *x* in mind is abstracted from many of its properties



Having something in mind. I have already introduced the phenomenal notion of "having something in mind" but there are still some general points that need to be made before we can go any further. First, "having in mind" is a flexible notion in the sense that it admits contents of

¹⁰¹ See Massin (2011: 278).

different formats. It can be an object, a property or a proposition. In what follows, I will focus on the case of *propositional having in mind* where a subject *S* has in mind that *x* is *F*.

Second, to have *x* in mind is not always the same in the sense that having an *x* in mind is always constituted by *a way of* having *x* in mind. I can have an *x* in mind as the crazy neighbor and in later circumstances I can have *x* in mind as the shy person waiting for the bus. Accordingly, to have *x* in mind corresponds to some extent to a Fregean sense. To have an *x* in mind constitutes a *mode of presentation* of *x* (which is not to be confused with the *psychological modes* I will discuss in the next chapter). But this “Fregean sense” should be understood in a phenomenal sense.¹⁰²

Third, I do not claim that for all *x*, the way of having *x* in mind is sufficient for its being an *x* that I have in mind. I might have water in mind in the sense that I have some transparent liquid in mind but whether my having in mind some transparent liquid is really about H₂O might depend on what constitutes the transparent liquid that exists in my environment. I accept however, that the way of having *x* in mind is sufficient for there being *something* that one has in mind.

Fourth, if I have in mind that *x* is *F*, this is compatible with there being no *x*. I can have in mind that Santa Clause is nice although there is no Santa Clause.

Fifth, the Thesis of Abstraction should then be understood in terms of such a way of having something in mind. If I have in mind that the ball is on the lawn, then the way I have the ball in mind abstracted from many of its properties I take the object to have. More precisely, suppose that at *t*₁ *S* has in mind that the mobile is black, small, at home, Mary’s belonging, etc. Suppose that at *t*₂, *S* has only in mind that the mobile phone is black (let us assume that he still believes that the phone is black, small, etc.) We can then say that at *t*₂, *S* has the mobile phone in mind abstracted from its properties of being black, small, and Mary’s belonging. Accordingly, I suggest that *S* has something *x* in mind abstracted from many of its properties iff (i) *S* has some properties he takes *x* to have in mind, although (ii) *S* does not have in mind most other properties he takes *x* to have, even though (iii) he could have all these properties in mind. For instance, when I think that the cat is black it often happens that I do not have in mind that the cat has a tail or a stomach.

Indeterminacy. Before considering more the phenomenon of abstraction, let’s consider another aspect of having something in mind. Discussions about cognitive phenomenology have usually not been concerned with giving detailed accounts of the way one has something in mind. But, outside the context of the usual arguments for cognitive phenomenology, several authors have described some aspects distinctive of conscious thoughts. Siewert (1998: 287), for instance, has discerned a certain form of indeterminacy that characterizes conscious thoughts. To make this aspect salient, he presents a case where he realizes that he has forgotten his briefcase at

¹⁰² See Pitt (2009).

home. “[...] it suddenly occurs to me (wordlessly) that I left my briefcase at home. I feel annoyed, [...]” (p.287) But then he notes with respect to the expression of his thought:

“But was that really the precisely correct report of what I thought? Perhaps it would have been more accurate to say the thought that occurred to me was: that my briefcase was at home (not that I left it at home). Am I sure that my leaving it there, as opposed to its simply being there, was part of my thought? And I said that I left the briefcase at home. Couldn’t this be distinguished from thinking that I left it at my house? Perhaps this was the thought I really had then? Also, I said rather vaguely that “it occurred to me that . . .,” but I might have also said, “I thought that . . .,” and this way of reporting it, while also rather vague, suggests the question of just what sort of commitment to what I thought was involved in this thought’s just occurring to me. It is not that I just entertained the possibility that my briefcase was back at home—but was the commitment as strong as would be implied by asserting outright that I left my briefcase at home? Just how strong was the commitment?” (p.287-8)

Siewert distinguishes between an indeterminacy that afflicts the content and another that concerns rather the kind of mental episode as a whole. With respect to the indeterminacy that characterizes the content, the indeterminacy concerns a way one has in mind a *single property* of an object. In the example, what is indeterminate, for instance, is *the location* of the briefcase. Was it left *at home* or *at his house*? Moreover, it should be clear that the indeterminacy in question is very fine-grained. It is not as if it is indeterminate whether he left it *at home* or *somewhere on planet earth*.

Further, the way I understand Siewert’s description is that it is the phenomenal character of the thought that is indeterminate. However, one may want to disagree with this. The indeterminacy could also be located in our *introspective access* to the phenomenal aspect or it could also be located in our *concepts* that characterize the crucial phenomenal aspect.

The example with the briefcase seems to concern the contents of judgments or episodes of recollection. But, presumably, one needs not restrict the phenomenon of indeterminacy to this kind of conscious thought. One could also *wonder* or make a *supposition* about the location of his briefcase and it could also be indeterminate whether one had in mind that one left the briefcase in some place or whether it is just located in some place.

Abstraction. Siewert’s description of the kind of indeterminacy that characterizes the ways of having something in mind is rather a subtle phenomenon that probably escapes attention most of the time. In contrast to the phenomenon of indeterminacy, the abstraction that is involved in conscious thought is much more spectacular. But, why should we think that the Thesis of Abstraction is true at all?

In order to see this, suppose, first, that it occurs to you that *your mobile phone is at home*. The question I will ask you to consider is whether, when this thought occurs to you, the way you have in mind your mobile phone also involves the following elements: that your mobile is a physical object, that your mobile has a shape, that your mobile has colors, that your mobile has weight, that your mobile has a screen, that your mobile stores some phone numbers, that your mobile phone is an artefact, that your mobile phone has the function to call people, etc.

Conscious Thinking

In the phenomenal sense of having something in mind that I started to sketch above, it seems to me that it is obvious that you don't have all these things in mind when you think that your mobile phone is at home. If this claim is not immediately convincing, recall what I suggested constitutes an indication of whether one has something in mind or not. If you don't have x in mind, you have to *think more* to have x in mind. The mental action of thinking more, which often involves some mental effort, is an experiential sign that you didn't have x in mind. (However, as I already explained, to think more is not a conclusive sign that someone did not have an x in mind. One can think more when one has already x in mind in order to make sure that one really has x in mind.) And I believe that it is clear that we have to think more in order to bring to our mind all these other properties of the phone.

If we accept that when one has something x in mind, the way one has x in mind involves the abstraction of many of its properties, we need to consider the following questions. For a given way of having a phone in mind, what kind of other properties of the phone do you also have in mind, when it occurs to you that your phone is at home? And what determines which properties of the phone you also have in mind?

To answer these questions, let's start by considering another example related to the first. Suppose that you also believe that your mobile phone contains some highly sensitive messages that you know will be discovered if you leave your phone at home. And then, suppose again that it occurs to you that your mobile phone is at home. Question: when you have in mind that your phone is at home, do you also have in mind that your phone contains some sensitive messages? I want the question to be understood in the sense that *at the moment* the thought occurs to you, you have in mind that your mobile phone *that contains some sensitive message* is at home. The question is not whether *after* you have in mind that your mobile phone is at home you also have in mind that it contains some sensitive messages. I believe a positive answer to this question is plausible. Or at least, it seems to me that the way one will have in mind his mobile phone will be different from the case where there is no such background belief that the mobile phone contains some sensitive messages.

If we take at face value this example, the lesson seems to be that what one has in mind with respect to a given object of thought will depend in part on other mental episodes. In this example, it is mainly non-conscious beliefs and some desires that create the difference in the way one will have in mind the mobile phone. But it seems that the way one will have something in mind could also depend on other kinds of mental episodes such as, for instance, previous conscious thoughts. If it occurs to you that your mobile phone is at home and if at this moment you also have in mind that your mobile phone contains sensitive messages, then presumably when shortly after it occurs to you that you should go back home to get your phone, you will still have in mind your mobile phone as containing sensitive messages.

Conscious Thinking

Another factor that may affect the way one has something in mind, is a phenomenon of association. Every time you see a mobile phone, you notice that it has some property F so that next time you entertain a thought about a mobile phone, you will have in mind that the mobile phone has property F . For instance, I guess that when it occurs to you that your mobile phone is at home, you also have in mind a small, flat and rectangular object in mind. But, I take it that this is a consequence of the usual way mobile phones are constructed in our world. In other circumstances, mobile phones might be little spheres and accordingly we would tend to have them in mind as small and spherical little things.

Furthermore, if it occurs to you that your mobile phone is at home, you might also have in mind that your mobile phone is *somewhere*. It seems thus that in some cases, if you have in mind that x is F , and x is F implies that x is G , then you will also have in mind that x is G at the moment you have in mind that x is F . But, it is clear that it is not the case for everything that is implied by what you have in mind. Not only are we not always aware of all the implications of what we have in mind, but also sometimes the implication is something that is experienced at a later moment. Certain things we do have in mind are implications of previous things we had in mind.

The way one has something in mind might depend on the various ways just sketched, but one may still wonder how many properties of the phone you will have in mind, when, for instance, it occurs to you that your mobile phone is at home.

I take it that this is in part an empirical question and that there might also be differences between individuals. However, when I introduced the phenomenon of abstraction, it should have been clear that I take it to be a phenomenon of a significant magnitude. When it occurs to me that my mobile phone is at home, there are many things about the phone that I don't have in mind with respect to the mobile phone. A curious additional feature is that, although there is such a significant amount of abstraction that takes place, it is still clear that one is *certain* of what one has in mind.

Independence. Another question that comes up once one has accepted that there is variation in the way one has something in mind depending on the context in which the thought will occur, is "How much variation can there be in the way one has something in mind?". More precisely, suppose it occurs to me that my phone is at home, are there then some properties of the phone that I cannot fail to have in mind? In the case of the mobile phone, if I have in mind that my mobile phone is at home, are there some properties of the phone that I also have in mind? For instance, it seems that being constituted of tiny physical particles is not something that I necessarily have in in mind, when it occurs to me that my mobile phone is at home.

My suggestion is that what is true for having in mind that my mobile phone is at home and having in mind that my mobile phone is constituted of physical particles is true for any pairs of

properties one can have in mind with respect to a given object of thought. More precisely, I want to defend the following strong thesis:

The Thesis of Independence:

(T08) For any two properties F and G , if S has in mind that x is F , then it is not necessarily the case that S has G in mind.

This thesis looks excessively strong. It seems excessive especially in the case of pairs of properties of objects for which one knows that having one implies having the other. Let's call these properties "linked properties". As I even suggested earlier, often what one has in mind will be, in part, determined by what implies what. More concretely, when I have in mind that my mobile phone is at home, is it possible, for instance, not to have in mind that my mobile phone is somewhere? Or, can I have in mind that my mobile phone is at home without having in mind that something is at home? I expect people to hesitate or even to object and claim that it is impossible. Therefore, why do I take the Thesis of Independence to be true?

The argument starts with the observation that for any kind of object of thought x that we have in mind as having some property F , there is a huge set of properties that are all non-contingently related to property F in a way that we know a priori. If I know that the mobile phone is at home, I also know that the mobile phone is somewhere, that it has a shape, a weight, a property, many properties, more than one property, that it is something, that it is a particular, that one can make phone call with, etc.

The next step is then to argue that if one has in mind that the mobile phone is at home, in virtue of the Thesis of Abstraction, one will not have all these properties in mind. I believe it is pretty clear that when you think that your mobile phone is at home, it is not the case that you have all these other linked properties of the mobile phone in mind.

But then the question is: with respect to this set of linked properties of the mobile phone, is there any single property that you necessarily will have in mind when you think that the mobile phone is at home? And it seems that there is no good reason why there must be such a property. The point of the argument is precisely to consider the set of properties that are all in the same manner non-contingently linked to the property of the mobile phone's being at home and therefore it seems that all of these linked properties seem to have an equal right to be entertained when one thinks that the mobile phone is at home. But since one cannot have all these properties in mind it seems that it must be something contingent and external to what one has in mind that will determine which other linked properties of the phone one will have in mind when one thinks that the mobile phone is at home. And therefore, there is really no pair of properties such that necessarily if you think that something x has one property then you have also in mind that this thing has also the other property.

Conscious Thinking



Other aspects. I have briefly mentioned Siewert's point about the indeterminate character of conscious thoughts. Then I have tried to describe how conscious thinking involves abstraction and independence. But there are other contributions concerning the characterization of conscious thoughts. It might be helpful to contrast what I have said with some accounts of these other aspects of conscious thoughts.

First, Siewert in another part of his book *The Significance of Consciousness* makes a distinction between simple and complex thought contents. The examples he uses to make the contrast are, first, a simple thought like the following: "Suppose you are riding a bicycle, approaching a green traffic light far ahead, and it suddenly occurs to you that the light will change soon, and you wonder whether to speed up to make the light [...]." (p.277) A complex thought is then illustrated by this example:

"Walking from my table in a restaurant to pay the bill, I was struck briefly by a thought, gone by the time I reached the cashier, about my preoccupations with this book's topic, the effects of this, and its similarity to other preoccupations and their effects. Asked to state more precisely what this was, I would have to say something like: "My preoccupation with the topic of my book has made the world seem especially alive with examples of it, references to it, so that it can't help but seem to me that the world is more populated with things relevant to it than previously. And it struck me that this is similar to the way in which new parenthood made the world seem to me burgeoning with babies, parents, the paraphernalia of infancy, and talk and pictures of these."" (p.277)

One question is: how does the distinction of a complex/simple thought relate to the Thesis of Abstraction? A natural suggestion is that the simpler a thought is the more abstraction it involves and the more complex the less abstraction it involves. This is not implausible.

However, one could also have doubts that there is such a variation in the complexity and simplicity of what we have in mind. For, it goes against the spirit of the Thesis of Abstraction. The suggestion is that the way one has in mind a given object *always* involves a good deal of abstraction and not that this varies to the point that the way one has something in mind becomes immensely rich.

And, without going into the details of the relationship between what one has in mind and what one asserts, one can argue that the complexity that some thoughts appear to have – as it is suggested in Siewert's example – is not something that characterizes the way we have something in mind but only the way we will *express it* and this does not imply that one has all these descriptions in mind at once.

Another aspect of conscious thought, which is closely related to what we have seen so far, concerns unarticulated thoughts. Blachowicz (1994) describes the phenomenon in the following manner:

"As I write these words, I too struggle to articulate an idea which I hope to communicate to you. I feel certain that, in some basic way, I already have this idea, even if I have not yet succeeded in its articulation.

Conscious Thinking

As I pass through successive drafts in editing these proposed articulations, it is true that I may encounter new problems and issues which cause me to change my original intuited idea significantly; however, in many cases (and perhaps to some degree in all cases), I may also be satisfied, on completion of my efforts, that I have successively articulated the very idea that I at first only “meant”. It is cases such as these that provide the paradigm examples of the “unarticulated meanings” I want to analyze here.” (p.44)

Clearly, unarticulated conscious thoughts are a different phenomenon from the abstraction involved in conscious thoughts. Although a conscious thought can involve abstraction in the way suggested, it can nevertheless also be clearly articulated. Second, unarticulated thoughts should also be distinguished from the indeterminacy described by Siewert. The indeterminacy that afflicts the content of thought is a very fine-grained phenomenon that escapes attention in ordinary circumstances. But unarticulated thoughts are special occurrences that are noticeable. One knows when one has an unarticulated thought. Third, unarticulated thoughts should also be distinguished from tip-of-the-tongue phenomena or episodes of feeling of knowing. In these cases, a subject has in mind that he feels he knows something although he does not have in mind what he feels he knows. This happens often with names of people. But, in contrast, unarticulated thoughts are something we have in mind. One has something in mind *in an unarticulated manner*. And this is why we should also distinguish such episodes of tip-of-the-tongue phenomena from the phenomenon of abstraction involved in conscious thoughts. In both cases, one does not have something in mind. But in the case of the tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon, one lacks a whole thought. In the other cases, it is only some aspects of the objects that are left out.

3.4. The non-sensory aspect of having something in mind

Now that I have sketched what to have something in mind consists of, let’s contrast my account of having something in mind with sensory perceptual experiences. The plan goes as follows: identify distinctive characteristics of sensory perceptual experiences and then argue that the way you have something in mind cannot be constituted by a sensory perceptual phenomenal character.

What are the distinctive characteristics of sensory perceptual experiences? This depends on the kinds of sensory perceptual experiences one is considering. I will focus on two cases and then suggest a general strategy to pursue the inquiry. First, I will focus on the way different properties are experienced together in different sensory perceptual modalities. Second, I will consider the idea of a sensory perceptual experience of an *object*. In both cases, I will suggest we find many examples of pairs of properties such that if one has the experience of one, then necessarily one has the experiences of the other. Therefore, it is the Thesis of Independence that first of all differentiates the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts from the phenomenal character of sensory perceptual experiences.

Conscious Thinking

Suppose you have a headache. There is then a specific aversive phenomenal aspect to this experience that is necessarily linked to a location in your head. You cannot have a headache that is not experienced as located in your head. Accordingly, we have a pair of properties such that if you have one of them, you will also have the other.

In vision, can one visually experience redness without an experience of a spatial property? And, if a color like a purple incorporates two different hues like reddishness and bluishness, can we experience purple without experiencing reddishness? Again, color properties and spatial properties seem to co-occur in various ways that exclude a total independence between all these properties.

In an auditory experience, when hearing the sounds of a trumpet, can we hear its timbre without its loudness and pitch? And, can we hear the sound of a trumpet without hearing the sound to have at least *some* temporal extension? Again, with auditory experiences, sounds seem always to have various properties that are experienced together.

And when touching a table, one has an experience with a phenomenal aspect that concerns a state of the body – the finger with which I touch the table – and another phenomenal aspect that concerns what the experience is about, for instance, the roughness of the table. And again, these two aspects seem to be necessarily related.

All these examples are taken to illustrate how sensory perceptual experiences involve experiences of bundles of properties in ways that are different and incompatible with the way one has something in mind in a conscious thought. But there are still further ways to make the contrast between the two kinds of experiences.

Sensory perceptual experiences are not just to be described as experiences of bundles of properties. As I briefly alluded to in the first chapter, in contrast with conscious thoughts, the number of sophisticated accounts of various aspects of sensory perceptual experiences is striking. Moving beyond the rough considerations about the properties one experiences in various sensory modalities, we shall consider the idea of an experience of an *object* in some very broad sense of “object”.

Consider how Dretske (1969) understands the experience of seeing an object:

“*S* sees_n *D* = *D* is visually differentiated from its immediate environment by *S*” (p.20)

According to Dretske, “*S*’s differentiation of *D* is constituted by *D*’s *looking some way* to *S* and, moreover, looking different than its immediate environment.” (p.20) Dretske’s notion of “simple seeing” as it is now called, is thus clearly to be understood in phenomenological terms; it concerns how things must appear in order for a subject to visually experience *something*. Also, for Dretske, this way of seeing does not require any kind of belief or cognitive episode. And although Dretske’s discussion focuses on visual experiences, it is easy to see that one could

formulate analogue theses with respect to other kinds of sensory perceptual experiences. (This is not to suggest that it is obvious that there are experiences of objects *à la* Dretske in all sensory modalities.¹⁰³) But, Dretske's notion of seeing an object is also to be understood in very broad terms. For instance, we differentiate the blue from the red of the flag of France but it is not clear in what sense the blue and the red are objects. It seems that the properties of redness and blueness can be differentiated in the same sense as a ball can be differentiated from its environment.

Suppose then that a subject *S* visually experiences an object *x*. By Dretske's definition of seeing an object, then *S* has to visually differentiate *x* from an environment *E*. But if *S* has to visually differentiate *x* from *E*, then it could not be the case that *S* had the experience of *x* and not the experience of *E*. Is this enough to show that the Thesis of Independence is not true of experiences of seeing an object? Yes, if one understands correctly the pair of properties such that if one experiences one of them, then one will also experience the other. If I visually differentiate the red ball from the green lawn, the crucial pair of properties is not the redness of the ball and the greenness of the lawn. I can obviously experience redness without experiencing greenness. The pair of properties I cannot experience independently are the properties of the being an object that is constituted by the redness of the ball and the property of being the environment that is constituted by the greenness of the lawn. In other words, one cannot have an experience of an object in the sense of Dretske's simple seeing, without experiencing such a pair of properties.

The way we experience bundles of properties in various sensory modalities and the dretskean notion of seeing an object illustrates how certain aspects of sensory perceptual experiences are incompatible with the way we have things in mind while we are thinking. I will not be able to contrast further conscious thoughts with sensory experiences, but I hope I have already made clear how one should pursue. There are many more phenomenal aspects of sensory perceptual experiences that one can consider in order to bring to light what is distinctive of conscious thought. The phenomenon of object constancy¹⁰⁴ is one of these aspects. A white wall can look grey or reddish depending on varying lighting conditions but still it would not look like it is changing in color. As one moves around a mug, the rim looks successively like various elliptical shapes although it would also not appear to change in shape. Is there anything comparable in the case of conscious thought? Is there a way of having the mobile phone in mind that would be changing although one would keep having the mobile phone mind?



¹⁰³ See Batty (2014), O'Callaghan (*forthcoming*)

¹⁰⁴ Siewert (2006), (2012).

Back to the arguments for cognitive phenomenology. My suggestion is, then, that the phenomenal difference between understanding and not understanding a stretch of speech is constituted by such an experience of having something in mind. When you hear the sentence “il pleut” not only are you hearing the sounds of the stretch of speech someone is uttering but you also have in mind what is said. More precisely, what you understand consists in the speech sounding some way to you and having in mind what you take to be said by this stretch of speech.

Additionally, since to have something in mind is best characterized as something non-sensory perceptual because of the phenomenon of independence, the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts is adequately non-sensory in the sense that it will provide us with support for the Minimal Thesis. Now we have a reason to exclude the hearing meanings account of understanding experience. The way the conceptual activity of thoughts shapes the experience of speech understanding is fundamentally different from any phenomenal aspect of sensory perceptual experiences.

Similarly, with regards to the argument with Pitt, I suggest that what I have said about having something in mind is a way of giving an account of the phenomenal character of thought that is independent from the epistemological role that it might play in an account of self-knowledge. The question we would need to address at this stage but that we will have to postpone for another occasion is “Does the present account of the phenomenal character of thought smoothly underpin the kind of account of self-knowledge Pitt wants to uphold?” This is not entirely clear to the extent that if the way one has in mind an object of thought usually involves the abstraction of many of the properties one takes the object to have, then how could the phenomenal character of the conscious thought provide us with an immediate justification of what we have in mind with respect to these abstracted properties? In other words, the Thesis of Abstraction seems to narrow down the scope of what in our thought is immediately accessible.

Objections. In order to conclude this section, let’s consider some objections to what I have said. An objection one can make, at this stage, is to point out that I am confusing the kind of contrast I should explain. Opponents to cognitive phenomenology usually want to account for the phenomenal character of conscious thought in terms of visualizations or auralizations. Accordingly, my contrast with visual experiences is out of place.

However, although I accept that what one has in mind may partly be constituted by visualizing something¹⁰⁵, I take it that the Thesis of Independence is nevertheless incompatible with the view of an opponent to cognitive phenomenology who takes the phenomenal character of conscious thinking to be exhausted by visualizations and episodes of inner speech. The reason is that the kind of independence that characterizes having something in mind cannot be grasped in terms of the experiences of visualizations and episodes of inner speech. My suggestion is that

¹⁰⁵ See also Siewert (1998: 263).

what it is like to have in mind that something has a shape without having in mind that it has spatial extension is not something that we can grasp with visualizations and episodes of inner speech. Accordingly, if an experience has independence it cannot be a sensory perceptual experience. One could also argue that the existence of visualization proves precisely that my Theses of Abstraction and Independence are completely misguided. Every time it occurs to me that my mobile phone is at home, I have in mind – by visualizing – some patch of color which by necessity implies that I have several other properties in mind (for example a shape).

However, if visualization cancels some abstraction and independence, it seems that it is unable to cancel everything. It seems difficult to cancel the independence related to properties that are not perceivable.

Finally, one may also object that the phenomenon of abstraction and perhaps also independence, concern also visualization. For, instance, when one visualizes a hand, is one also always visualizing five fingers? It seems that in some circumstances one will not have in mind all the fingers or, at least, it will be indeterminate. However, I don't think that it is problematic to grant some abstraction and independence to visualization. First, it seems that for many experiences of visualization, some independence is impossible. If I visualize redness, I cannot fail to visualize spatially extension. Accordingly, if visualizations have independence it is not with the same scope as in the case of conscious thought. Second, although I think that the difference between having something in mind and visualizations is clearly of a different nature, it is not clear that a weaker position, which takes the difference between conscious thinking and other experiences to be only of degree, is especially problematic. If one is thinking in some intentionalist framework, then one should expect that at some level there are similarities in the intentional structure of different kinds of experiences. Abstraction and independence are perhaps features of several different kinds of experiences.

3.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I suggested a way of understanding that the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts is intentional. The main point was that the phenomenal character of conscious thought is intentional in the sense that it is exhausted by the way a subject has something in mind. Second, I suggested that the nature of the way of having something in mind was fundamentally a matter of abstracting properties from an object of thought. Third, I proposed that having in mind something was fundamentally non-sensory perceptual because of the way in which in conscious thought one abstracts properties of objects of thought in ways that are incompatible with how properties are variously experienced in sensory perceptual experiences.

In the next chapter, I'll consider whether *psychological modes* are part of the phenomenal character of conscious thoughts.

Chapter Three – Conscious modes

3.1. Introduction

Does the phenomenal character of a conscious thought also involve an aspect of a cognitive psychological mode? And if it does, what is the distinctive phenomenal nature of this cognitive mode? And, has this mode a distinctively non-sensory perceptual aspect and provide some support for the Minimal Thesis? These are the questions I will discuss in this chapter.

In sections 3.2 of this chapter, I distinguish the modes of belief, judgement and entertaining a proposition. In sections 3.3 and 3.4, I examine the conscious modes of belief and judgement. In the last section 3.5, I gather all the previous results and conclude that strictly speaking no conscious thought has any distinctive phenomenal aspect of a distinctive cognitive or intellectual mode. There is no phenomenal aspect of *judging* or *believing*. What philosophers refer to with expressions such as “conscious belief” or “conscious judgement” is better described in terms of “entertaining a proposition”.

3.2. Doxastic episodes

Judgements and beliefs. The set of thoughts gathered on List 1 in the first chapter contains a subset that is the family of *doxastic episodes*:

List 4. Judging that p , believing that p , accepting that p , being convinced that p , being confident that p , holding p as true, asserting p , assenting to p .

What are the distinctive features that gather together these episodes? All these episodes share at least two features: (i) they aim at the true¹⁰⁶, but (ii) they might go wrong.

It is difficult to spell out exactly what the metaphor of aiming at true means. In some sense, it certainly means that if a subject S believes that p , then S believes that p is true. However, it also seems to be clear that truth cannot be part of the content of a belief just as any object or property can be part of the content of a belief. It cannot be that to believe that p is the same as to believe that p is true because the propositions p is true and the proposition p are not in the same explanatory relations. Although it is true that p is true because p , it is not the case that p because p is true.¹⁰⁷ Consequently, p is true and p are different contents. Furthermore, it is also often mentioned that animals and infants might have beliefs although they do not have the concept of truth.¹⁰⁸ But if truth were part of the content, then infants would need to have the concept of truth. These considerations suggest that the property of aiming at true is better to be construed

¹⁰⁶ Williams (1973 : 136-7), Velleman (2000: 244-81).

¹⁰⁷ Mulligan (2007: 210).

¹⁰⁸ Kriegel (2015: 43).

as being part of the doxastic *mode* of judging or believing. To judge or to believe is *a way of grasping* some content and not the grasping of a particular content which includes the concept of truth as one of its constituent. Accordingly, we can say that beliefs aim at true in the sense that if *S* believes that *p*, then *S* believes-*as-true* that *p* rather than *S* believes that *p is true*.

But to say that a doxastic episode aims at true in the sense that if *S* believes that *p*, then *S* believes-*as-true* that *p* as true in the sense just explained is not enough to distinguish doxastic episodes from other non-doxastic episodes. According to Velleman (1992), there are many other episodes different from belief that have the same direction of fit and also aim at the true. "Hypothesizing that *p*, assuming that *p*, fantasizing that *p*, and the like are all attitudes in which *p* is regarded, not as a representation of what is to be brought about, but rather as a representation of what is. The propositional object of these attitudes is thus regarded as true." (p.12) Thus, according to Velleman:

"[...] beliefs bear a double relation to the truth. Believing a proposition entails not only regarding the proposition as true but, in addition, so regarding it in a manner designed to reflect whether it really is true. The latter relation to truth is part of what distinguish believing from other cognitive attitudes, in which a proposition is regarded as true without concern for whether it really is. [...].

[...]. Part of what makes someone's attitude toward a proposition an instance of belief rather than an assumption or fantasy, then, is that it is regulated in accordance with epistemic principles rather than polemics, heuristics, or hedonics. An attitude's identity as a belief depends on its being regulated in a way designed to make it track the truth." (p.13-4)

The difference between belief and other mental episodes that also aim at truth is then that, in the case of a belief, a proposition is accepted as true but *with a certain aim* which differs from the aim of other attitudes or modes such as hypothesizing, assuming or fantasizing.

The second feature of doxastic episodes – that they might go wrong – is what distinguishes them from *epistemic episodes*.

List 5. Knowing that *p*, perceiving that *p*, being certain that *p*, being acquainted with *p*

Whereas it is possible that *S* believes that *p*, and it is not the case that *p*, it cannot be that *S* knows that *p* and it is not the case that *p*. This obviously does not prevent the possibility that *S* *thinks* that he knows that *p*, although it is not the case that *p*.

The most prominent members of the family of doxastic episodes are judgement and belief. In addition to the features of aiming at truth and having the possibility to go wrong they have further distinctive features. A judgement is usually taken to be a conscious *occurrence* that constitutes a way of forming a belief. In contrast, a belief is usually recognized as a dispositional and often unconscious state that stores the results of a judgement. However, it is also often accepted that beliefs sometimes and somehow are manifested in consciousness. Related to these ontological distinctions, there are temporal differences: belief *states* are *extended in time*

whereas judgements are *events* that *occur instantaneously*. Finally, beliefs and judgement also have features that differentiate them from each other. Beliefs guide actions, can be expressed through assertions and are not up to our will in the sense that we can't choose them directly.¹⁰⁹ With respect to judgements, it is less clear whether they guide actions, are expressible through assertions and whether or not they are up to our will. Concerning the last features, some philosophers at least argue that judgments are mental actions and thus up to our will.¹¹⁰

What is the relation between a judgement and a belief? Although a judgement is a way of forming a belief, it is not the case that the judgement is the only way to form a belief. I believe that 2 is smaller than 7 but it is very unlikely that I came to have this belief through a corresponding judgement. And, if a judgement is a way of forming a belief, does that mean that necessarily if *S* judges that *p*, then *S* believes that *p*? Here is an example provided by Peacocke (1998) that purports to show that there are judgements without beliefs:

"Someone may judge that undergraduate degrees from countries other than her own are of an equal standard to her own, and excellent reasons may be operative in her assertions to that effect. All the same, it may be quite clear, in decisions she makes on hiring, or in making recommendations, that she does not really have this belief at all." (p.242-3).

And one may further contend that if a judgement does not imply a belief it is because a belief requires a certain amount of dispositions that a simple judgement does not guarantee. Consequently to judge that *p*, is not sufficient to believe that *p*.¹¹¹

However, all this might be true, but, barring such circumstances where prejudice plays a role or that one has suddenly forgotten what one just has judged, to judge that *p* is still a reliable indication that one believes that *p*.

The converse relation leaves little doubt. If *S* believes that *p*, it is clear that it does not follow that *S* judges that *p*. There are many things one believes while asleep although it is clear that one is not judging any of them.

Doxastic episodes can also be contrasted with the episode of *entertaining a proposition*. For some philosophers, to entertain a proposition is the most fundamental intentional episode – the "ur-attitude" – that is involved in all other intentional episodes although they are not involved in it.¹¹² To entertain a proposition is roughly to have in mind a proposition without believing or grasping it through any other psychological mode. Armstrong (1973: 70-1) calls the problem of explaining the difference between a belief and an episode of entertaining "Hume's problem". According to Armstrong, Hume takes himself to be the first to have identified this problem.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Williams (1973).

¹¹⁰ Nussbaum (2004: 187, 194), Peacocke (1998), Shoemaker (2009: 36).

¹¹¹ Sillins (2012: 309).

¹¹² Bernecker (1996: 272), Price (1969: 192).

¹¹³ Hume (1739-40/1978: Book I, Part III, Section VII).

It might be tempting to analyze entertaining as not aiming at truth. When *S* entertains that *p*, one is not taking *p* to be true. But following our initial characterization of doxastic episodes, it is perhaps better to think of entertaining as accepting *p* as true in the same sense as one also accepts something as true in hypothesizing or assuming. The difference between belief and entertaining is rather to be thought of at the level of the second order aim that distinguishes belief from hypothesizing or assuming. In the case of entertaining, one has *p* as true in mind although one has no second order aim toward it. This goes together with the way Armstrong explains the difference between belief and entertaining: a belief is also something “by which we steer”. In other words, in belief one does not have just *p* as true in mind but one also is *ready to act on the basis of p* taken as true.

How does, then, an entertaining episode relate to the judgement and belief? First, it seems clear that if *S* judges that *p*, then *S* entertains that *p*. The converse does not hold, however, as it appears. If *S* entertains that *p*, then it is not necessarily the case that *S* judges that *p*. Second, if *S* believes that *p*, then it is not necessarily the case that *S* entertains that *p*. One might nevertheless wonder whether if *S* believes that *p* one is not also in some sense entertaining that *p*. Can't we say that one has *p* in mind (i.e. is entertaining *p*) even when one is deeply asleep? Surely we can say this, but for the purpose of the project we are pursuing here, we can make a distinction between a conscious and non-conscious sense of entertaining. And for our concern here, it is only the conscious sense of entertaining that has a role to play.

3.3. Doxastic phenomenology: Conscious belief

A doxastic phenomenal aspect. Suppose that, while you are preparing dinner, you consider whether there will be enough food for everybody. You think of what you have at home and who's going to come over and then, on the basis of these thoughts, you *judge* that indeed there is enough food; or, in a slightly different scenario, you remember that you already thought of everything and thus it is your *belief* that there is enough food that comes back to consciousness. At the moment it appears to you that there is enough food in addition to the phenomenal aspect of having in mind that *there is enough food*, is there also of a distinctive phenomenal aspect of *judging* or of *believing* that there is enough food?

It is reasonable to say that, at least in some circumstances such as the one described in our example, there is *some* phenomenal difference that is associated with doxastic episodes like a judgement or a belief. In the example above, in addition to the thought-content *there is enough food*, there is also a phenomenal aspect that we could, cautiously, call “a phenomenal aspect of a psychological mode”. Let's call it “*D*”.

In the sense of the Weak Thesis of the first chapter it should then not be too contentious to say that sometimes there is something it is like to judge or believe something. Expressions such as

“It was clear to me that *p*” or “It strikes me that *p*” can all be understood as referring to circumstances where a subject is judging or believing something and where this event has some distinctive experiential dimension.

Without committing ourselves to anything more specific, let us assume then that there is sometimes such a phenomenal aspect *D* of a *psychological mode* that is part of the phenomenal character of some thoughts in addition to the phenomenal aspect of content. The question we have to consider, with respect to *D*, is whether it is a *doxastic* phenomenal aspect. Accordingly, the thesis we need to examine in this chapter is the following:

The Thesis of the conscious psychological mode:

(MT2) Some conscious thoughts have a phenomenal aspect of a *doxastic* mode

We will then consider our three questions: (i) what are the reasons to think that there is something like *D*? (ii) Is *D* a distinctive *doxastic* phenomenal aspect? And, (iii) is *D* also distinctively non-sensory?

Above, I distinguished two *doxastic* episodes: judgement and belief. A straightforward question is: If *D* is a *doxastic* phenomenal aspect, is it a phenomenal aspect of judging or believing?

I will start by following a common way of parlance which associates *D* with an episode of a *conscious belief* or *occurrent belief*. It is common that friends of cognitive phenomenology talk of conscious beliefs. However, it is not always entirely clear what they mean by this notion of “conscious belief” and whether they make a difference between conscious belief and conscious judgement.¹¹⁴ Anyway, I suggest we start with the hypothesis that *D* is the phenomenal aspect of belief and, as we will see, it will naturally emerge why this is inadequate.

Arguments for the existence of D. What reasons are there to think that there is such phenomenal aspect of belief besides the intuitive force of the example I have introduced at the beginning? There are three ways to argue for the existence of *D* that elaborate the intuitive point made earlier. (Later on, I will call these three arguments the “initial arguments”.)

First, according to Horgan and Tienson, the phenomenal aspects of the mode and the content of belief are “aspects that you cannot miss if you simply pay attention.” Their suggestion, more specifically, is that through introspective attention one can come to notice that “[t]here is a phenomenological *difference* between wondering whether rabbits have tails on one hand and thinking [i.e. believing] that rabbits have tails on the other. This aspect is the *phenomenology of attitude type*.” (Horgan & Tienson (2002: 522-3). The existence of conscious thoughts with *D* is thus taken to be noticeable through some simple act of introspection.

¹¹⁴ Goldman (1993), Horgan & Tienson (2002), Shield (2011).

Second, Horgan and Tienson's case involves the phenomenal difference between wondering and believing. This suggests also a contrast case argument. Suppose that there are two identical subjects that are questioned whether p is true. The two subjects have then similar sensory perceptual, emotional and mood experiences and they also entertain the same proposition p meanwhile they are considering whether it is true or not. Suppose, however, that there is one difference between the two subjects: one knows that p is true whereas the other has no clue about it. Question: after they are asked "Is it true that p ?" do the two subjects have the same overall experience? If not, what does the phenomenal difference consist of? Obviously, the argument aims to elicit a positive answer to the first question, and – as an answer to the second question – it will then be argued that since the two subjects are taken to have the same sensory perceptual, affective and mood experiences and also to have in mind the same proposition p , the best explanation for the phenomenal difference is that there is phenomenal aspect of belief that is part of the phenomenal character of the overall experience of the subject who knows the answer to the question whether p is true or not.

Third, Hopp (2016) suggests another argument that is based on considerations made by Horgan and Tienson concerning the phenomenal difference between wondering and believing. Hopp's suggestion is a "method of *phenomenal comparison*". In more abstract terms, his proposal is the following:

"[...] we hold some feature F of a mental state constant while varying the rest of its features. If the resulting experience has some phenomenologically salient feature in common with the original, then that provides a good reason to think that feature F is what accounts for it, and that feature F therefore makes a constitutive contribution to the phenomenological character of each." (p.48-9).

With respect to D , the suggestion is then to hold the belief mode steady while varying other phenomenal aspects and in particular those related to contents in order to make apparent the constant phenomenal aspect of the belief mode.

I take it that the three argumentative strategies are subject to various objections. But, on the whole, it seems that their argumentative power is similar to the Contrast Argument we reviewed in the first chapter. Taken together, these three arguments strengthen the initial intuitive considerations made about the example of the conscious thought that there is enough food and provide some support for **(MT2)**.

Another argument for **(MT2)** is the self-knowledge argument defended by Goldman (1993). Goldman has a self-knowledge argument related to both the contents and the conscious modes of our thoughts. But here I'll focus just on what it says with respect to modes. Roughly, Goldman appeals to an epistemic capacity that calls for explanation. The distinctive epistemic capacity we enjoy is that of discriminating different intensities in our modes.

Conscious Thinking

"Subjects' classificational abilities are not confined to broad categories such as belief, desire, and intention; they also include intensities thereof. People report how firm is their intention or conviction, how much they desire an object, and how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with a state of affairs. Whatever the behavioral predictive power of these self-reports, their very occurrence needs explaining. [...]. The most natural hypothesis is that there are dimensions of awareness over which scales of attitude intensity are represented." (p. 24)

Objections. First, Goldman's self-knowledge argument has similar persuasive force to Pitt's (2004) self-knowledge argument. Its success depends on its ability to discredit non-phenomenological accounts of our self-knowledge of modes.¹¹⁵

Second, there is also a phenomenological objection against Goldman's self-knowledge argument. The objection can be extracted from Braithwaite's (1933) account of the phenomenal aspect related to episodes of belief. According to Braithwaite, if *D* exists at all, it is to be identified to a feeling of conviction which is only *contingently* related to a belief episode:

"I do not wish to deny that in a great number of cases I have a feeling of conviction when I believe: indeed, I think that this feeling of conviction may reasonably be used as evidence for the existence of the belief. But I seem to have a belief frequently with no feeling of conviction: I believe quite thoroughly that the sun will rise tomorrow but experience no particular feeling attached to the proposition believed. And it seems possible to have the feeling of conviction without believing a proposition. So I cannot accept the feeling as part of the essence of belief." (p.142)

Braithwaite gives the example of the proposition that *the sun will rise tomorrow* that he takes to believe thoroughly although he discerns no feeling of conviction. It seems likely that he wants to contrast this case with the occurrence of a conscious belief that has a more striking phenomenal aspect. The example involving the content *there is enough food* was precisely designed to highlight a more obvious "feeling of conviction".

However, Braithwaite gives no example for the possibility of a feeling of conviction without a belief. One possible case he might have had in mind is when one undergoes some episode of wishful thinking. A subject *S* might have a feeling of conviction with a thought that it will be the case *p*, although *S* never really believes that *p*. Coliva (2008) gives an example which illustrates the point:

"[...] consider cases of wishful thinking: certain contents may manifest themselves to a subject with such an intensity and 'colouring', as it were, that, while being merely hopes, can actually be taken for beliefs. So, their phenomenology would be pretty much the same, yet only the self-ascription of the relevant hope would be *rational* on their basis (not just correct). If so, however, it is unclear how any *purely* phenomenological account of what it means for a mental state to be conscious can support the claim that a first-order state can stand in a *rational, justificatory* relation to the corresponding self-ascription." (p.23)

The independence of the feeling of conviction (i.e. the doxastic phenomenal aspect) and the episode of belief is real trouble for the of self-knowledges argument. It seems that we would need a bifurcated account of self-knowledge. When there is a feeling of conviction, the self-knowledge of the mode is grounded in the doxastic phenomenal aspect but, when there is no

¹¹⁵ Nichols & Stich (2003: 194-8). See also Peacocke (1998).

such feeling of conviction, the self-knowledge would have to be accounted for in a different manner. But then it is unclear why we would still need the doxastic phenomenal aspect to account of our self-knowledge of the mode at all. If, in the case of belief without feeling of conviction, we can give an account of our self-knowledge without appealing to a doxastic phenomenal aspect, why do we need the doxastic phenomenal aspect at all?

To sum up our discussion, the situation so far is the following: We do have the initial arguments that provide some support for thesis **(MT2)**. But, when considering the self-knowledge argument for the existence of *D* as a phenomenal aspect of belief, the existence and nature of *D* becomes more uncertain. One pressing objection is that *D* is independent from the doxastic episodes. This brings us to the questions (ii) and (iii) about the nature of *D*. Let us have a closer look at the nature of *D* that we have assumed to be a phenomenal aspect of belief.



Accounts of the doxastic phenomenal aspect. So far, the account of the nature of *D* implicit in the various arguments we have discussed has been rather vague. In Horgan and Tienson's account, *D* is simply characterized in terms of a conscious aspect of the general cognitive category of a belief.

When discussing Goldman's self-knowledge argument and the objection build on insights by Braithwaite and Coliva, the nature of *D* became more problematic. In fact, things become even more troublesome if we examine more examples. Consider, thus, the case where a subject undergoes an intense emotion. For instance, *S* is sad because Mary is leaving. Arguably emotions are based on doxastic episodes.¹¹⁶ When *S* undergoes an episode of sadness with respect to Mary's leaving, *S* also judges or has the conscious belief that she is leaving. If *S* did not have this doxastic episode that Mary was leaving, *S* would not be sad. But now, how exactly should we describe the doxastic phenomenal aspect of the conscious belief that Mary is leaving? Arguably, there is also the phenomenal aspect of the emotion of being sad. But then, how does the doxastic phenomenal aspect relate to the phenomenal aspect of being sad? Is the phenomenal aspect of the doxastic episode annihilated by the phenomenal character of the conscious emotion? Or, does the doxastic phenomenal aspect *show through* or *occurs "next"* to the phenomenal aspect of being sad?

Granting that the nature of *D* is not as certain as we might have thought at the beginning, we still have not drained all our options. Braithwaite describes *D* in terms of a "feeling of conviction". This suggests an *affective account* of *D*. Other possibilities are a *qualia account* and a *humean account* of *D*. Let's consider in turn these three suggestions.

¹¹⁶ Mulligan (1998).

The humean account. On the humean account of *D*, the contrast between consciously believing that *p* and just entertaining that *p* is that in the case of a conscious belief the proposition *p* appears more *lively* or more *vividly*.¹¹⁷ Goldman's account, which involves the idea that mental episodes might have different intensities, can be recast as one such humean account. The more intensity one has in one's belief, the more lively or vivid it is.

The humean account of *D* faces several problems. First, a natural way to understand the suggestion that *p* appears with more liveliness and vivacity, is that there is a difference *in the content* of the beliefs – it is *what* we believe that appears more lively or vividly. But this is problematic since it runs against what we said about doxastic episodes in general. The doxastic nature of a belief or judgement is not something that is part of the content.

Second, suppose even that we accept that it is nevertheless accurate to describe *D* as located in the content. The question is then how should we understand the liveliness or vividness of beliefs contents? The problem is that it is not easy to see in what sense liveliness or vividness correspond to *doxastic* differences. Why could we not have, for instance, a vivid or lively idea of something that is false or something that we simply imagine?

The qualia account. It seems thus that *D* cannot be identified to a difference in the content. This was also Hume's original view. According to Hume, the difference between conscious belief and conscious entertaining does not consist in a supplementary idea. In a non-humean terminology, we could then, perhaps, say that the difference is constituted by a *non-intentional doxastic quale*. Contra intentionalists, on this account, there are doxastic phenomenal differences that do not correspond to differences in what one has in mind.

Although this account fares better than the preceding account, it is also not satisfying. We are left with a phenomenal aspect that we just have to accept and about which there is not a lot to say. Perhaps we should then look for an affective account of *D*.

The affective account. Consider first the view defended by Prinz (2011):

"[...] I actually think many beliefs come along with attitudinal feels. We can feel confident or certain. It's like something to have a hunch or to suspect that something is the case. There are also emotions of doubt: uncertainty, incredulity, hostile dismissal. My suspicion, though highly speculative, is that all of these states are felt as emotions, which, like other emotions, are constituted by bodily expressions. We knit our brow in doubt and pound our fists in confidence. Further evidence for this proposal comes from the simple fact that doxastic attitudes can be expression through intonation; we can vocalize the difference between an assertion, an interrogative, and even a tentative speculation. These speech sounds exemplify differences in bodily states." (p.191-2)

There are several things that deserve to be highlighted in this excerpt. First, according to Prinz, doxastic feelings belong to a larger class of epistemic emotions that includes, for instance,

¹¹⁷ See also Cohen (1989: 368), Church (2002: 362-3), Hume (1739-40/1978: Book 1, Part III, Section VII).

“curiosity, interest, awe, wonder, familiarity, novelty, puzzlement, confusion, and surprise—all of which can give rise to corresponding propositional attitudes.” (p.192)

Second, the suggestion is not that a doxastic episode like a belief just is an episode of emotion. Prinz’s idea is that it is only at the phenomenological level that we distinguish different modes or attitudes in virtue of such *accompanying* episodes of epistemic emotions. The phenomenal aspects related to the modes of our conscious thoughts are phenomenal aspects of distinct episodes of epistemic emotions.

Third, for Prinz, emotions are constituted by bodily expressions. However, this is a particular view of our emotional experiences that one does not need to accept. And with respect to cognitive and intellectual mode, it is, I suggest, at least unclear whether phenomenal aspects of doubt and belief can wholly be captured in terms of knitting our brow and other related bodily sensations.

Concerning the particular case of the mode of belief, Prinz’s suggestion is then that *D* is an affective episode that comes with a belief. Let’s call this account the *epistemic feeling account* of *D*. This account goes, nevertheless, against what I have said until now. Implicit in my way of talking is that some conscious episodes of thought have some phenomenal aspect. However, according to the present proposal, *D* is a phenomenal aspect of a feeling which is *distinct* from the thought. In the terminology of our first chapter, this kind of account of *D* is an account of a First Opponent who would argue that *D* is *derived* from some other co-occurring conscious episodes.

The epistemic feeling account of *D* would then belong to a broader account of epistemic feelings which would gather feeling of knowing, tip of the tongue feeling, feeling of certainty, feeling of familiarity, feeling of forgetting etc. There is much to say about these feelings. What exactly are these feelings? Do they have intentional contents and if yes what is their content? And what is their function?¹¹⁸

One advantage of this epistemic feeling account is that it can make sense of the independence between *D* and the episode of belief. If the phenomenal aspect of belief is a distinct episode from the belief, then arguably there is an explanation for why there are cases of conscious belief without *D* and why *D* sometimes occurs without an episode of belief.

However, in agreement with the spirit of an affective account of *D*, one can also oppose Prinz and argue that *D* is not a phenomenal aspect derived from a *distinct* episode. The suggestion under scrutiny is, then, that beliefs *are* emotions or emotion-like episodes with distinctive *affective* phenomenal characters. On this account, *D* is a phenomenal aspect of an emotion. Let’s call this kind of account the *doxastic emotion account*.

¹¹⁸ Arango-Muñoz & Michaelian (2014), Meylan (2014).

This account may sound implausible at first. However, it will perhaps become more palatable once we consider it from another angle. Consider Nussbaum (2004) who argues that emotions are certain kinds of *judgements* of value. Now, if this view is correct, the distinction between doxastic episodes and emotions becomes blurry to a large extent. Emotions and beliefs belong to the same kind of intentional episodes; the only difference being that they have different kinds of contents.

This account has two virtues. First, it makes the existence of *D* a much less problematic issue. It's uncontroversial that episodes of fear or sadness have some phenomenal character. Accordingly, if we grant phenomenal characters to episodes of emotions, and emotions and beliefs belong to the same generic kind of mental episode, why not also concede phenomenal characters to beliefs? Second, according to Nussbaum, an emotion is just a judgement and any remaining feeling that is not a thought and that may be associated with emotions is not necessary to the emotions. This fits nicely with the point that *D* sometimes does not occur with conscious belief and sometimes also occurs in the absence of any doxastic episode.

What should we think of these two affective accounts of *D*? The prospect of an epistemic feeling account of *D* depends also on whether one is able to give a substantial account of such a category of epistemic feelings. According to Prinz, what he calls "epistemic emotions" are constituted by bodily expressions. Now, the problem with such an account is that, from a phenomenological point of view, it appears as being unable to account for all the phenomenal differences we would want to associate with such epistemic feeling. Consider Prinz's own example of the epistemic feeling related to doubt. Is knitting one's brow enough to account for the phenomenal aspect that comes with such an episode of doubt? If I knit my brow, do I always doubt? Certainly not. Moreover, it seems not even necessary. It seems plausible that in some circumstances one is under the obligation to refrain to express any bodily expression although one is entertaining a strong episode of doubt with respect to something one is, say, hearing.

According to another account of epistemic feeling, these episodes are some kind of emotions understood as intentional episodes. A problem for a version of such an account, pointed out by (Meylan 2014), is that epistemic feelings seem to lack a necessary feature of the intentionality of emotions. According to the account Meylan considers, emotions are intentional episodes that are directed at two distinct objects: a particular object and an evaluative property. For instance, when one is afraid of a dog, one's fear is not just directed at the dog but also at the *dangerousness* of the dog. According to Meylan, a necessary condition for something to be an emotion is that it has such a double intentionality. But then, a problem with epistemic feelings is that although they are directed at an epistemic episode, it is nevertheless highly dubious that these mental episodes are presented as having certain evaluative properties. When one has a feeling of conviction, what is the evaluative property that the episode of conviction appears to have?

Furthermore, the doxastic emotions account's main concern is the question of whether emotions are evaluative judgements. And the problem is that, although such an account has its own virtues¹¹⁹, there are also good reasons to think that evaluative judgements are neither necessary nor sufficient for emotions as it is pointed out by Deonna & Teroni (2012: 54-6). One can have a fear of a spider, although one is not judging that the spider is dangerous. Moreover, judgement – which requires the capacity to articulate concepts – seems to be a rather demanding capacity. Some subjects (i.e. animals, infants) appear to lack such cognitive capacities although they seem to undergo some emotions. For the latter problem, the trouble is simply that one can make all the possible judgements about a dog and its dangerousness and still not undergo an episode of fear.¹²⁰



We have already come a long way, let's recap.

In response to question (i), we have discussed the initial arguments for **(MT2)**. In response to question (ii), we have then also reviewed different accounts of the nature of *D*. Aside of accounts that characterize *D* in general cognitive terms, we have distinguished a humean account and two versions of an affective account. All accounts have their own difficulties, and so far none is entirely satisfying. Yet, how do these accounts behave with respect to our question (iii)? Do considerations about *D* provide us with some additional reasons to accept the Minimal Thesis (M)?

First, recall our initial arguments for the existence of *D*. To the extent that they are structurally similar to arguments we have reviewed in the first chapter, it is not surprising that they can be criticized for similar reasons. The contrast case argument and the phenomenal comparison argument both try to highlight that there is *some* phenomenal aspect but, at the same time, they do not imply anything specific about the nature of this phenomenal aspect. Further, Goldman's self-knowledge argument has a similar defect to Pitt's self-knowledge argument. The argument appeals to some phenomenal aspects in order to explain our self-knowledge of types of psychological modes, but what makes these phenomenal aspects necessarily non-sensory perceptual? This is not clear. An affective account seems to allow doxastic phenomenal aspects *D* to play similar epistemic roles.

Second, the humean account of *D* when construed as a difference in vividness and liveliness that is to be accounted for in a difference in content, is highly implausible. Moreover, even if it were defensible, to the extent that it recognizes *D* as a feature of the content, it would not provide us with anything additional to what we have already seen in the second chapter.

¹¹⁹ Deonna & Teroni (2012: 53-4).

¹²⁰ Deonna & Teroni (2012: 55-6).

The humean account that interprets *D* as some cognitive qualia is more powerful. If there are some cognitive qualia that characterize conscious doxastic modes, then it seems that we are very close to have some support for the Minimal Thesis. But, an important worry remains and consists in the independence between *D* and the belief episode. Why should we then individuate these qualia as *doxastic*? The lack of a stronger tie to belief or judgement makes it tempting to think that *D*, understood as a quale, is a derivative phenomenon that comes from co-occurring sensory perceptual or affective experiences.

Furthermore, another difficulty for a qualia account of *D*, with respect to question (iii), is that contrary to the phenomenal aspect of a content of thought, there is no conceptual obstacle to account for the putative doxastic quale in terms of a sensory perceptual or affective quale. The phenomenal aspect of conscious thought-contents has to be described in complex conceptual terms that make it conceptually impossible to give an account of it in terms of visualizations or episodes of inner speech. But the psychological mode of doxastic episode has no such complexity that prevents it from being accounted for in terms of a sensory perceptual or affective phenomenal aspect.

Finally, there are the affective accounts that construe *D* as some kind of affective phenomenal aspect. As I have already pointed out, the two versions of the affective account – the epistemic feeling account and the doxastic emotion account – will be put forward by opponents to cognitive phenomenology. Affective episodes belong to List 2 of mental episodes; accordingly, if *D* is an affective phenomenal aspect, then thesis **(MT2)** will not provide any support for the Minimal Thesis.

There are many more things to say about *D* and how it relates to affective phenomena but, for now, none of the accounts of *D* we have reviewed so far demonstrate that *D* is non-sensory perceptual. Thesis **(MT2)** does not provide us with any further support for the Minimal Thesis.



Against conscious belief. It is time to consider what I take to be some decisive objections against the idea that the phenomenal aspect of the psychological mode we are examining is really a phenomenal aspect of a mode of *belief*. According to the objections I will now present, if there is a phenomenal aspect of a psychological mode associated with some beliefs, it is nevertheless not to be described as a phenomenal aspect of belief.

The closely related objections against the existence of conscious beliefs that I will now present are all based on the idea that beliefs cannot be conscious because of their ontological category of *states*.

One version of this objection can be built out of two theses from O'Shaughnessy (2000). The first thesis is that if a mental episode is *conscious*, then the episode is of a *processive* sort. The idea of an episode being of a "processive sort" is that it belongs to the ontological category of an

event or *process*. From this it follows that if a belief is conscious, then it is of a processive sort. However, and this is the second thesis, beliefs are not of a processive kind. Beliefs are *states* which do not belong to the same ontological category of events and processes. But then if beliefs are not of a processive kind, it follows that they cannot be conscious.

The thesis that it is part of the nature of a *conscious* episode that it belongs to the ontological category of *processes* or *events* is, however, very dubious. What prevents a state to be conscious? What is the reason for the view that conscious episodes are necessarily events or processes? O'Shaughnessy seems to be aware of this worry when he writes that "[y]et even when experience is not changing in type and content, it still changes in another respect: it is constantly renewed, a new sector of itself is there and then *taking place*." (p.42) The suggestion seems to be that what looks like a conscious state is in fact not a state at all but an event or process. But what does "renewed" mean? The only possibility I can think of is that it has to do with continuity. If the content and the mode of an experience are not changing but nevertheless renewed, it seems that there is a lack of continuity in the sense that if at a later time t_2 after t_1 the experience is renewed then it is different from the earlier experience at t_1 . But if it's different, in what sense is it different? If it's an experiential difference, then it seems that the assumption that the content and mode are not changing is not true. But if it's not experiential, then there is no reason to think that *at the experiential level*, the experience is not non-processively continuous. The upshot is that there is not good reason to exclude states from the stream of consciousness.

However, even though it is not by metaphysical necessity that states cannot figure in the stream of consciousness, it is still possible that by psychological necessity all conscious episodes are of a processive sort. As Locke has pointed out, our experience is constantly changing. And to those who would doubt this, Locke urges to try to keep in mind the same idea for a while:

"For Trial, let him take any Figure, any Degree of Light or Whiteness, or what other he pleases; and he will, I suppose, find it difficult to keep all other Ideas out of his Mind: But that some, either of another kind, or various Considerations of that Idea (each of which Consideration is a new Idea) will constantly succeed one another in his Thought, let him be as wary as he can."¹²¹

To the extent that every change in attention, is already enough to modify our overall experience, the claim that our experience is constantly changing seems to have some plausibility.¹²²

However, if this put some pressure on the idea that states of beliefs can ever be conscious, very often when philosophers speak of conscious beliefs, they use the expression of "occurrent belief" which clearly implies a processive episode. Consequently, it seems that O'Shaughnessy's worry that beliefs cannot be conscious because they are states and not processive episodes is already

¹²¹ Locke (1690/1971: Book II, Chapter XIV, Section 13-14)

¹²² See also Strawson (1997).

bypassed by most philosophers who speak of conscious beliefs. The solution is that, although *beliefs states* are never conscious because by psychological necessity a conscious episode has to be of a processive sort, this is no real trouble because *in addition of* beliefs states there are *occurrent beliefs* which are the only real conscious episodes of beliefs and which are of a processive nature.

But this solution which is based on a distinction between two kinds of belief episodes does not work. According to Tim Crane an “Occurrent belief’ is a myth”.¹²³ More precisely, Crane (2013) argues that:

“If a conscious belief were an occurrence, it would exist for as long as that occurrence were to exist. For a belief to *cease* to be conscious, then, on this understanding, would be for the occurrence to cease, or to go out of existence. But if the occurrence thus went out of existence – for example, when the subject paid attention to something else, or became unconscious – then it cannot play the essential role of belief as I have characterized it. So whatever such an occurrence is it cannot be belief: “occurrent belief” is not belief at all.” (p.165)

I suggest that we can understand the basic idea of this argument as represented by the following *modus tollens*:

(1) If beliefs are occurrent events, then they easily cease to exist

(2) It is not the case that beliefs easily cease to exist

Therefore,

(3) It is not the case that beliefs are occurrent events

The first premise of the argument gets some support from the lockian point made above. Our conscious experiences are, as a matter of psychological necessity, of a processive sort and although there is nothing incoherent in the idea of an occurrence that occurs in “slow motion”, so to speak, *conscious psychological* occurrences do not last very long. Accordingly, if belief is a conscious occurrence it will easily cease to exist.

Crane defends the second premise by appealing to a constitutive feature of beliefs: it is part of belief’s nature that it guides action. And in order to guide action, a belief must be robust enough to survive constant changes in experience. If my belief that there is a red ball in the garden ceases to exist as soon as the ball is out of my view or if my attention gets distracted by something, it would be impossible to complete an action of walking to the garden to pick up the ball.

The way I understand this claim is that the problem with occurrent beliefs is not that if they have short-lived existence, it would be impossible to complete our actions. This is obviously not

¹²³ Crane (2001: 108).

true because it should be clear that beliefs that are *not* conscious can also help us to guide our actions. The problem is rather that it is a necessary or essential feature of beliefs that they can guide actions and this is not possible if they are occurrences.

One could object that, while walking toward the ball, I have in mind the occurrent belief that the ball is in the garden. And although as soon as I pick up the ball this belief disappears, this does matter to the extent that I could complete the relevant action. Occurrent beliefs are short-lived but they can guide some actions.

But this is not to take seriously the lockian point made earlier. Conscious occurrences are changing in such a manner that they never remain the same for more than a few instants. Relatedly, the example involving someone looking after the ball in the garden should be described in the following manner. It is not that when walking through the living room one has already constantly and consciously the same belief in mind that the ball is in the garden. This belief is better understood as being a state of the subject that is, at some instants but not at all, manifested in consciousness.

Ultimately, the argument depends then on the lockian thesis that experiences are constantly changing. I believe that this is plausible and the conclusion I want to draw from this argument is, therefore, that *D* which we identified at the beginning of this chapter and for which I gave several distinct plausible accounts for is, in the end, not a phenomenal aspect of a *belief*. But, since the objection against occurrent belief does not put in jeopardy the existence of *D* itself, this raises the question of how we should characterize *D* if not in terms of a phenomenal aspect of belief.

3.4. Doxastic phenomenology: Conscious judgement

If beliefs cannot be conscious, the natural alternative is that *D* is a phenomenal aspect of a judgement. At the beginning, I characterized a judgement as something that occurs. This smoothly goes together with our discussion about conscious occurrences.

Similarly, although Crane rejects the existence of conscious belief, he recognizes, on the other hand, that there is a phenomenally conscious episode that takes place in the circumstances where people are eager to talk of “occurrent belief”. “My claim is that what is brought to mind is, rather, a conscious thought”¹²⁴. And these includes “[...] episodes of speculation, wondering, imagining, planning, as well as the central phenomenon of judgement.”¹² The upshot is thus that Crane presumably recognizes that there is something like *D*, although he thinks that it is better understood as belonging to a judgement or other intentional episodes.

¹²⁴ Crane (2013: 169).

The suggestion that conscious doxastic episodes are judgements is also interesting because there is significant literature that focuses specifically on the consciousness of judgement as part of an account of self-knowledge. I will go through these accounts and see how what we have already learned about *D* can be improved and extended by the suggestion that *D* is fundamentally a phenomenal aspect of a judgement.

Transparency accounts of self-knowledge. The self-knowledge arguments we have discussed earlier were based on a conception of self-knowledge that consists in direct acts of introspection of one's own mental episodes. But, there is another view of self-knowledge that challenges this basic idea. These accounts build on an insight of Evans (1982):

"[...] in making a self-ascription of belief, one's eyes are, so to speak, or occasionally literally, directed outward – upon the world. If someone asks me 'Do you think there is going to be a third world war?', I must attend, in answering him, to precisely the same outward phenomena as I would attend to if I were answering the question 'Will there be a third world war?' I get myself in a position to answer the question whether I believe that *p* by putting into operation whatever procedure I have for answering the question whether *p* [...]" (p.225).

Thus, according to a *Transparency account of self-knowledge*, the way we come to know that we believe that *p* is not through a direct act of introspection of a belief episode that *p* but is rather similar to the way we come to know that *p*.

My aim is not to start to assess the plausibility of such an account but only to highlight how a phenomenal aspect of a judgement has a distinctive epistemic role within the framework of such views of self-knowledge. More precisely, in agreement with such Transparency accounts of self-knowledge, several authors have propounded the view that we come to know that we believe something in virtue of (i) conscious judgements we make about the world, and where (ii) some phenomenal aspect of these judgements plays a crucial role for this self-knowledge.

The first to propose such an account in the recent literature is Peacocke (1998).¹²⁵ Consider a case where a subject *S* is asked "Who do you believe was prime minister?" Peacocke's view is then that in such circumstances, *S* will consciously self-ascribe a belief by going through three stages:

- (1) An apparent memory that *p*
- (2) A judgement that *p*
- (3) A self-ascription of the belief that *p*

The crucial transition is between (2) and (3). On this account, one can justifiably self-ascribe a belief on the basis of conscious judgement. But, for step (3) to be justified, several things need to

¹²⁵ See also Coliva (2008), McHugh (2012), Smithies (2012), Sillins (2012), Valaris (2014), Zimmerman (2006).

be in place. First, *S* is required to have the capacity to conceptualize the doxastic episodes he possesses and also that he is the subject of these doxastic episodes. Because a judgement is a way of forming a belief, if one is judging that *p*, then – if everything is working properly – one is also coming to believe that *p*. And this is why the conscious judgement gives a reason for the subject to self-ascribe the belief. Second, the transition from (2) to (3) should not be conceived as an inference. Peacocke's reason for this is that, in general, a mental event can be a reason to judge something without relying on an inference. An experience of pain is a reason for judging that one is in pain; and one needs not be in an intermediate episode of awareness of the pain and then on the basis of this awareness judge that one is in pain. If a judgement had to be reached by an inference, this would make impossible, according to Peacocke, an epistemology of the self-ascription of sensations.¹²⁶

Third, conscious self-ascriptions of beliefs need not be the only way to self-ascribe beliefs. It is not required that for all conscious self-ascriptions, *S* has to go through the three steps mentioned above. Short cuts are authorized; one can skip step (2). But, these short cuts are allowed to the extent that *S*, if needed, could take the longer route.

Finally, and this is the crucial point for us, the transition from the judgement to the self-ascription of the belief is similar to the transition to a belief which is reached through an inference: it is not only the *content* that will support the belief ascription. In both the inferential case and the conscious self-ascription, the subject needs to be sensitive to the *psychological modes* with which he is entertaining the premise. If *S* desires that *p*, and imagines that if *p* then *q*, then *S* cannot justifiably come to believe that *q*. *S* needs to *believe* the premise in order to reach the justified belief that *q*.

However, Peacocke's argument is, to some extent, similar to Goldman and Pitt's self-knowledge arguments. There is a phenomenal aspect of judgement, *D*, that plays a given epistemological role in our self-knowledge. But, just like in these previous self-knowledge arguments, the phenomenal aspect of judgement is not much more characterized beyond its general epistemological role. And, this poorly characterized conscious mode is precisely what leads to two problems.

First, there are alternative ways to explain that epistemological role attributed to the phenomenal character of the judgement. Shoemaker (2009), for instance, wonders why the self-ascription must be based on *phenomenally conscious* episodes.

"I have no objection to the claim that self-ascriptions of beliefs are grounded on reasons. Nor do I object to the claim that the reason for such a self-ascription must be a conscious state, as long as "conscious" can here mean "available." I do not see why an available belief cannot count as a reason for self-ascribing the belief that one has it—on the view I am putting forward here, this would amount to its being a reason for the second-order belief of which it is a part. What I question is the view that occurrent phenomenally

¹²⁶ Peacocke (1998: 71-2). See also Sillins (2012).

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conscious states, first-person judgments being the central case, are the canonical reasons for belief self-ascriptions.” (p.48)

Shoemaker’s notion of “available” is close to Ned Block’s notion of “access conscious”. “[...] a belief is “available” if the subject is “poised” to assent to its content if the question of whether it is true arises, to use it as a premise in her reasoning, and to be guided by it in her behavior.”¹²⁷ We need to have an explanation for why we need a *phenomenally* conscious episode and why an episode which is simply A-conscious in Block’s sense is not enough.

A second problem with Peacocke’s limited characterization of conscious judging makes it also inadequate to explain why it can play the kind of epistemological role it is wanted to play. One can be sympathetic to the idea that a phenomenal aspect plays a given epistemological role, even though not any kind of a phenomenal aspect will do. This is precisely, Valaris’s (2014) objection to Peacocke’s account of the phenomenal character of conscious judgements. Valaris argues that the phenomenal character of a judgment is fundamentally a matter of being aware of the world and *only* of the world:

“[...] the only type of conscious awareness that is essentially involved in having a conscious belief is awareness that the world is a certain way – namely, the way that the content of the belief specifies. [...] it is not awareness of any distinctively mental properties, and it is not quasi-perceptual awareness of the belief itself as a particular mental event. Beliefs are transparent, in the sense that they do not register in our internal gaze.” (p.5)

Valaris talks of “conscious beliefs” or “occurrent belief” but this is just a terminological preference and here it means the same as Peacocke’s “judgment”. In agreement with Peacocke’s account, Valaris takes it that we have reasons to self-ascribe beliefs that are based on our conscious judgements about the world. And, although the phenomenal character of a judgement plays also a justificatory role, in the same way as in Peacocke’s account, there is no intermediate episode of conscious awareness of the judgement that is required for the self-ascription of the belief. It is the judging itself that justifies the self-ascription of the belief.

Valaris objects to Peacocke’s view that there is no good explanation for the relation between the phenomenal character of the judgement and its justificatory role.¹²⁸ His objection, more particularly, has as target the specific conception of the phenomenal aspect of judging that is part of Peacocke’s account. Valaris appeals to a broader principle which goes as follow: “if you claim that a phenomenally conscious state *M* justifies a certain response, then you should be able to tell a story about what it is like to be in *M* that shows why it is rational for a subject who enjoys the relevant phenomenology to respond in that way.” (p.6) His objection is, then, basically that Peacocke’s conception of the phenomenal character of judgement fails to meet this principle. Roughly, we are told that the judgement and in particular its attitude is conscious but this is

¹²⁷ Shoemaker (2009: 40).

¹²⁸ Valaris (2014: 6).

pretty much what it is. In particular, we are not told why this specific phenomenal aspect has the epistemic virtues it is taken to have.

In contrast, Valaris takes it that his *transparent* account of the phenomenal character of judgement is much better suited to play its epistemological role. Valaris' own "Stepping back account" based on the transparent phenomenal character of judgement is, then, the following:

"Consider a subject who has a conscious, occurrent belief [i.e. judgement] that *p*. Thus she is aware — in the phenomenal sense — that *p*. Suppose, moreover, that our subject is rational and in possession of the concept of belief. If this is correct, then she must grasp the distinction between her own take on the facts and the facts themselves: she must know that her taking the world to be a certain way is a different matter from the world's really being that way. This piece of knowledge, I suggest, enables our subject to *step back* from her awareness that *p*, and self-ascribe the belief that *p*." (p.7-8)

A crucial element in this account is then the transition of stepping back. It is not an inference but a *sui generis* rational transition. Does this provide us with a satisfactory account of our self-knowledge of beliefs? A complete answer to this question must be left for further work. But, it raises several questions we can discuss. First, is not Valaris simply reducing the phenomenal aspect of a doxastic mode to the phenomenal aspect of a conscious content? And, second, how exactly does his account relate to other accounts of *D*?

Concerning the first question, it seems that nothing in Valaris' account prevents the reduction. There is no phenomenal aspect that relates to the psychological mode itself; Valaris is clear about that. But then a question emerges: How does he conceive of the phenomenal aspect of the content itself? It seems that it consists just in entertaining a proposition. But, as we saw at the beginning when discussing the idea that doxastic episodes aim at truth, there is a difference between having in mind that *p*, and having in mind that *p as really true* or *as what's the case*. The first is simply entertaining a proposition and it is only the second that is really a doxastic episode. But, this creates a significant problem for Valaris' theory of self-knowledge. For, if Valaris' account reduces the phenomenal aspect of judgement to the phenomenal character of entertaining a proposition, then it is unclear in what sense simply entertaining a proposition is enough for the epistemic role that he needs for his theory of self-knowledge. How could simply having *p* in mind, in addition with the stepping back procedure, be sufficient for a justified self-ascription of a belief? What is needed is that *p* appears *as really true* or *as being the case*. Simply, entertaining *p* is not enough.

Regarding the second question, if the preceding points are correct, it seems that Valaris' account of the phenomenology of judgement is not really in competition with other accounts of *D*. These other accounts try to give a theoretical description of what is precisely missing in Valaris's account. The other accounts are concerned with what it experientially consists of having *p* in mind *as really true* or *as being the case*. For these other accounts, *D* is the conscious aspect that corresponds to the feature of the judgement that consists in its being "really true" or

“being the case”. It seems that by reducing the *D* to the phenomenal character of entertaining, Valaris simply loses it.

The challenge for Valaris is, then, that he needs to explain what the difference is between having *p* in mind and having *p* in mind as really true. Unless he is able to make this difference, he cannot appeal to the phenomenal character of judgement in order to account for the self-knowledge of our beliefs. And, the problem is that, to the extent that he thinks that the phenomenal character of a judgement consists exclusively in what the subject has in mind, he needs to explain the difference in terms of a difference in the content of the judgement. But, as we have already seen, this is problematic for various reasons.



What is then our account of conscious judgement? It seems that for all we have seen so far, the consciousness of judgements consists, first, of the having in mind of something – as we described it in the first chapter. And, second, of *D* although it has proven difficult to see exactly of what it consists in. We can perhaps transpose what we have learnt about *D* in the context of our discussion about conscious beliefs. It seems to have some independence from judgement although we do not have yet reached a clear understanding of its phenomenal identity.

My aim, in the rest of this section, is to argue that although the doxastic phenomenal aspect we have identified at the beginning, *D*, is a real phenomenal aspect, it cannot nevertheless be a phenomenal aspect of judgement. Consequently, the final conclusion of this chapter will be that *D* cannot is not a doxastic phenomenon.

The reason why judgements never are conscious is that, on the one hand, the phenomenal aspect *D* is also implicitly assumed to be a phenomenal aspect of an occurrence shortly *extended in time*. Not for a long time – as is pointed out by Locke – but still extended in time. However, on the other hand, a judgement is a strictly *instantaneous event* that is not extended in time *at all*. Consequently, *D* cannot be the phenomenal aspect of a judgement and strictly speaking there is no conscious judgement. Before going any further, a clarification is needed: my argument is not an argument against cognitive phenomenology that roughly consists in the claim that judgements cannot figure in the stream of consciousness *because* they are instantaneous events.¹²⁹ My claim is only that there is a temporal incompatibility between *D* and judging and that this is enough to undermine the reality of conscious judging.

Why should we think that *D* is conceived as extended in time? First, I think that reflection on our initial example of the judgement that there is enough food already gives us some indication of this. *When it strikes us* that there is enough food, this does not consist in an instantaneous happening similar to, say, the crossing of the finish line of a runner. It need not be an occurrence

¹²⁹ Tye & Wright (2011). See also Chudnoff (2015: Chapter 4).

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that takes several minutes to unfold, but nevertheless, it seems not to consist of a strictly instantaneous event.

Second, although this is not always clear, in the literature philosophers tend to describe *D* in terms of extended episodes. Tim Crane who argues that there is no occurrent belief, suggests that the conscious occurrences that some philosophers mistakenly call “occurrent belief” are better described as judgements. Crane (2013) distinguishes three kinds of judgements:

“There are three broad kinds of conscious occurrence which can be called judgement. The first kind occurs when a subject is making up their mind about something. When they have not formed a belief about some subject-matter and need to do so, they may weigh up the evidence and come to one conclusion or other; or they may ‘suspend judgement’. Here judgement is the formation (or the attempted formation) of belief. Judgement stands to belief in this case as decision stands to intention. [...].

Episodes of the second kind of judgement are those which occur when our beliefs are brought to mind without effort, or any act of will. We need our beliefs to guide our action in the world, and often this needs to be conscious. Or we reveal what we believe in consciousness when someone asks us a question, and the answer occurs to us immediately, without effort or without having to make up one’s mind.

The third kind of case occurs when one deliberates explicitly in consciousness about what one already believes. This can occur when one is trying to work out what one believes, or remember some fact, or draw out some consequence of what one believes. [...]” (p.160-70)

I think that the second and third kinds of judgements are pretty clearly conceived as extended in time. If we need some of the thing we believe to be conscious in order to guide our action, it seems that if they were instantaneous events, they would not be able to help to execute actions. Similarly, the third kind of judgements, also presuppose that they can be kept in mind. It would be impossible to deliberate about what we believe, if we could not keep these contents in mind.

One way to object to the claim that judgements are instantaneous and which is compatible with Crane’s three kinds of judgements is to make a distinction between instantaneous and “extended judgements” and argue that I mistakenly assumed that all judgements are instantaneous. Dorsch (2009: 41), for instance, makes a distinction between judging (i.e. the act of the formation of belief) and judgment. And, “[...] while events of forming a judgement are often, or perhaps even always, instantaneous, the formed judgements may remain in continuous existence for a considerable amount of time.” So, what I called “judgement” would correspond to what Dorsch calls a “judging” and the temporarily extent doxastic event would be a “judgment”.

However, what is the difference between such a temporarily extended judgement and an occurrent *belief*? An extended judgement is what follows the formation of a belief (i.e. a judgement), which is – by our initial assumptions – a belief.

However, I must admit that I cannot rule out the possibility that in between judging and belief there is a further episode of an extended judgement. But, the proposal I will make later allows us not to introduce such kinds of episodes.

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Another way to resist the idea that a judgement is an instantaneous event consists not in looking how we could keep in mind a judgement *after* it has been made but rather to look at what happens *before*. One possibility is to follow Peacocke (1998: 89) who claims that a “[j]udgment is a conscious rational activity, done for reasons, where these reasons are answerable to a fundamental goal of judgement, that it aims at truth.” Presumably the activity Peacocke has in mind is a temporarily extended event or process. Can we then identify a judgement to the whole activity that ultimately peaks with a judgement? A judgement would then consist of the whole process of considering different things and then, on the basis of these considerations, coming to acknowledge the truth of *p*.

The problem with this suggestion is that “to judge” belongs to what Vendler (1957) called “verbs of achievement”. A verb of achievement picks out an instantaneous event that occurs at a definite moment. Other examples of verbs of achievement are “reaches the hilltop”, “wins the race”, and “spot or recognize something”.¹³⁰ Achievement verbs are best distinguished from accomplishment verbs like “running a mile” or “write a letter in an hour”. What is distinctive of accomplishment verbs appears when we contrast them with a third category: activity verbs. Consider, for instance, the activity verb “run”. If *S* runs for an hour, then *S* is running at every moment during that hour. In contrast, if *S* runs a mile, then it is not the case that at every moment *S* is running a mile. Activity verbs are homogeneous in such a manner that any part of the process is of the same nature as the whole. Accomplishment verbs are not homogenous in this manner; they require the process to proceed until an end-point which is logically necessary for the accomplishment to take place. An achievement verb can, then, be contrasted with an accomplishment verb:

“When I say that it took me an hour to write a letter (which is an accomplishment), I imply that the writing of the letter went on during that hour. This is not the case with achievements. Even if one says that it took him three hours to reach the summit, one does not mean that the reaching of the summit went on during those hours.” (p.147)

An accomplishment verb picks out an extended process for which a terminus point is necessary. However, an achievement verb does not pick out such an extended process but only an instantaneous event that may conclude a process.

The upshot from all this is the following: if a judgement is extended in time, it should belong to the category of an accomplishment and not an achievement. But this seems difficult to defend. When considering different reasons in favor of *p* before acknowledging the truth of *p*, one does not want to say that one has already judged that *p*. This is because a judgement consists in the commitment to the truth of a proposition. And while one is considering reasons in favor or against the truth of a proposition, one is not already committed to its truth. And, therefore, it

¹³⁰ Vendler (1957: 146).

cannot be the case that one has judged that p . To judge is an event picked out by an achievement verb and thus is not extended in time.

Finally, the claim that a judgement is an instantaneous event does not mean that there are not some preceding events that are necessary for the judgement to occur. Also, the claim that there is no conscious judgement because of the temporal incompatibility between D and the instantaneous character of judging, does not mean that there is no instantaneous event of judging that ever takes place. The claim is only that this event is not conscious.

3.5. Conscious modes and the problem of cognitive phenomenology

What should we then say about D and conscious doxastic modes in general? How should we describe the case of the conscious thought that we presented at the beginning of this chapter? Is there anything in addition to the phenomenal aspect of the content that we described in the last chapter?

I think that we have stumbled over two problems.

The first problem is that the doxastic phenomenal aspect D , in any account, seems to be independent from doxastic episodes. The second problem is that the Thesis of the Doxastic Experience seems not to provide some support for the Minimal Thesis.

The first problem has two aspects. On the one side, D seems independent from conscious doxastic episodes in the sense that it seems that it can occur in the absence of the doxastic episode and that there can be conscious doxastic episodes without it. On the other side, it seems that D cannot be qualified as either the phenomenal aspect of belief or as the phenomenal aspect of judgement. D cannot be the phenomenal aspect of a belief because there is an *ontological* incompatibility between D and beliefs. And D cannot be the phenomenal aspect of judgement because there is a *temporal* incompatibility between D and judgement.

The second problem is that the nature of D remains highly unclear. Among all the different accounts we have reviewed, none is entirely convincing. And the most convincing – the doxastic quale account perhaps – is still under the pressure of being an account that reduces D to some phenomenal aspect of List 2.

In response to these problems, what are the options? There are two options. First, one could try to show that either there is no ontological incompatibility between belief and D or that there is no temporal incompatibility between judgement and D . An alternative to this would be to try show that D is in fact the doxastic phenomenal aspect of a doxastic episode of an “extended judgement”. This would require one to distinguish a further doxastic episode in between belief and judgement so to speak. Second, one could try to show that D is not independent from conscious doxastic episodes. Accordingly, when a conscious doxastic episode seems to occur with no D , one would have to argue that D is of fainter intensity but still real. And finally, the

friend of cognitive phenomenology could also try to show that *D* is a distinctive *cognitive* phenomenal aspect.

However, I will not try to pursue one of these options and suggest that we bite the bullet: there is no conscious belief or judgement. And I believe that this option is palatable because there is a plausible alternative way to account for conscious occurrences with *D*. My suggestion is, then, that what some call “occurrent belief” or “conscious judgement” are in fact conscious episodes of *entertaining a proposition*.

A further claim is, then, that *D* is a phenomenal aspect that attaches to these episodes of entertaining although it is not strictly speaking a phenomenal aspect of judging or believing. From my inquiry, nothing we have seen concerning *D* is enough to take it as a distinctive cognitive phenomenal aspect but that doesn’t annihilate its existence. My suggestion is, then, that the contents that are entertained are contents that are *believed* or *judged*. *What* we believe and judge can be conscious – in the sense I suggested in the second chapter – although the *judging* and the *believing* are not conscious. And obviously, we can also become conscious *of* our beliefs or judgements, in the same sense, that we can become conscious of Paris or the red ball.

In spirit, my suggestion is very much in agreement with Valaris’ account of the phenomenal character of conscious judgement. When we judge that *p*, then the only thing that is phenomenally conscious is our being aware of *p*. But contrary to Valaris, I deny that being phenomenally conscious that *p* constitutes the phenomenal character of a doxastic episode. It is just entertaining a proposition.

It’s likely that some philosophers would grant that beliefs are never conscious – and this need not be just the view of opponents to cognitive phenomenology. But, I anticipate that it is the conjunctions of the claims that beliefs *and* judgements are never conscious that will displease many. Yet this should not be the case. There is another reason why one should not be too surprised that judgements are never conscious once one has accepted that beliefs never are. This becomes apparent once we think again of the relationship between belief and judgement. A judgement *just is the beginning of* (i.e. the formation of) a belief state. But then, how could judging ever be conscious if it’s the “extremity” of a state that cannot be conscious? Unless one can show that a judgement is not a part of belief state, it seems difficult to sustain that judgements are ever conscious, once one has acknowledged that there are no phenomenally conscious beliefs.

One may then wonder what *D* is all about. I agree that this is not entirely clear. But, I am ready to accept an account of *D* that goes along the line of opponents to cognitive phenomenology. *D* is basically a matter of a change in visualizations, or some affective phenomena and perhaps *D* is in fact constituted by one’s having in mind that one believes or judges something. In other words, *D* might sometimes be a phenomenal aspect of a content of higher order thought. But, the

important point is that since *D* is not a doxastic phenomenal aspect strictly speaking, the fact that it is to some extent independent from doxastic episodes is not a problem anymore.

Finally, although I will not go further into this, if what I said is correct then this militates against the account of self-knowledge that take it that our self-knowledge is based on some conscious phenomenal aspect of a psychological mode. But this raises questions for another occasion.

I speculate that what I have said here concerning doxastic episodes can be extended to all conscious thoughts. If some conscious episode is a thought, then the phenomenal character of the thought has no part of it that is constituted by a phenomenal aspect of cognitive or intellectual mode.

Assuming that one can extrapolate in this fashion, we have also an answer to a question that appeared in the first chapter. Part of meaning of the Minimal Thesis is that conscious thoughts have a *sui generis* phenomenal character and by this we meant that it constitutes the phenomenal signature of a psychological kind. We are now in position to explain what the phenomenal signature of thoughts is: it is simply the phenomenal aspect of having something in mind that I described in the second chapter. With this claim, I am then in agreement with Braithwaite (1932) who argued:

“[...] the relation of entertainment is the cognitive relation par excellence, and the analysis of belief that I shall give will be in terms of it.” (p.131).

Furthermore, in contrast, I am in opposition to anybody who would claim that the phenomenal signature of conscious thought is a phenomenal aspect of judging or believing. The negative results we have obtained in this chapter concerning the phenomenology of attitude suggests that it is really the *way one can have something* in mind which is proper to thought.

Another thing to note is that by saying that the phenomenal signature of thought is the phenomenal aspect of content, I am not claiming that the phenomenal character of what we call a “conscious judgement” is just constituted by the qualities of *p*. I am not saying that thoughts are *fully transparent*. The phenomenal aspect that constitutes the phenomenal signature of thought is the *experience* of entertaining that *p* or of having in mind *p* or at least nothing of what I have said is incompatible with this.

3.6. Conclusion

The distinctive conscious aspect of conscious thoughts consists then in the way one has something in mind where this does not involve any conscious doxastic mode. But this is not all there is to conscious thinking. The way I described the conscious episodes of entertaining thought contents so far was a rather static picture. But, conscious thinking is not just having in

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mind propositions. It also consists in the active or passive way things cognitively or intellectually are brought to mind. In the last two chapters I will, then, examine some of these dynamic aspects of conscious thinking.

Chapter Four – Conscious active thinking

4.1. Introduction

In the second and third chapter, we discussed the way one has something in mind. However, we exclusively considered non-dynamic episodes of having something in mind and did not discuss the way conscious thoughts *occur*. What we have in mind *comes to our mind*. In this chapter and the next, I will consider two aspects of the way something comes to mind. In this chapter, I will examine the *active* dimension that characterizes some ways things come to mind, and in the next chapter, I will discuss the *temporal* aspect of the way things come to mind.

As in the two previous chapters, I will discuss three questions about the active aspect of the phenomenal character of some conscious thoughts. What are the reasons to think that there is such a phenomenal aspect of agency to some thoughts? If there is such a phenomenal aspect of agency in the case of some conscious thoughts, what are its distinctive characteristics? Assuming that there is such an active aspect in the case of some thoughts, does it reveal the non-sensory nature of the phenomenal character of conscious thought and thus provide some additional support for the Minimal Thesis for cognitive phenomenology?

The plan is to answer the first and second questions by examining an argument by Galen Strawson that purports to show that there is only a very limited sense in which there is conscious mental agency at all.¹³¹ The outcome of the examination of this argument will allow us to answer the third question concerning the Minimal Thesis.

4.2. The problem of conscious mental agency and cognitive phenomenology

Conscious agency, whether mental or bodily, deserves attention independent of questions related to cognitive phenomenology. First, it has significance in the context of the phenomenal intentionality research program we briefly discussed in the second chapter. Is the active phenomenal aspect of agential experience intentional? In this chapter, I assume that it is. I do not think that it is too contentious to assume that, in some sense, one is experiencing oneself as doing things in a way that is assessable for accuracy. More difficult questions arise once one tries to provide a more detailed account of the intentionality of agential experiences. Second and related to the previous point, phenomenology of action is crucial to the problem of free will.¹³² In this context, it is, in fact, a presupposition that our agential experiences are intentional. To be able to discuss the question of whether we experience ourselves *as* free or not, it seems that we must assume that our agential experiences present us as in some way assessable for accuracy.

¹³¹ Strawson (2003).

¹³² Deery (2015), Horgan, Tienson & Graham (2003).

Third, various issues related to the philosophy of action are also connected to agentic experiences. Is consciousness necessary for the existence of an action?¹³³ Is our knowledge of our actions (at least in part) grounded in the phenomenal character of agentic experiences?¹³⁴ Finally, agentic experiences are also interesting with regards to methodological questions concerning the study of conscious experience in general. Several severe disorders in conscious agency reveal aspects of our conscious experience that seem not to be accessible in everyday non-pathological experience.¹³⁵ One may wonder to what extent there can be a distinct philosophical knowledge of our conscious experiences next to the empirical knowledge we obtain from these studies of pathological cases of conscious agency. The numerous well-studied disorders that afflict agentic experiences are fruitful cases to consider in relation to methodological questions about philosophical attempts to understand conscious experiences.

Questions about conscious mental agency are scarcely treated in the context of the debate about cognitive phenomenology.¹³⁶ However, there are good reasons to think that things should be different. First, some thoughts are arguably mental actions. By thinking about the different ways one can get to some place, one is *doing* something, just like one is doing something when one tries to find keys at the bottom of a bag. Accordingly, if a conscious thought consists of one having something in mind then presumably, in cases of mental actions, the conscious way something comes to one's mind will have its own distinctive phenomenal aspect that deserves some attention. Second, it is a familiar theme that our awareness or consciousness of our bodily actions is special and distinct from our awareness or consciousness of the external world. It is often said that we do not need to perceptually observe our actions to know what we are doing.¹³⁷ Is something analogous at play in the case of mental actions? If yes, would it help us to understand whether the conscious features of thoughts belong to episodes of List 1 or List 2? These are questions that I will consider in the following sections.

4.3. An objection to the experience of mental action

According to Strawson (2003), all occurrences of thought-content are experienced as passive events, and if there are mental actions, it is only in the sense of mental acts *enabling* thought-contents to occur. Strawson called them "catalytic acts". Strictly speaking, in this view, occurrences of thought-content are never mental actions.

¹³³ Bayne (2010), Mossel (2005).

¹³⁴ Roessler (2010).

¹³⁵ Campbell (2002). See also Lynn & Graham (2000).

¹³⁶ Dorsch (2009), Peacocke (2007), Strawson (2003).

¹³⁷ Schwenkler (2012).

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To prove the passivity of an occurrence of a thought-content, Strawson considered various cases that, at first sight, seem to be thoughts that are actively brought about. Closer inspection, however, proves that this is not the case:

“- I'm now going to think that grass is green, and my thinking that grass is green is going to be a premeditated action: grass is green. There. And now I'm going to think something - I don't yet know what—and my thinking it is going to be a premeditated action: *swifts live their lives on the wing*. Both these actions disprove your last claim.” (p.234)

“Well, they are hardly natural cases of thought, but let us consider them. In the first case, that of thinking grass is green, it may seem that there is an especially concentrated, fully fledged action of comprehension-involving entertaining of a content. But is this really so? Is there really any such thing as an action of comprehension-involving entertaining of a content? What one finds, I think, if one reflects, does at one stage involve some sort of action, but this is just a matter of a silent mental imaging of words (as sounds or visual marks, say): the actual comprehending thinking of the content is something that just happens thereafter or perhaps concurrently.

In this case a comprehending entertaining of grass is green has already occurred previously - it has already been held in mind as an intended object of thought. Another event of (particularly emphatic) comprehending entertaining is then brought about by one's doing something of the priming or catalytic kind, such as generating a silent acoustic image of 'Grass is green' to oneself in some way—something that has already been allowed to be a genuine instance of mental action. But the event of entertaining itself is not an action, any more than falling is once one has jumped off a wall.” (p.235)

Three different ideas that appear in these paragraphs deserve to be highlighted. First, we should distinguish between two cases. On one side, there is the case in which one decides to think a *particular* thought-content such as *grass is green* and, on the other side, there is the case in which one decides to think *some* thought that eventually brings about the thought-content *swifts live their lives on the wing*. I will call the first case the “specific case” and the second case the “unspecific case”.

Second, as already mentioned, Strawson did not deny mental agency altogether. Silent mental imaging of words and other acts of priming that Strawson called “catalytic acts” which have the basic function of *enabling* and *contributing* to occurrences of thought-contents are genuine mental actions, according to Strawson.

Third, some terminological clarification will help. A mental event *M* is a mental action if and only if *M* is actively brought about. According to this terminology, to give an account of mental actions and experiences of a mental action is then to give an account of what it is like to actively bring about a mental event or what it is like to actively bring about a mental episode. Related to what we discussed in chapter two, we can also say that what it is like to actively bring about a mental episode is exhausted by *the active way something comes to mind*. In the second and third chapters, I sketched an account of what it is to have something in mind. In this chapter and the next, I am concerned with the *ways things come to mind*. Strawson's suggestion that I am considering in this chapter is that all the ways things come to mind are *passive ways*.

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Finally, the basic idea at the heart of the argument against active thinking is that, when one decides to think a thought-content, it turns out that “it has already occurred previously” and this is what prevents the occurrence of this thought-content to be an episode of active thinking. If we put aside for a while the category of catalytic acts, this is a way of representing, if not Strawson’s exact thoughts, then an argument that is at least Strawsonian in spirit:

- (1) (Whenever I engage in conscious active thinking) I consciously decide to think a thought
- (2) If I consciously decide to think a thought, then the thought I decide to think is already involved in the decision to think and is not experienced as intended
- (3) The thought I decide to think is already involved in the decision to think and is not experienced as intended (from (1) and (2))
- (4) If the thought I decide to think is already involved in the decision to think and is not experienced as intended, then the thought is not experienced as a thought that is actively brought about
- (5) The thought is not experienced as a thought that is actively brought about (from (3) and (4))

There are several further elements to consider with respect to this argument. First, one should be careful to take note that the thought that occurs as part of the decision to think is *not experienced* as intended and not *experienced as not intended*.¹³⁸ The latter claim is stronger than the first. The difference between these two claims is the difference between an absence of an experience and an experience of an absence. An experience of an absence is more challenging than an absence of experience. In some cases, it is tempting to argue that an experience of absence just is an absence of experience but sometimes an experience of absence is a positive phenomenon that involves more than an absence of experience. For instance, when one is used to seeing a huge building in a given place, when the building is demolished, it is as if one can *positively* experience the absence of the building in a way that involves more than just the absence of a visual experience of the building.¹³⁹

Second, I propose that the Strawsonian argument is to be understood phenomenologically. The occurrences of thought that are discussed are conscious occurrences. I take this to transpire in the quotes given above.

Third, according to Strawson, if all occurrences of thought-contents are experienced as passive events, it is a consequence of a certain temperament or personality trait. Some people might be inclined to experience their thoughts passively, while others might have more active experiences of their thoughts.¹⁴⁰ However, later, on the basis of Strawson’s own ideas, I will suggest that the passivity of the occurrences of thoughts is grounded in the nature of our mental episodes.

¹³⁸ Compare with Horgan, Tienson & Graham (2003: 335).

¹³⁹ Farennikova (2013).

¹⁴⁰ Strawson (2003: 230, 248).

Fourth, in order to simplify the discussion, I will assume that the decisions to think thoughts that we will be discussing happens in the context in which someone has a desire to attain some piece of information or to know something. This is contentious and I admit that arguably not all thinking has such an aim.

In light of the preceding remarks, I will then assess Strawson's argument in the following manner: in the next section, I will focus on premise (2). In Section 4.5, I will then examine premise (4). Finally, in Section 4.6, I will consider premises (1), catalytic acts, and more generally questions concerning cognitive situations from which one engages in active thinking.

4.4. Deciding to think

The specific case is the situation in which one decides to think a particular thought that p . Premise (2) is if S decides to think that p , the thought-content that p is already involved in the decision as an unintended thought.

Nonetheless we should make a distinction. Premise (2) contains two different ideas. A first idea is that if one decides to think the thought that p , then the thought that p occurs as a part of the decision. A second distinct idea is that if the thought that p occurs as a part of the decision, then the occurrence of the thought that p is *not experienced as intended*. Let us then examine these two ideas separately.

The first of these two ideas is plausible. To the extent that a content contributes to individuate a mental episode, then it seems that a given conscious decision to think that p could not fail to involve the thought that p . This seems not to be a contingent truth but rather a metaphysical truth. It is part of the nature of a decision to have some sort of content as a part of it and thus a decision to think that p cannot fail to have the thought that p as a part of it. This is also the reason, if Strawson is right about his claim that all occurrences of thoughts are not experienced as actively brought about, then this is nevertheless not because of some personal or character traits.

The second idea is slightly more problematic. I grant that, in the example given by Strawson, the thought-content *grass is green* seems not to be experienced as intended because it occurs as part of the project to think a particular thought that was not already previously entertained. However, this is not necessarily always the case. The thought-content *grass is green* might enter the decision to think that grass is green in a different manner. If one can have in mind something as intended that "enters the mind" in a different manner from the present specific case, then it seems possible that a thought with the content *grass is green* is part of the decision to think that grass is green, although it is also an intended thought. Consequently, the second idea is true only if there is no other way for a thought to enter a decision that differs from the present cognitive situation. However, it is not clear that this is the case.

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In the unspecific case, the thought that occurs as a result of a decision to think some thought is in one sense not already part of the decision to think. If *S* decides to think *some* thought and as a result of this decision, the thought that *swifts live their lives on the wing* occurs, then the thought-content *swifts live their lives on the wing* is not already involved in the decision, or if it is involved, it is only in the weaker sense that *swifts live their lives on the wing* is *some* thought.

A little more reflection suggests nevertheless that the unspecific case is not entirely different from the specific case. This becomes apparent if we consider more carefully the content of the decision in the unspecific case. If one decides to think some thought, then the content of the decision is still a particular thought-content. The content *to think some thought* is as particular as the content *to think that grass is green*. Consequently, when one decides to think some thought, the content *to think some thought* occurs as not intended just like the content *grass is green*. This is what should happen considering that the content of the decisions in both cases are the same in terms of their particularity.

Still, there is a difference between the specific and unspecific case. When one decides to think that grass is green, at the experiential level, the decision to think that grass is green seems to consist uniquely in thinking that grass is green. It is difficult to distinguish the thought that *p* and the decision to think that *p* that presupposes the thought that *p*. It would be wrong to describe the specific case as involving two distinguishable mental episodes of first thinking that *p* and then deciding to think that *p*.

In contrast, when one decides to think some thought, the overall experience is different. On the one side, one has the experience of the decision to think some thought that seem to consist in thinking the content *to think some thought* but, on the other side and in addition, one also experiences the occurrence of a thought-content like *swifts live their lives on the wing* that *results* from the decision to think some thought. The unspecific case is thus different from the specific case in that it involves *two* thought-contents. It is the occurrence of the second content that results from the decision to think some content that, on the one hand, *is not* experienced as intended *as a particular thought* but, on the other hand, *can be* experienced as intended when considered as answering the demand to think *some* thought.

So far I have not discussed whether a thought is being experienced as intended or not experienced as intended. What do I mean by this? An occurrence of a thought-content is experienced as intended just in case it is experienced as connected to practical reasons. In Strawson's unspecific case, the thought-content *swifts live their lives on the wing* is experienced as intended in the sense that one has in mind that *swifts live their lives on the wing* because one had the intention to think *some* thought. The intention to think some thought is the reason that one is thinking *swifts live their lives on the wing*.

As will become clearer later, the unspecific case constitutes the central case of our conscious active thinking. Consider again the unspecific case where one starts by deciding to think *some* thought. It is easy to see that one could add some further condition to the kind of thought that one aims to bring about. One could decide or have the intention to think some thought about a fun city. Suppose it occurs to you that Rome is fun. In virtue of what we have seen so far, the occurrence of the thought-content *Rome is fun* is experienced as intended. As I will argue later this is not sufficient for conscious thought to be experienced as actively brought about, but it is still a necessary condition.

There are two things we should not forget. First, the unspecific case presupposes the specific case and as we had worries about the specific case, we should remain cautious about the unspecific case. Second, and in response to the first point, all our discussion takes place in the context of an argument that starts with the assumption that conscious active thinking starts with a decision to think. However, there are good reasons to think that this is unrealistic. I will come back to both points later.

In summary, we have then two difficulties with premise (2). The first difficulty concerns the specific case. Although it is true that when I decide to think the particular thought-content *grass is green* this content occurs most often as not intended; nothing, in principle, prevents this content from entering the decision “in a different manner” as intended. A second more serious worry appears in the unspecific case. When one decides to think some thought, the thought-content *to think some thought* is not experienced as intended just like the content *grass is green* in the specific case. However, although the further thought-content *swifts live their lives on the wing* is also not experienced as intended as the particular thought that it is, it is nevertheless experienced as intended in the sense that it is *some* thought. Furthermore, one can change the example of the unspecific case, and then one will have decisions to think *some* thought with whatever kind of additional constraints. For example, one can decide to think a thought about a fun city and then a further thought can occur that will satisfy the decision (ex. *Rome is fun*). This is why the unspecific case constitutes the basic case for an occurrence of an intended thought. However, even in this case, the particular thought that occurs as intended is never intended as the particular thought it is.

4.5. Accounts of conscious active thinking

We are considering an argument for the claim that there is no active way of bringing something to the mind. If successful, this argument threatens the possibility of a positive answer to our first question about the existence of a phenomenal aspect of mental agency. However, in general, skepticism towards agentic experiences is rather exceptional. Philosophers who are concerned with the phenomenal character of conscious bodily actions often do not even bother

to defend the existence of this kind of experience. There is no problem of the phenomenology of action, as there is a problem of cognitive phenomenology. If there is a problem about the phenomenology of action, it is the problem of providing a specific account of its nature and its significance. It is puzzling how philosophers interested in agentic experiences end up with divergent accounts and often seem not even aware that there are dissenting views on the matter – Horgan and his colleagues are a notable exception.¹⁴¹

Some philosophers do provide us with reasons to think that there is something it is like to do something. For instance, Tim Bayne wrote that “[t]he existence of agentic self-awareness can be highlighted by drawing attention to pathologies of agency in which it is lost or disturbed. In the anarchic hand syndrome, patients will complain that they have lost control of a hand; that will report that one of their hands has acquired a “will of its own [...]. Of course, the fact that there are experiences of alienated agency does not entail that there are—or even could be—experience of (un-alienated) agency, but it surely provides some support for that thesis.” (Bayne 2011: 357).¹⁴² Bayne focused on pathologies of bodily agency but similar considerations can be made with the case of pathologies that afflict mental agency, such as cases of so-called “inserted thoughts”.¹⁴³

In light of these remarks and with the additional support from what we have already discussed with regards to the Strawsonian argument, it is reasonable to accept the following thesis:

(MT3) Some conscious thoughts have a phenomenal aspect of agency

In following sections, I will attempt to build a more elaborate account of this “phenomenal aspect of agency”. In order to do this, I will assess premise (4) by confronting it to some existing accounts of agentic experiences. The main question we eventually have to consider is whether a thought *not* being experienced as intended is an obstacle to its being experienced as actively brought about.

In contemporary literature, we can distinguish two types of accounts of agentic experiences depending on what they take to be the *core phenomenal aspect* in virtue of which agentic experience is really an experience of *agency*. The assumption that agentic experiences have such a core phenomenal aspect seems to be widely shared in contemporary literature.¹⁴⁴ For example, Elisabeth Pacherie (2008) writes that:

“[...] some aspects of the phenomenology of agency concern the action itself, what is being done, while others concern the agent of the action, her awareness that she is acting or that she is the agent of the action. The former aspects, constituting what we may call awareness of action, themselves subdivide into what and how, i.e., awareness of the goal pursued and awareness of the means employed to attain this

¹⁴¹ Horgan, Tienson & Graham (2003: 327-332), Horgan (2007: 185-90).

¹⁴² See also Bayne (2008: 184-5), Deery (2015: 4), Searle 1983: 89).

¹⁴³ Graham & Lynn (2000).

¹⁴⁴ Bayne & Pacherie (2014: 212-3).

goal. The latter aspects of the phenomenology of action, the sense of agency proper, may itself be subdivided into a sense of intentionality or intentional causation, a sense of initiation and a sense of control.” (p.195).

According to Pacherie “the sense of agency proper” consists in the awareness that the subject is acting but which can then be further subdivided into further phenomenal aspects.¹⁴⁵ What I called the “core phenomenal aspect” is what Pacherie calls the “sense of agency proper”.

Diverging views about agentic experiences can be stated in terms of what authors take to be the core phenomenal aspect of these experiences. In recent literature, numerous different phenomenal aspects of agentic experiences have been distinguished. Usually the core phenomenal aspect is taken to be one or several of these phenomenal aspects. Other phenomenal aspects will characterize more specific types of conscious actions.

Here is a non-exhaustive list of these phenomenal aspects of agentic experiences: There is a phenomenal aspect of (i) the “self as a source” (Horgan 2007: 187), (Nida-Rümelin 2007: 262), (ii) of willing (Smith 1992: 123), (iii) of being sensitive to reasons (Dorsch 2009: 61), (iv) various kinesthetic and perceptual episodes – in the case of bodily actions (Horgan 2007: 189), (Smith 1992), (v) of purposiveness (Bayne & Levy 2006: 50), Horgan 2007: 187), (vi) of the presence or absence of previous deliberation (Horgan 2007: 187), (vii) of free will (Deery 2015), (Horgan 2007: 189), (viii) of mental causation (Smith 1992, Bayne & Levy 2006: 51-2), (ix) of effort (Bayne & Levy 2006), (x) of trying (Horgan 2007: 189), (x) of control (Pacherie 2008), or (xi) of efficacy (Siegel 2005).

The two main accounts diverge on whether the core phenomenal aspect involves a *causal* element. The main non-causal account takes the core phenomenal aspect to be the phenomenal aspect of being sensitive to reasons or, more generally, a normative element. The causal account comes in two versions. According to a *mental episode causal account*, the core phenomenal aspect of an agentic experience is the phenomenal aspect of being caused in some suitable manner by some mental episodes. According to a *subject or agent causation account*, the core phenomenal aspect of conscious agency is the phenomenal aspect of being caused in the right way by the *subject* or the *agent*.

Smith (1992) defended a mental episode causal account for the case of bodily actions. According to Smith “[...] *my experience of acting* consists in my conscious volition, which occurs against the background of my relevant kinesthetic and perceptual experiences. And these three forms of awareness make up my *overall experience* in acting.” (p.122) On Smith’s account, it is the volitional aspect that constitutes the core aspect of an agentic experience and which consists also in an experience of causation: the volition causally brings about a bodily movement. Following this account, the phenomenological structure of the content of the agentic

¹⁴⁵ See also Bayne & Levy (2006: 50), Dorsch (2009: 61), Horgan (2007).

experience can be characterized in the following manner: “In this volition I am now willing that I pick-up-this-shovel *by so willing*, i.e. that I pick up this shovel and this volition causes my bodily movement in picking up this is shovel.” (p.126)

In several publications, Terry Horgan, John Tienson, and George Graham have developed a subject causation account of agentic experiences.¹⁴⁶ In defending their account, these philosophers engage directly with the mental episode causal account of agentic experience – although not the one of Smith in particular. According to Horgan and his colleagues, if you consider the case of the experience of holding up your right hand and closing your fingers into a fist, it would be wrong to describe it as an experience of “[...] first experiencing an occurrent wish for your right hand to rise and your fingers to move into clenched position, and then passively experiencing a causal process consisting of this wish’s causing your hand to rise and your fingers to move into clenched position.” (p.186)¹⁴⁷ This is why, in opposition to a mental episode causal account, their suggestion is that an accurate description of the content of an experience of holding up your right hand and closing your fingers into a fist is better captured with a description of the following kind: “[y]ou experience your arm, hand, and fingers as being moved *by you yourself* [...]” (p.187) Agentic experience is a matter of “[...] what-it-is-like of *self as a source* of the motion.” (p.187) Conscious bodily or mental episodes find their source of agency not in mental episodes but in the *subject*.

At first glance, it is perhaps not entirely clear how one should understand this metaphorical notion of “a self as a source”. However, a causal interpretation of the notion of “source” seems natural. This is, for instance, the way Nida-Rümelin (2007) understood the same point. “It seems quite obvious [...] that to experience oneself as active in one’s doing can be described equally well by saying that we experience ourselves as *the cause* or *a cause* of what happens.”¹⁴⁸

A normative account presupposes – in the same way as the preceding causal accounts – that an agentic experience is inherently intentional. In this view, a bodily or mental event is experienced as actively brought about just in case it has some normative feature such as being correct or appropriate in some sense. The clenching of my fingers into a fist is experienced as an agentic experience to the extent that it is *correct* or *appropriate* in some respect. The most natural way to understand this normative element is in relation to reasons. Dorsch (2009), for example, suggests that it is *sensitivity to reasons* that is at the heart of agentic experience. “[...] if our experience of our deliberate mental action did not reflect this sensitivity to reasons, it would not make much sense to call it an experience of activity at all: practical motivation seems to be at the heart of agency.” (p.62)

¹⁴⁶ Horgan (2007), Horgan, Tienson & Graham (2003).

¹⁴⁷ See also Bayne (2008: 192).

¹⁴⁸ Nida-Rümelin (2007: 262).

However, whereas Dorsch takes practical reasons to be at the heart of conscious mental agency, interestingly others believe that *epistemic* reasons may also be the agency factor for some occurrences of thoughts. For instance, Cassam (2011: 7) when discussing self-knowledge argued that “[t]o say that passing thoughts are not necessarily responsive, or responses, to reason and that one can distance oneself from one’s passing thoughts is to say that such thoughts are ones with respect to which one is passive.”¹⁴⁹ Of course, the way these reasons are part of one’s experience is open to further debate, but the general shape of the account is clear in the sense that it takes the core phenomenal aspect of agency to be constituted by something normative that is best understood in terms of sensitivity to (practical and/or epistemic) reasons.

What are the prospects of these different accounts of agentic experience? How do they help us with respect to the premise (4) of the Strawsonian argument? Here are three versions of these accounts:

The subject causation account. *S*’s bodily or mental episode *M* is experienced as actively brought about iff *S*’s bodily or mental episode *M* is experienced as caused by *S*

The normative account. *S*’s bodily or mental episode *M* is experienced as actively brought about iff *S*’s bodily or mental episode *M* is experienced as sensitive to reasons

The mental causation account. *S*’s bodily or mental episode *M* is experienced as actively brought about iff *S*’s bodily or mental episode *M* is experienced as caused by *S*’s mental episodes

The mental causation account. The mental causation account is the phenomenological version of the standard causal theory of action. A given bodily or mental event is an action just in case it is preceded by an adequate causal sequence of other mental events; the mental causation account of agentic experience takes an experience of mental events causing further mental events or bodily events to be the core phenomenal aspect of conscious agency. However, although a mental causation account of agentic experience would smoothly underpin a causal theory of action, it nevertheless suffers from phenomenological inaccuracy. As Horgan and his colleagues point out, it would be wrong to describe the action of holding up your right hand and closing your fingers into a fist as an experience of mental episodes causing bodily events.¹⁵⁰ According to Horgan, such a conception suggests rather an alienating experience. “[...] one does not normally experience one’s own actions in that way – as passively noticed, or passively introspected, causal processes consisting in the causal generation of bodily motion by occurrent mental states.”¹⁵¹

There are several things to comment on these observations. First, one can have doubts about the idea that one experiences one’s actions as caused by mental states because one thinks that

¹⁴⁹ See also O’Brien (2013).

¹⁵⁰ Horgan (2007: 186).

¹⁵¹ Horgan (2007: 187).

we never experience causal relations. But, this is not a point I will press on now. In the present context, I am assuming that we can have experiences of high-level properties such as, for instance, causal relations.¹⁵² Another point of concern is that some may doubt that one can have an experience of mental episodes causing bodily or other mental episodes.¹⁵³ Some cases appear to be problematic. For instance, a visual experience that causally guides an action is especially questionable for all those who think that visual experiences are transparent or diaphanous.¹⁵⁴ In what sense could we experience a visual episode causally guiding an action, if such kind of episode is completely transparent? It would have to be the object of the visual experiences that guide the action. However, this is clearly not the way we experience our actions. However, if this case seems problematic (and there is also room to disagree about the complete transparency of visual experience), it is not true that the causal power of all conscious mental episodes is dubious in all circumstances. Horgan's example of an episode of fear causing a shuddering is a rather convincing example of an experience of a mental episode causing a bodily movement. There are also good examples of experiences of mental episodes causing other mental episodes. For example, when one makes random associations between different thoughts, it seems clear that one has an experience of a thought causally associated with another preceding thought.

Of course, even if there are experiences of mental causation, the problem is that this kind of experiences still seems insufficient for agentic experience. All experiences of mental causation we have reviewed are rather good examples of mental episodes that are not conscious mental actions. Accordingly, unless one can identify a way an experience of mental causation can constitute an agentic experience, we have reasons to reject this account.

An additional problem for the mental causation account is that it is not clear that all conscious actions are experienced as preceded by a mental episode that brings them about. Cases of minimal actions (also called sub-intentional actions or doings) threaten the idea that an agentic experience consists of an experience of mental causation.¹⁵⁵ Examples of minimal actions include the following: Searle's example of a man lost deep in his thoughts who suddenly gets up and start pacing around the room, the spontaneous laughter of someone who is hearing a joke, the smile of a person caught in her thoughts or someone's scratching his head while pondering over some serious issue.¹⁵⁶ It is not entirely clear whether these minimal actions are really different from other actions but, at the experiential level, at least, it seems difficult to say whether there is volition or any other kind of mental episodes that is experienced as what brings about the bodily movement.

¹⁵² See also Siegel (2009).

¹⁵³ Nida-Rümelin (2007: 259).

¹⁵⁴ Harman (1990), Tye (2002).

¹⁵⁵ Bach (1978), Nida-Rümelin (2007).

¹⁵⁶ Nida-Rümelin (2007: 255-6).

The subject causation account. For Horgan and his colleagues, the difficulties plaguing the mental causation account of agentic experience make a subject causation account all the more attractive. Unsurprisingly, this account has its own troubles. First, consider Hume's observation that one can't find oneself in one's own experience.¹⁵⁷ If this is an accurate phenomenological observation, how should we understand the subject causation account of agentic experience? How can we experience ourselves as a causal source if we are not given in experience in the first place?

There is no short and easy answer to this problem. An adequate response to this objection would probably require, on the one side, an elaboration of the idea of something being given in an experience. It is arguably a misguided assumption to think that if something is given in experience then it must be given in the manner of red patch. Something can phenomenally contribute to an experience albeit it is not given as an object of the external world. The way our conscious experiences are *unified* into a single stream of consciousness is certainly an example that contradicts the "red patch conception" of experiential givenness. Likewise, one could also argue that the self is not given as red patch and makes a phenomenal difference in its own distinctive way. On the other side, there is probably also room to refine the notion of an experience of causation. For instance, the humean objection seems to assume that if one has an experience of causation then one needs to have an experience of both *relata* of the causal relation. However, one does not have to accept this. For instance, can't we perceive something as a causal effect without perceiving its cause? Furthermore, it is also common for friends of agent causation theories of actions to take the causal power of the agent to be irreducible to event causation. Accordingly, it might be a mistake to think of the subject as a causal source of something on the model of everyday causation. Arguably, the experience of the self as causing something is to be understood as a *sui generis* experience of causation.

Imagine that you enter a room and sit on a chair. Suppose further that, under your weight, the chair collapses. In such circumstances, how should we characterize your experience of your effect on the chair? I would suggest that your experience of the collapsing of the chair has some similarities with the experience of efficacy as it is described by Siegel (2005). You are experiencing your causal efficacy. However, if this is an accurate description of the situation, should we then say that, in a scenario like this, you are also having an experience of actively bringing about the collapsing of the chair? Is this an agentic experience of destroying the chair?

I take it that we can imagine a case where it is clear that you are not undergoing an experience of actively bringing about the destruction of the chair although you also experience yourself as being the cause of that event. A supporter of the subject causation account will thus have to

¹⁵⁷ Hume (1739-40/1978: Book I, Part IV, Section VI).

exclude such a case. He needs to spell out the “right way” a subject has to causes a bodily or a mental episode so that we end up with an agentic experience.

There are several options here. First, he may argue that in the case of the collapsing of the chair, it is only your body that causes something and not your *self*. However, without committing myself to any more specific theory of the self, I think that any such theory should respect the constraint that some of the things that we ascribe to your body are also things we ascribe to yourself. For instance, when I see your face, it must also be the case that I see you. Similarly, I take it that at least some causal effects of your body are causal effects that you bring about (actively or not). This point granted, it is clear that Horgan and his colleague have something different in mind when they describe agentic experiences in terms of an experience of a self as a source. Thus we need something else.

I have no real satisfactory answer to propose and the only thing I can suggest is that to make the difference between agentic experiences and the case of the chair, the best solution is to appeal to the *sui generis* nature of subject causation. In the case of the collapsing of the chair, the experience of one’s body causing the chair to collapse is only an experience of ordinary event causation and is therefore not suited to capture agentic experiences. In addition, in the case of subject causation, the subject is *directly* bringing about something.

In contrast, in the case of the chair, the destruction of the chair is not directly caused by the subject. The subject directly causes a bodily movement but he does not directly cause the destruction of the chair. Consequently, we can discard the case of the chair as misleading since it suggests that an experience of an ordinary causal relation could constitute the core phenomenal aspect of agency. However, clearly, this is not the way we should understand the proposal of a subject causation account and thus the case of the chair is not a real problem.

However, the case of the collapsing chair is revealing something else that is missing in the subject causation account. It appears that a subject can causally bring about a thought or a bodily movement while being completely ignorant that he is doing this. Nothing in the subject’s experience would explain why it is one particular thought that occurs instead of another one. From the perspective of the subject, there would be no way to make sense of the occurrence of a given thought or bodily movement and it would be a pure random matter why a given thought occurs.

All this is counterintuitive. We need something else to make sense of the occurrences of thought or bodily movement. Of course, the most natural way to explain why a given thought occurred is to appeal to the reasons one may have to do something. Let us examine the normative account of agentic experience.

The normative account. What it is like to be sensitive to reasons? Different views and different cases seem possible. Dorsch (2009: 50), for instance, has a rather non-demanding conception of

our experience of epistemic or practical motivation. It can be non-conceptual, minimal, fallible, and non-distinctive. An experience of being sensitive to reasons is non-conceptual in the sense that having this experience of sensitivity to reasons does not require one to have any specific conceptual capacities. An experience of being sensitive to reasons is minimal in the sense that we are not necessarily able to identify the reasons for which one is doing what one is doing or believing what one believes. Third, if we experience a mental episode as sensitive to reasons, this does not mean that the mental episode is actually rationally motivated as it seems to be; one might be mistaken about this in various ways. Finally, the mental episodes that are practically or epistemically motivated need not to be phenomenally different from other mental episodes or even phenomenally different from each other – in the terminology of Pitt (2004) this means that these episodes need not to have a proprietary and distinctive phenomenal character. In addition to these characteristics that concern both practical and epistemic motivation, Dorsch argues that the episodes that are experienced as practically motivated are also experienced as *immediately* responding to the reasons. The notion of “immediacy” that Dorsch has here in mind can be roughly characterized in the following way: mental episodes that are practically motivated do not rely on certain passively experienced epistemic or causal processes in order to occur.

This picture of the way a mental episode is practically motivated can still be refined. In particular, the modesty of the proposal makes it somewhat hard to understand exactly what is distinctive for a mental episode to be experienced as sensitive to reasons. I want to stress two troublesome points and leave other issues for another occasion.

First, I am not convinced by Dorsch’s characterization of the immediacy that he takes to be part of our experience of mental agency. Strawson’s observation concerning the way contents occur seems accurate *even in the case* of mental occurrences Dorsch takes to be cases of conscious mental agency. When one tries to directly conjure up the mental image of a nice place, the occurrence of the mental image happens in exactly the same way as it is described in the scenario of the specific or unspecific cases in which one decides to think a thought. In both cases, the particular mental image is not experienced as intended. In Dorsch’s terminology there is a passive experience of a causal process.

Second, if one need *not* be able to identify the reasons for which one is mentally doing something, in what sense is the actively brought about mental episode still experienced as practically motivated? What in the phenomenal character of the occurring episodes indicates that they are practically motivated?

On this modest account, the only way I can understand the suggestion that the mental episode is still experienced as practically motivated is that although one is not aware of the reason *as* the reason, the reason is still phenomenally present in a different matter. How should we

characterize an experience of a reason which is not an experience of reason as a reason? One way to understand this is that a mental episode is experienced as practically motivated in the sense that it is experienced as having some generic normative property of being *correct* or *appropriate*. According to this proposal, the occurrence a mental episode is experienced as being correct or appropriate in some sense although it is not part of the experience with respect to what it is correct or appropriate.

This modest account may be further refined by adding a further element. An episode of visualization can be experienced as correct or appropriate and the subject has a disposition to retrieve the reason why he is visualizing such and such a thing. Consequently, although one is not having in mind the reason one is mentally doing something, it is still easily accessible.

Against this modest view, one might nevertheless be attracted by the idea that practical reasons have a more pregnant presence in our experiences. A way to develop this idea is to resort to Valaris' (2014) argument for cognitive phenomenology. His argument appears in the context of his transparency account of self-knowledge that we briefly discussed in the third chapter. However, here I will make abstraction of any such further concern.

Valaris considers the case of bodily actions and claims that there is phenomenological difference between actions that are done for reasons and those that are not. He writes then that: "My argument is going to be that this difference is often explained by another one: the phenomenological difference between being aware of a content at the phenomenal, subjective level, and being guided by information which is not so available to one. This latter difference is the difference that an occurrent conscious belief makes." (p.10) In the terminology I have used, this means that in the case of actions done for reasons, one *has in mind* why one is doing what one is doing.

To illustrate the argument, Valaris gives examples. One involves Fred who has the unconscious belief that all of his endeavors are doomed to failure. Fred would sincerely deny having this belief even though this unconscious belief would explain some of Fred's actions. It would for instance explain why Fred rejects a job offer that on all accounts would otherwise appear to be perfect for him. According to Valaris:

"[...] in such a case it is very likely that Fred himself will have experienced his rejection of the offer as unintelligible: he might, for example, say that he simply found himself unable to accept the offer. My suggestion is that the explanation of Fred's sense of unintelligibility lies in his not being aware, at the subjective level, of his endeavors as doomed to failure." (p.12)

Valaris' argument can be extended to the case of mental actions. However, to avoid the objection that the phenomenal difference between actions that are done for a reason and action that are not done for a reason is just a matter of a faint experience of appropriateness or correctness, we should modify Valaris' example. We should consider a pair of actions which

consist in the same bodily movements but which are done for different reasons. If an experience of a reason is only a generic experience of appropriateness or correctness then the pair of actions should be experienced in the same manner. However, it appears that we can find good examples of actions that consist in the same bodily movements and which are done for different reasons and in which the overall experiences are different. Consider, for instance, the situation in which you wave to a friend compared to the situation in which you do the same movement with your hand but it is only with the intention to relax your wrist. (Imagine also that in both situations your friend believes that you are waving to him and you realize this only later.) It seems to me that in the case of bodily actions, at least, the suggestion that one also has in mind the reason why one is doing something is compelling.

How can we then extend this to the case of conscious active thinking? Is it accurate to say that what it is like to actively bring about a thought-content involves that one has in mind why this thought-content is brought about? I think it is. And the reason for this is that it is a general experiential phenomenon that what comes to our mind does not occur as discrete phenomenal units. Thoughts occur as connected to other thoughts we have and this need not concern only cases of practical reasons. Peacocke describes in a convincing manner this general phenomenon:

“When you have a thought, it does not normally come neat, unconnected with other thoughts and contents. Rather, in having a particular thought, you often appreciate certain of its relations to other thoughts and contents. You have a thought, and you may be aware that its content is a consequence, perhaps gratifying, perhaps alarming, of another conclusion you have just reached; or you may be aware that its content is evidence for some hypothesis that you have formulated; or indeed that it is a counterexample to the hypothesis.”¹⁵⁸

My suggestion is thus that when a thought is experienced as actively brought about, one not only has in mind the content of that thought but also the reasons why one wanted to entertain that thought.

Suppose it occurs to you that Rome is fun. There are then several ways one can embed this thought into a scenario where it becomes clear that the subject actively contributed to the occurrence of the thought. One possible case, an instance of the unspecific case, is that the subject decides to think a thought that would satisfy his desire to recollect of fun places. Another possibility, again an instance of the unspecific case, is that the subject decides to think a thought that would satisfy his desire to know where to go for vacation.

Occurrences connected to reasons. My proposal is then that in the first scenario what comes to mind is not just the thought that Rome is fun but also that you’re having in mind that Rome is fun *because* you wanted to recollect of fun places. And in the second case, similarly, you have in mind not only that Rome is fun but also that Rome is fun *because* you wanted to know where to go for vacation. The suggestion that the thought-contents are connected to reasons becomes palpable if

¹⁵⁸ Peacocke (1998 : 84)

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we contrast how having in mind a thought-content like *Rome is fun* can change depending on the context in which it occurs.

Still, some may not be convinced that one has really in mind these thoughts as connected to reasons. How should we make these connections more salient? I think that what I suggested in the second chapter is still usable. If you do not have something in mind, you need to *think more*. (Recall, I admitted that this mental act is not conclusive evidence that you do not have something in mind – because you can think more about something you already have in mind – however, it is nevertheless a good indication of not having something in mind.) Accordingly, if “episodes of thinking more” are good indication of not having something in mind, if a thought actively brought about would not occur *as connected* to reasons, then one would need to think more in order to make plain why these thoughts occurred in the first place. However, the fact is that most of the time we do not need to think more to get clear why a given thought occurs; most of the time it is absolutely clear why we have in mind a given thought-content. Therefore, I take this constant lack of further experience of thinking more to be the sign that the connections to the reasons are already part of what one has in mind when a thought-content like *Rome is fun* occurs.

Further, the two examples we considered are already enough to demonstrate that it will be difficult to establish a clear cut boundary between thoughts that are experienced as actively brought about and thoughts that are not. In the first possible scenario, the thought-content *Rome is fun* matches perfectly the intention of the subject. However, in the second scenario, there is already a little mismatch. It seems that it is rather the thought-content *Rome is the place you need for your vacation* that would perfectly match the intention to think a thought that would satisfy his desire to know where to go for vacation. Furthermore, we can also easily imagine that *Rome is fun* occurs when one tries to think a thought that would satisfy a desire to recollect where one’s mobile phone is. Clearly, when such unrelated thoughts occur they are not experienced as actively brought about. (This is also exactly what happens with unpleasant thoughts “keep coming back” despite the subject making all effort to think about something else.)

The point I want to press is that when one decides to think some thought, then one will bring about various thought-contents that fit more or less with what one has decided to think. There are various ways in which a thought can respond to reasons while not perfectly fitting with what was intended and still be experienced as a case of conscious active thinking. Suppose for instance that you decide to think a thought that would satisfy your desire to know where to go for vacation. Suppose further that it occurs to you that Paris is place where to go for vacation. However, let us suppose that you also know that you can’t go to Paris for some reason. Accordingly the thought that Paris is a place where to go for vacation would not respond to your intention to think a thought that satisfies your desire to know where to go for vacation. But of

course, this should not speak against your thought being experienced as actively brought about. What matters is that it is still relevant for what you were trying to think.

And then there are also many borderline cases. A familiar example is when you try to recollect the name of the author of the novel *Emma*. Suppose everything works smoothly and the thought-content *it is Jane Austen* occurs immediately. However, there are also cases where the relevant thought occurs suddenly but only a day after. In these circumstances should we still say that the thought came to the mind in an active way? Clearly it will occur as connected to the reasons we had but not as something that we brought about. In contrast, we can also imagine cases where the thought occurs only a little bit later and where it will be difficult to classify as actively brought about or not.

What is important in the picture I am sketching is not only the way an occurrence of thought answers practical reasons but also the causal power of the subject who brings about the thought-contents. However, as it became apparent in the unspecific case, the subject cannot choose the particular thoughts that he causes. In a sense, it is a bit mysterious that one is able to bring about thoughts that are relevant to what one wants to think although one cannot choose them.

It should be clear that with all this I am only scratching at the surface of how conscious thoughts occur. And I will have to leave for another occasion a more thorough account of all this. In particular, I have to leave out the way thoughts occurring as connected to practical reasons interfere with the way they occur as connected to epistemic reasons.

✎ ✎

In the last paragraphs, I tried to sketch how there is normative aspect to the way we experience thoughts that the subject has the power to bring about. All this discussion was initiated by the subject causation account. It seemed that just appealing to a causal notion does not suffice to grasp all the agentic aspect of agentic experience. It seemed that there was no way to make sense of why a given thought was occurring. The normative account of agentic experience was thus introduced with the hope to complete the picture. I believe that we have reached something more satisfying.

A last comment is required. It is worth to emphasize that the normative account on its own, also is insufficient for agentic experiences. It seems that a thought-content that occurs completely detached from all causal power of subject, can still be experienced as answering the reasons a subject has to think it. But in such fortuitous circumstances, I do not think we would want to say that it is experienced as actively brought about. My conclusion is thus that the core phenomenal aspect of an agentic experience must be a combination of a subject causation account and a normative account.

Our verdict concerning premise (4) in the Strawsonian account is therefore that if a thought is not experienced as intended, then this speaks against its being a thought that was actively

brought about. I argued above that an experience of a self as source and an experience of a normative feature are necessary for an agentive experience. Premise (4) is then acceptable but its main interest was that it enabled us to uncover further aspects of conscious active thinking.

4.6. Other cases

Strawson's examples are restricted to certain very specific cognitive situations where one decides to think something. In this section, I will examine whether there are other possible ways to engage in conscious active thinking (and thereby I will also examine premise (1)).

First, let's consider Strawson's catalytic acts. If there are such mental episodes, then there is a reason why conscious mental agency should not exclusively be considered as thought-contents occurring after conscious decisions. However, after inspection, it will turn out that by Strawson's own lights it is dubious that there is any such category of mental acts.

The examples Strawson gives for catalytic acts fall into three categories. In the first category there acts like silently imagining key words or sentences. In the second category there are acts such as rehearsing inferential transitions, refreshing images, and dragooning one's wandering mind back to a previous thought-content. And in the third category there is the act of attention that produces no thought-content but is an action and perhaps also the act of initiating "a kind of actively receptive blanking of the mind in order to give any missing elements a chance to arise."¹⁵⁹ Let's examine these three categories.

The first category of catalytic acts seems not to be different from the cases of occurrences of thought-contents as in the Strawsonian argument. Suppose you set your mind to a philosophical problem and this involves rapidly and silently imagining key words or sentences. But then the question is "Which words?". And it seems that acts of imagining words or sentences occur in exactly in the same way as the occurrences of thought-contents. One will again wonder why it was that word or that sentence that came to mind.

The second category of catalytic acts involves mental episodes that are similar to the examples of thoughts that illustrate the cognitive situation in which one has his mind already engrossed with some content and on the basis of which one tries to actively bring about another thought. How should we characterize these mental acts on thought-contents that have already occurred? Strawson's examples include rehearsing an inferential transition refreshing an image or dragooning one's wandering mind back to the previous thought-contents, for instance. The general problem for all these cases, and that brings them back to Strawson's initial cases of an occurrence of thought-contents, is that whatever operation a subject *S* wants to make with such a thought-content *p*, it will involve some decision to do something. Suppose that I have in mind

¹⁵⁹ Strawson (2003: 232).

some images or thought that p and that I want to refresh it. How do I get the idea of refreshing this image or thought? It seems again that I need to have in mind the content of *refreshing this image or thought that p* . And how will I bring about this content? Again, we always fall back on the same situation.

The last category of catalytic acts concerns mainly the act of attention. This is arguably the most plausible case that cannot be brought back to the other cases. However, it is also difficult to understand what attention is if it is conceived as a mental act completely independent of any occurrence of a thought-content. A natural understanding of an act of attention is that it is way of undergoing other conscious experiences. We look and think *attentively*. However, if this is correct, attention is not separate mental act that can bring about a perception or a thought.

Second, the cognitive situation assumed in the Strawsonian argument is that of a subject trying to fill in a blank mind. This is however unrealistic. One is never in the situation of starting a “first mental action”. One has always things in mind or is under the impression of various things presented through sensory perceptions. Consequently, often it is on the basis of something we have already in mind that we engage into further conscious thinking.

This brings us back to premise (2) and the specific case. If a subject S decides to think a particular thought that p , then this decision presupposes the thought-content p . I mentioned the possibility that this thought might enter the decision “as an intended thought” but not directly as a result of this decision. Let us consider this possibility.

Suppose S decides to think some thought and that as result it occurs to him the thought-content *swifts live their lives on the wing*. This thought will count as intended in the sense of being *some* thought. The suggestion is that S having in mind the thought about swifts decided to think it again. Therefore, the thought *swifts live their lives on the wing* is part of a decision *as an intended thought*.

This case is nonetheless not as promising as it appeared at first. On the one hand, if one decides to think a thought that entered the decision as intended then in the end this comes down to keeping in mind a thought that one already had. Although not entirely worthless, this does not correspond exactly to what we take to be interesting cases of conscious active thinking. On the other hand, if on the basis of a thought that occurs as intended (or simply that we had already in mind for whatever reasons), we try to think something different, then it turns out that ultimately we will fall back on cases that already figure in the Strawsonian argument. In order to see this, let us change the example and consider how we think about an object that is presented in visual perception.

Suppose that a red ball visually appears to you. What kind of thing can you mentally do with the appearing of the redness of the ball? While focusing on the redness one could decide to think about other objects with *this color*. One demonstratively picks out the redness of the ball to think

something else. But again, how do we come to think the part of the thought-content *about other object with* this color? It seems that to make this decision we need to bring to mind the part of the thought-content *about other objects with*. And the same troubles we had with the initial specific case reappear with respect to this part of thought-content. In other terms, even if the Strawsonian argument seem to assume carelessly a cognitive situation where a subject tries to fill in a blank mind, things do not really change with cases where the subject has already in mind some thought-content and tries on this basis to think something new.

Another reason to be dissatisfied with premise (1) is that it assumes a too narrow similarity with bodily actions. In the case of bodily actions (although this does not happen always), we sometimes do deliberate about a possible particular thing to do and then decide to accomplish it. I can deliberate about whether it is worth saying something and then finally decide that it is. But, with respect to mental actions, deliberation about whether I should think one further particular thought or not seems particularly misplaced.¹⁶⁰

The only case that illustrates something analogue to bodily action happens when one decides to postpone thinking about some issues. However, this is not a case where one decides to think a further particular thought. It's rather that one decides to engage in a whole thinking process at some later time. It seems obvious that even if in some circumstances where we do deliberate about engaging in thinking or not, we do not consider the different token thoughts we need to go through in order to get to some final thought. There is no such thing as representing a detailed course of mental actions that would correspond to the way one can think of the different things one will do on a Saturday morning. (One way perhaps to make sense of this difference between mental action and bodily action is that in active conscious thinking we often pay less attention to the thinking episode themselves rather than to the objects of thought. We do not think of *thinking* whether *p* is the case but rather directly whether *p* is the case.)

At this point one may object that my discussion is flawed because many thoughts I have considered as possible episodes of mental actions are simply not mental actions. Many philosophers think that beliefs are not up to our will and thus that we cannot decide what we believe.¹⁶¹ Consequently, the simple idea of deciding to think something is completely misguided from the start. However, nothing in what I have said so far implies that a subject decides or has the intention to bring about a doxastic episode like a belief or a judgement. My discussion is not about deciding to think what is true. It is only about bringing to mind some thought-content. Furthermore, what Strawson's unspecific case illustrates is precisely that the particular thoughts that we think are never decided or intended. In the example with the mobile phone, it is not that the subject decides to think that the mobile phone is at home. One decides or has the intention to

¹⁶⁰ Peacocke (1998).

¹⁶¹ Williams (1973).

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think a thought that will satisfy my desire to know the location of the phone. But the thought-content *the mobile phone is at home* that eventually will perhaps even be judged to be true is never part of what is intended.

Finally, premise (1) does not do justice to what is our common predicament as thinkers. Our need to think is constant and various. Practical concerns, for instance, will constantly command to think thoughts about the movements and location of our body. Should I go to the toilets upstairs or downstairs? Accordingly, we are not often in position to deliberate about our next thought as it is suggested in premise (1). We are, as matter of fact, constantly in situation where we already need to think immediately some thought that meets some condition (i.e. the unspecific case) and it can even happen that one will not even have in mind that one needs to think a thought of a given kind. Accordingly, most of the time we engage in conscious active thinking, it is with intentions to think thoughts that meet some condition although we didn't start with a conscious decision. Our power as thinkers is to bring about particular thoughts that we do not choose but that often enough satisfy what we want to bring to our mind.

Let us recap. The Strawsonian argument against conscious mental agency we have considered fails. First, it is not true that we always engage in conscious thinking on the basis of a conscious decision. It is even a distinctive feature of mental actions that we do not deliberate on them in the same sense as we can with respect to bodily actions. Second, the most common way a thought-content is experienced as actively brought about is that a subject experiences himself as the causal source of the occurrence of the thought and that the occurring thought is experienced as intended. The thought will be experienced as intended in the sense that it will be experienced as connected to reasons one has to think that thought. However, the thought that occurs as connected to the reasons will nevertheless also always be experienced as unintended as a particular thought. When it occurs to me that Rome is fun, the thought can be experienced as intended in the sense that I will have it in mind as connected to the reason that I wanted to think of a fun place to go. However, that the thought was about Rome was not something that was intended. Furthermore, although the reason I have to think a thought can be part of what I have in mind while engaging in thinking, this need not be the case. Accordingly, the reasons we have for thinking are experienced as connected to occurrences of thought-contents but not necessarily as what initiated the occurrences of a thought-content. Finally, although one does not have the ability to think (decide) a particular thought that *p*, one is nevertheless in a position to causally initiate a thinking process that produces particular thought-contents that may satisfy what we want to think.

This picture of conscious active thinking is then the answer to our second question about the phenomenal aspect of agency. Let's then consider our third and last question.

4.7. *The non-sensory phenomenal aspect of conscious active thinking*

We have reached the conclusion that in some specific sense some conscious thoughts are actively brought about. Our next task is to find out whether thoughts with the phenomenal aspect of agency give us also a further reason to accept the Minimal Thesis. The crucial proposition on which this further step hinges is the proposition that agentic experiences are non-sensory perceptual experiences.

In contemporary literature on agentic experiences of bodily actions, there is a divide between those who take bodily agentic experience as a species of sensory-perceptual experiences and those who refuse such a conception and favor a non-sensory account. On the one side, Horgan, Tienson and Graham say that agentic experience is “an aspect of sensory-perceptual experience, broadly construed”.¹⁶² And according to Tim Bayne bodily “agentic experience are best thought of in perceptual terms – they are the products of a dedicated perceptual system (or perhaps systems). Just as we have sensory systems that function to inform us about the distribution of objects in our immediate environment, damage to our limbs, and our need for food, so, too, we have a sensory system (or systems), whose function it is to inform us about facts of our own agency.”¹⁶³ On the other side, Ginet (1986), for instance, suggests that the experience of *voluntarily* exerting our bodies is non-perceptual. Peacocke (2007) also explains that the position he is developing concerning conscious mental action “[...] is, then, in head-on disagreement with the view that the character of conscious thought involves only states that are sensory or, like imagination, individuated by their relation to sensory states.

How should we think of the phenomenal aspect agency of conscious active thinking?

I will suggest that there is simple reason why conscious active thinking is a non-sensory perceptual experience although not in the sense that one might have expected. The hindrance that prevents to see this is that the usual ways agentic experiences are discussed fail to make a crucial distinction. The distinction is between experiences *of* action and experiences that *are* actions. Most discussions of agentic experiences assume a conceptualization of the issue in terms of experiences *of* actions. But once we think of agentic experiences in terms of experiences *of* action, it becomes natural to wonder what kind of experiences they are and how their objects (i.e. actions) are given to a subject of experience. Moreover, it becomes even very tempting to think of agentic experiences in sensory perceptual terms. The “of” in “experience of action” seems very much like the “of” we find in a visual experience of a material object.

However, by making the distinction between experiences of action and experiences that are actions, we have the mean to get ourselves rid of this temptation to identify agentic experiences to some kind of perceptual experiences. The reason is simply that agentic

¹⁶² Horgan, Tienson & Graham (2003: 324).

¹⁶³ Bayne (2011: 355-6).

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experiences are not experiences *of* actions or at least we are mistaken in thinking of agentic experiences in terms of *representations of* actions. An agentic experience is rather a *way of experiencing* and therefore also ways of representing the world (if experiences are representations). We undergo agentic experiences while we actively touch, see, move our body or think. To touch, to see, to feel one's body or to think are all different kinds of experiences, but an agentic experience is not a *kind* of experience in the same sense. Consequently, it cannot be a further sensory perceptual experience next to, say, visual experiences.

According to the account of agentic experiences I have just sketched, in conscious active thinking, the subject experiences himself as causally bringing about what he has in mind and things coming to his mind as connected to reasons. Similarly, a visual experience can be said to be an agentic experience in the sense that the subject is conscious of himself as causally bringing about the way things visually appear even though appearances do not occur as connected to reasons. However, one need not accept that all kinds of sensory perceptual experiences are also agentic experiences. Looking or listening, for instance, are plausible candidates for perceptual experiences that are also agentic experiences.

Finally, an important point to add is that the intuition that there is a sense in which we are conscious *of* our actions can also be accommodated in this picture. It is compatible with the account of agentic experience just sketched that sometimes one is acting consciously not only in the sense that one is actively experiencing certain things but also in the sense that one has in mind – in the sense explained in the second chapter – what one is doing. One can be conscious *of* his action by way of thoughts one is entertaining about his actions. I can undergo an agentic experience *of* touching the surface of the car in the sense that I have in mind that I am touching the surface of the car and where this also involves my actively experiencing in a tactile way the surface of the car.

Assuming that agentic experiences are not a further kind of experience they cannot be counted as a sensory perceptual experience. Does this mean that we have a further reason to accept the Minimal Thesis? On the one hand, it seems that it does not. Phenomenal aspects of agency seem to characterize both conscious thought and sensory perceptual experiences. Consequently, a phenomenal aspect of agency is not what distinguishes conscious thinking from conscious episodes like visual or pain experiences.

On the other hand, I characterized the core phenomenal aspect of agency as involving the experience of a self as a causal source and the experience of being intended. If the self as a causal source can be part of some sensory perceptual experiences, there is then no reason to take it to be what distinguishes conscious thoughts from others kinds of experiences. But, a thought experienced as intended is a phenomenal aspect of conscious thinking that does indicate something distinctive. Basically, a thought experienced as intended means that it was

experienced as connected to reasons. And this was to be understood as a feature of *what the subject has in mind*. When a thought that p comes to mind in an active way, the subject has in mind not only that p but also a reason to think something that the thought that p satisfies. In other words, a conscious thought experienced as intended is just a more sophisticated way of having something in mind. And since we have already seen that to have something in mind is enough to distinguish conscious thoughts from other kinds of experiences, it turns out that the fact that some thoughts have a phenomenal aspect of agency is also a reason to accept the Minimal Thesis.

4.8. Conclusion

What it's like to bring about a thought-content is thus an experience of thought-content that is causally brought about by a self and is also experienced as intended. The second phenomenal aspect of being experienced as intended also indicates why conscious active thinking is a non-sensory perceptual experience. However, this phenomenal aspect of agency does not exhaust the entire dynamic dimension with which a thought comes to mind. There is also a temporal dimension that we will examine in the next chapter.

Chapter Five – Conscious instantaneous thinking

5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, we examined the active way a conscious thought comes to mind. How does the way a conscious thought come to mind extend over time? In this chapter, I will consider some reasons to think that conscious thoughts occur instantaneously.

As in the preceding chapters, I will consider our three usual questions. What reason is there to think that there is an instantaneous aspect? What is the nature of this aspect? Does it reveal that conscious thoughts have a non-sensory phenomenal aspect?

One thing to note beforehand is that, in contemporary literature, the instantaneous character of conscious thought is usually seen as reason *against* the existence of cognitive phenomenology.¹⁶⁴ While I disagree with this view, I will not try to refute it. (Chudnoff (2015: Chapter 4) is an extended discussion of this issue.) Instead, I will indirectly argue that it is mistaken by making plausible the alternative view according to which conscious thoughts do occur instantaneously.

My argumentative strategy will be to deflate the mysterious aura that surrounds the idea of instantaneous conscious thoughts by making distinctions and explaining the meaning of the main notions. I will begin by making sense of the notion of “instantaneity” in section 5.2 to answer our first question. In section 5.3, I address the question of the reasons we have to think that thoughts occur instantaneously. In section 5.4, I discuss the problem of how we can make sense of the continuity there is in our conscious experience once we have acknowledged that thoughts occur instantaneously. Finally, in section 5.5, I consider the question of whether the instantaneous or continuous phenomenal aspect of thoughts can provide further support to the Minimal Thesis.

5.2. The meaning of “instantaneous thoughts”

Instantaneous mental episodes are intriguing and deserve much more attention than I am able to provide here and for reasons unrelated the problem of cognitive phenomenology. The instantaneity of some mental episodes is an interesting phenomenon as it provides us with an uncommon way of categorizing the mental. First, the distinction between instantaneous and non-instantaneous mental episodes does not correspond to the distinction between thought and non-thoughts. Thoughts are not the only mental episodes that are instantaneous. To visually recognize somebody and to decide to do something are arguably both instantaneous events. Second, it does not go clearly with the distinction between active and passive mental episodes.

¹⁶⁴ Tye & Wright (2011: 341-3). See also Soteriou (2007).

Some actively brought about mental episodes are instantaneous and some passive mental episodes are also instantaneous. A decision is something we make and is also an instantaneous event, but to visually recognize somebody is arguably a passive event. Third, it seems difficult for cognitive phenomenology opponents to argue on a general basis that the instantaneous character of mental episodes is a sign of a non-conscious mental episode. Decisions are conscious and they also are instantaneous.

The following is the thesis we examine throughout the chapter:

The Instantaneity Thesis:

(MT4) Some conscious thoughts have a phenomenal aspect of instantaneity

What do I mean by “phenomenal aspect of instantaneity”? There are two ways to highlight at the instantaneity of conscious thoughts. First, we can contrast an occurrence of a thought with other mental episodes that are not instantaneous. Consider for instance an intense headache. It can remain the same for a long period. In contrast, thoughts introduce discontinuity in our conscious life. It seems that there is a significant variation. Second, the instantaneous character of conscious thoughts becomes palpable in relation to our active powers. In the previous chapter, I suggested that we cannot choose to think a particular thought but that, in principle, we are able to decide to keep in mind a particular thought that already occurred. However, it is usually hard to keep in mind the same thought without any alteration over a long period time. Conscious thoughts escape our will and their tendency to slip out of what we have in mind often suggests the metaphorical expression of the “speed of thoughts” to describe the brief occurrences of thoughts.

These initial characterizations point to a rather obvious phenomenon. Thus, it is not surprising that it is discussed in the philosophical literature. However, we find distinct ideas that superficially look similar and are better not lumped together.

First, Locke (1690/1971) observed that it is impossible to keep in mind the:

*“self-same single Idea a long time alone in his Mind, without any variation at all, [...]”*¹⁶⁵

This fits with our intuitive characterization above.

Second, consider also Geach’s (1957) claims:

“Spoken words last so long in physical time, and one word comes out after another; [...]. The same would go for the duration of mental images of words, or any other mental images; one could sensibly say “I rehearsed the words in my head as I watched the beetle crawl from one side of the table to the other”.

“With a thought it is quite different. Even if we accepted the view sketched in §14 that a judgment is a complex of Ideas, we could hardly suppose that in a thought the Ideas occur successively, as the words do in a sentence; it seems reasonable to say that unless the whole complex content is grasped all together –

¹⁶⁵ Locke (1690/1971: Book II, Chapter XIV, Sections 13-15).

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unless the Ideas, if Ideas there are, are all simultaneously present – the thought or judgement just does not exist at all.” (p.104).

Third, following another philosophical tradition, Mulligan & Smith (1986) make distinctions between three kinds of mental episodes. One kind gathers “punctual acts”.

“We shall assume, in the light of our general ontology above, a rough and ready opposition between mental acts, mental processes and mental states. Mental acts are temporally punctual rememberings, noticings, recognisings, realising, and the like. Mental processes are temporally extended considerings, wonderings, observings, deliberatings, and the like. Mental *states* are for example states of conviction or belief, or of non-episodic love or hate. These neither occur nor go on but rather endure. Each act serves as a boundary between one mental state or process and another. A judging serves as the initial boundary of a state of belief; a deliberating serves as terminal boundary of a process of deliberating, and so on.” (p.117).

In a broad sense, Geach, Mulligan and Smith and Locke seem to have the brief character of conscious thought in mind. However, there are differences between these authors and, ultimately, I would like to show that they are not all highlighting the same phenomenon.

First, there are terminological differences between these different authors. Geach often talks about ideas presented “simultaneously”. Others, when discussing Geach’s view, speak of the “instantaneous” character of thoughts or judgements, as I do.¹⁶⁶ In contrast, Mulligan and Smith, following Reinach (1911/1982), talk about “punctual” mental acts. Locke uses the notion of “variation” and succession” in the way thoughts are temporally short lived.

Second, in the case of Mulligan and Smith, the temporal dimension is related to an ontological dimension. A punctual mental act is an *event* that consists in the initial *boundary* of a *state* or a *process*. Although Geach’s point that we grasp a complex content all at once could be interpreted as a punctual event, Locke’s point about variations in ideas as about punctual events that consists in boundaries seem to be more difficult to understand.

The ontological difference between Geach, Mulligan and Smith, on one side, and Locke on the other, suggests a third difference. While the three former philosophers seem to take the notion of “instantaneity” or “punctuality” as picking out a *strictly* temporally non-extended event, Locke is better interpreted as having a different understanding of the brevity of the occurrences of ideas. These ideas that constantly succeed each other are likely not punctual events but rather temporally short-lived events that have some temporal extension. It seems that, if Locke thought of the occurrences of ideas as temporal boundaries, he should have given another description of the way different ideas succeed each other. If ideas were temporal boundaries, it is not just that they are constantly succeeding each other but also that, within a short time span, they could be *enormously numerous* or, if there is no idea succeeding immediately after another, there must be gaps without any ideas. Locke, however, mentions nothing like this. Consequently, the

¹⁶⁶ See also Soteriou (2007).

instantaneity with in which ideas occur, according to Locke, is better understood as not strictly instantaneous. Although they are short-lived, ideas *à la* Locke are not temporal boundaries.

A fourth difference again concerns the distinction between psychological modes and intentional content. In Geach's quotation, what is instantaneous is the way the *conceptual constituents of the contents* of thought occur. However, in the case of Mulligan and Smith, what is emphasized as instantaneous or punctual are rather certain *kinds of psychological modes*. We are told that *judging, noticing, recognizing, or deciding* are punctual and not the way the constituents of the contents of these episodes occur.

The difference between psychological mode and intentional content, allows us to make an important distinction. According to Geach, judging consists of the instantaneous grasping of all the conceptual elements constituting the content of the judgement. However, one may wonder: "What happens once the judgement has been executed?". Does the judged content simply disappear without leaving any traces? However, as we have already seen in chapter three as well as in Mulligan and Smith's excerpt, a judgement is simply the formation of a belief or the initial boundary of state of belief. If this is correct, it seems there is no reason to think that *after* a judgement has been executed there is nothing left. Nothing in what we have seen so far prevents the possibility that once it has been judged that *p*, the subject keeps in mind the proposition that *p*. This suggests a further distinction: we could say that either a mental episode of *grasping a content* is instantaneous or that a mental episode of *entertaining a content* is instantaneous. Geach (1957) clearly has only the former in mind and does not seem to consider the possibility of the latter. This appears more clearly if we look at how he deals with the question of whether there really could be a judgement that occupies "a mere moment of physical" time.

"[...] could a judgment be regarded as occupying a mere moment of physical time? If so, then either in any finite stretch of time there would be an illimitable number of judgement (or other thoughts), or there would be flashes of thought at discrete instants separated by gaps of thoughtlessness; the first alternative at least is plainly false, but the second might seem possible." (p.105)

However, concerning the first alternative, it is not clear why there *should be* an "illimitable number" of judgements. If thoughts are instantaneous, there *could be* such an illimitable number, but that doesn't mean that it will necessarily happen. In addition to their temporal character, it is plausible that there are further constraints that govern occurrences of judging and prevent an illimitable number of judgements. With respect to the second alternative, if our distinction between grasping and entertaining is correct, although Geach seems ready to concede the possibility of some gaps of thoughtlessness, there should not necessarily be any such gaps. After a judging occurred – which consists of grasping a content –, the content could be entertained until, say, a next judging.

Related to this distinction between grasping and entertaining, there are some concerns about the conscious character of such episodes. It is not clear whether Geach for instance would count judgment as conscious. Although Mulligan and Smith, and Locke might be interpreted as having conscious episodes in mind¹⁶⁷, I would like to remind the reader that I do not want to say that some conscious episodes of grasping consist of conscious episodes of *judging*. In chapter three, I argued that the mode of *judging* was never conscious. Accordingly, on my account, an episode of grasping is conscious and strictly instantaneous, but it is not a matter of a conscious psychological doxastic mode. More precisely, and to be in line with what I said, conscious occurrences we call “judgements” are episodes of grasping that consist of events of *entering into* episodes of entertaining thought-content. Entering into an episode of entertaining consists then, also, of something coming to the mind. Entertaining a thought corresponds, of course, to an episode of having something in mind. The upshot from all this is that in what follows, whenever I speak of judgement as of a conscious episode, I refer to entering into the episode of entertaining a thought-content.

We have seen two important distinctions. The first holds between strict and non-strict instantaneity. The second is between grasping and entertaining a thought-content. If we combine these distinctions, we have four possible ways understanding The Instantaneity Thesis. First, some conscious thoughts (for example, grasping) are strictly instantaneous. Second, some conscious thoughts (for example, grasping) are non-strictly instantaneous. Third, some conscious thoughts (for example, entertaining) are strictly instantaneous. Fourth, some conscious thoughts (for example, entertaining) are non-strictly instantaneous.

The rest of this chapter will be concerned with the defense of the first and the last of these theses:

The Thesis of Strict Instantaneity of Grasping:

(T09) Some conscious thoughts (graspings) have a phenomenal aspect of instantaneity_{Strict}

The Thesis of non-Strict Instantaneity of Entertaining:

(T10) Some conscious thoughts (entertainings) have a phenomenal aspect of instantaneity_{Non-strict}

The reason I do not consider the second thesis should be clear. Unless one grasps all the conceptual elements of the content *at once*, the judgement does not exist. This leaves no space for a temporally extended event. The reason I do not consider the third thesis, is that it would mean that one could not keep in mind a thought-content one has just grasped. It would mean there is no such thing as the fourth thesis. However, what reason is there to reject the possibility that once all the conceptual elements of a content are in place one can still keep in mind that content? I don't see any such reason.

¹⁶⁷ Mulligan (2003: 202).

I take it that all these clarifications should already make the claim that conscious thoughts are instantaneous more acceptable. In the next section, the reasons for the instantaneous character of conscious thought are made in the same spirit of dissolving the oddities surrounding the idea of instantaneous thoughts.

5.3. Arguments for instantaneous thoughts

First, let us consider the Thesis of Strict Instantaneity of Grasping. Why is a conscious thought, in the sense of grasping, an instantaneous event? Consider Geach's (1969) point:

"I think Norman Malcolm was right when he said at a meeting in Oxford that a mental image could be before one's mind's eye for just as long as a beetle took to crawl across a table; but I think it would be nonsense to say that I 'was thinking' a given thought for the period of a beetle's crawl—the continuous past of 'think' has no such use." (p.36).

What is of interest to me in this excerpt is the remark concerning the inadequate use of "to think" in the past continuous. This brings us back to Vendler's distinction between different kinds of verbs.¹⁶⁸ According to Vendler, we can make a distinction between verbs that possess the continuous tense and verbs that do not. To the question "What are you doing?" one can answer "I am running" or "I am writing" but not "I am knowing" or "I am believing". Activity verbs like "to run" or "to write" belong to the category of verbs for which the continuous tense applies and which also include accomplishment verbs, such as "to draw a circle" or "to run a kilometer", that pick out activities that have climax or an end point that have to be reached for the activity to have occurred at all. If I don't run till the last meter of the whole kilometer, I have not run a kilometer. In contrast, verbs for which the continuous tense does not apply include the category of state verbs such as "to know" and "to believe" as well as achievement verbs such as "to win the race" or "to recognize something". The difference between these further categories is that state verbs can be predicated of a subject at a different moment for some time, whereas achievement verbs can be predicated only at a single moment. Although one can ask questions such as "How long...?" and answer with a response such as "For such-and-such a period" with respect to state verbs, this is not the case with achievements verbs. Furthermore, according to Vendler "[...] in case of pure achievement terms the present tense is almost exclusively used to report the actual finding or winning, while the seemingly paradoxical "Now he has found it" or "At this moment he has won the race" is." (p.147).

The differences between all these kinds of verbs suggest an argument for the instantaneous character of conscious judgements. One has to argue that "to judge" is an achievement verb that picks out a conscious instantaneous event. Or, at least, one has to argue that some sense of the verb "to judge" does not accept the continuous tense and picks out instantaneous events.

¹⁶⁸ Vendler (1957).

Arguably, there are some uses of “judge” that are not that of achievement verbs. When one answers the question “What are you doing?” with sentences such as “I am judging that the party should be canceled”, one is using this verb with a meaning that is different from the meaning of achievement verbs. The meaning is rather that of a *making an assessment* or, in some circumstances, it could also be understood as meaning a dispositional state.

Is this argument convincing? One may be suspicious of any argument that is based on such linguistic considerations. However, I will not press this point. The main problem with this argument, and in relation to what is of interest to my project, is that it does not tell us anything about instantaneity *as a phenomenal aspect* of conscious thought. Perhaps one can come to appreciate that a judgement is an instantaneous event on the basis of such linguistic consideration but this nevertheless falls short of demonstrating the conscious character of the instantaneity of grasping. Or, to put it in other terms, an opponent to cognitive phenomenology could accept that a judgement is an instantaneous event on the basis of such linguistic considerations even though he rejects the idea that this instantaneity has anything to do with the conscious character of thought.

Closely related to this argument, is another one that relies on the distinction between different kinds of ontological profiles, rather than the distinction between types of verbs. As we already saw in the chapter about conscious modes, if a judgement is not an instantaneous event then, presumably, it is extended in time like accomplishments, activities, or states. However, since it cannot be established that it has some of the features of such categories extended in time, it seems that we can be confident that it is an instantaneous event.

First, why should we not view a judgement as an accomplishment? Soteriou (2007), in the steps of Geach, argues:

“If judging were an accomplishment, it should be possible to stop *S* halfway through his act of judging. It should be possible for there to be a situation in which it was not yet true that the subject had judged that *p*, but in which it was true that he had started judging that *p*. However, here we might ask, what could the subject have done that counted as starting the act of judging, and what else would he have needed to do in order to finish his judging? If we think of the content of the act of judging as having parts that signify the temporal parts of the act, then this would perhaps provide us with an answer. But Geach’s observation is that we should not regard the propositional content of an aspect of mind in this way. We can think of the content as having a structure, and so as having structural parts, but these structural parts do not signify the temporal parts of the aspect of mind they individuate.” (p.546).

If a judgement were an extended event, then one could figure out a place where one has already started to judge but not yet finished.¹⁶⁹ The claim is that we cannot identify (i) what it would consist of having started a judgement, despite not yet finished, and (ii) what it would consist of finishing a judgement that has already been started.

¹⁶⁹ See also Smith (1987: 213).

This brings us back to what we have already seen in the chapter about conscious modes. Although one could take the activity of assessing the evidences supporting some proposition p to be part of the judgement that p that follows, this will ultimately not work. If judgement consist of taking as true that p – as we have seen in the third chapter –, then as long as one is assessing evidence with regard to whether p is true, one has not already taken p as true. Therefore, one is not already judging. In the case of grasping, something similar can be said. If we understand grasping as coming to entertain a thought-content, then whatever one is doing before one grasps something, then one has not already grasped the thought-content.

Second, if judgement is not an accomplishment, why is it not an activity? Soteriou suggests judging that p is usefully contrasted with imagining that p . Imagining that p is an activity that one can *intend* to engage in for some time. The activity one must engage in is either perceptual imagining or propositional imagining. However, according to Soteriou, things are different when it comes to judging. It does not require the subject to be doing anything. Or, at least, the outcome – the belief state – of a judgement is something that does not require anything to be done.¹⁷⁰

I am not sure that imagining is the best example of a mental episode to use to illustrate a mental activity. To reflect or ponder seems better suited. I can have the intention to reflect later in the afternoon about a sensitive issue. However, with respect to judgement, this does not to make sense. We have seen that whatever you are doing before judging that p , it cannot consist of the beginning of judging that p .

However, although the point about the ontological profile about judging makes sense, it seems that this reasoning suffers from the same problem as the one that plagued the reasoning that is based on linguistic considerations. It is not enough to show that a judgement is an instantaneous event in order to establish that some thoughts have an instantaneous *phenomenal aspect*. It seems that we have to find a better way to highlight the distinctive conscious aspect of the instantaneity of judging or entering into the state of entertaining a thought-content.

Another way to understand the idea that judging is strictly an instantaneous event is that our concepts of *judgement* or *grasping* work as a concept which applies without degrees.¹⁷¹ For instance, let us consider and contrast the concepts of *knowledge* and *hope*. Suppose I hope that you will come to my place. My hope can then increase or decrease over the course of a day. I can have more and more hope that you will come. However, if at some point I come to know that you will come, then it cannot be the case that later in the day I “know more” that you will come. I might have more or less *justification to believe* that you will come, but once, the conditions for knowing that you will come are in place, then it cannot happen that later I will “know more” that you will come. In other words, the concept of *knowledge* applies all at once just like the concepts

¹⁷⁰ Soteriou (2007: 546-7).

¹⁷¹ See Unger (1975: Chapter 2).

of *judging* and *grasping*. In other terms, the relation between grasping and entertaining is similar to the relation between coming to know and knowing or between becoming pregnant and being pregnant. The moments when one comes to know that something is the case or that one gets pregnant are both instantaneous events. It cannot be that there is an instant where one has started to get pregnant but is still not fully pregnant or that what one started to know but does not yet fully know. If one seems to find situations in which one has started to get pregnant or to know something, I believe one will notice that these are cases where one is not already pregnant or knowing anything at all.

The preceding point about the kinship between the concept of *judgement* with absolute concepts such as *knowing* or *being pregnant* suggests that there are many instantaneous events. Instantaneous events are picked out by absolute concepts. To the extent that some of these situations can be experienced, one can argue that an instantaneous event of conscious grasping is to be understood by analogy with these other experiences of instantaneous events.

Here are two examples of experiences of instantaneous events. The first is seeing something, (for example, a car) starting to move. First, you see it at rest and then you see it in motion. However, unless you are careless you presumably visually experience the car from the time it is at rest until the time it is in motion. The moment it starts to move happens in the time span you are watching the car, you cannot miss the moment where it starts to move. Thus you will experience the instantaneous event of the car starting to move.

The second example, perhaps more convincing, concerns the experience of touching an object such as a table. Or, more accurately, it is the *experience of getting in touch with* the table which is an experience of an instantaneous event. Of course, one can touch the table for some time and this is why it is only the event of *entering in contact with* the table that consists of the experience of an instantaneous event. Again, it seems obvious that one will be aware of one's bodily sensation while one is approaching the table and eventually also when one touches the table. Since the moment, one is getting into contact with the table happens within this interval one cannot miss it.

Some objections will target contingent or irrelevant features of these examples. For instance, some will point out that some events of something starting to move are unperceivable (suppose the car starts to move very slowly) or some will say that at a microscopic level physical matter does not behave in such a neat manner. But, concerning the first point, I grant that some instantaneous event might not be experienced because our sensory organs aren't sensitive enough. And, with respect to the second point, my claim concerns our experience of objects in the everyday world; the way matter behaves at the microscopic level is not an object of our experiences.

Another point of concern is that seeing a car starting to move or touching a table are experiences *of* instantaneous events whereas grasping is not necessarily an experience *of* an instantaneous event but still is necessarily an instantaneous experience. I grant that even though it makes the analogy weaker than what one might have wished, it nevertheless does not extinguish its entire persuasive force. To the extent that one can be aware of one's own experiences in some manner, then one should, in principle, be in position to have access to the instantaneous phenomenal aspect.

A more subtle objection, which suits well with the case of seeing the car starting to move, is that one cannot really discern anything like the experience of an instantaneous event. I can see the car at rest and when it is moving but I cannot really see when it starts to move. The car starting to move is an elusive event that just consists of the state of being at rest *and then* being in motion. There is no experience of an instantaneous event over the succession of the experience of the state of being at rest and then being in motion.

This objection brings us back to the idea that grasping is a boundary – the initial boundary of state or a process. Boundaries and, for instance, holes are metaphysical awkward items. Our experiences of these entities can be puzzling. Consider the case of a hole. In what sense can we really experience a hole? After all, a hole is some kind of absence, but then – assuming that a visual perception requires a causal connection – how can an absence cause a visual perception? Similarly, where exactly is located the boundary of the car starting to move? Does it really exist? And how should we understand that moment where the car starts to move? Is it already moving or is it still at rest?

Although this remains only a very broad outline of a possible solution, the case of the hole suggests a solution for how we can experience a temporal boundary such as a grasping. If one sees the hole in my shirt, then somehow one will also see the shirt. Or, more precisely, one could argue that seeing the hole in my shirt consists in seeing my shirt. One sees the hole *by* seeing the particular “holed” surface of the shirt. Similarly, in the case of the car starting to move, one has the experience of the car starting to move *by* visually experiencing the car at rest and then in motion. And then one could say something similar for the case of grasping. The phenomenal aspect of an instantaneous experience of grasping a thought-content is to be characterized in terms of the neighboring experiential episodes – for instance entertaining episodes – that precede and succeed the grasping. More generally, the hunch that motivates this argument is that boundaries are entities that ontologically depend on other entities. Likewise, our experiences of these entities have, as primary objects, the entities on which these others entities depend.

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Let us then consider the Thesis of non-Strict Instantaneity of Entertaining. Locke's suggestion that it is impossible to keep in mind the "*self-same single Idea a long time alone in his Mind, without any variation at all, [...]*." seems plausible. Locke urges his potential detractor to try by himself:

"For Trial, let him take any Figure, any Degree of Light or Whiteness, or what other he pleases; and he will, I suppose, find it difficult to keep all other Ideas out of his Mind: But that some, either of another kind, or various Considerations of that Idea (each of which Consideration is a new Idea) will constantly succeed one another in his Thought, let him be as wary as he can." (Book II, Chapter XIV, Section 14).¹⁷²

The constant change in the mental content one is having in mind pointed out by Locke is to be understood as non-strictly instantaneous. It does not consist in a kind of boundary that separates different mental episodes. Further, if things happen this way, it does seem to be a contingent matter. It is perfectly conceivable that some subjects have the power to keep in mind a thought-content for more than a few moments. Relatedly, I don't have a definite answer to the length one can keep in mind a thought. Speaking from my experience and very approximatively, it would always be less than a second.

An objection to the idea that entertaining is non-strictly instantaneous appears when we think of the cases of thought that one would express with very long sentences. How can such a "long thought" be non-strictly instantaneous? However, a long description does not necessarily refer to a complex item that would somehow require extraordinary cognitive resources to grasp. "The property of many material objects manufactured by poor and unhappy human beings" can refer to the property of being round. This is why, the real question rather concerns the way we grasp what someone says when uttering a sentence.

On the one hand, if we say that we grasp the thought when the last word is pronounced, then one can wonder what happens all the times before. What had one in mind before the full sentence was asserted? However, on the other hand, if we say that one grasps the thought expressed by the sentence before the sentence is completely asserted, it is unclear that the correct thought could be grasped before the last word was pronounced. How could I grasp the thought-content *the red ball is on the lawn* before I've heard the word "lawn"?¹⁷³

I have no good answer to this problem. I can speculate about two kinds of answers. One is to argue that there are non-propositional ways of thinking and in consequence before the sentence is fully asserted, the subject entertains non-propositional thoughts – episode of thinking *of* – with respect to what is said at the beginning of the sentence and then puts everything together into a judgment with a propositional content once everything has been said. A second possibility is to object to an oversimplified conception of the mental act of understanding a sentence. One

¹⁷² Locke (1690/1971).

¹⁷³ See Geach (1957: 105-6).

should not read off the structure of the mental episode of grasping a proposition from the structure of a sentence. What happens in the case of speech understanding is that while a sentence is asserted one goes through several different mental episodes of the type *this sounds means x_1* , *this sounds means x_2* , etc. and ultimately one grasps the proposition expressed by the whole sentence on the basis of the various thoughts about parts of the sentence.

Finally, one should also question an assumption that I made in presenting this problem. When someone starts to articulate a long sentence, why is it that one cannot experience the beginning of the sentence *with* the middle or even the end of the sentence? In my presentation above I made the assumption that there is a succession of experiences that constitutes the whole experience of hearing the sentence but that in strict sense there is no such thing as an experience of hearing the whole sentence. This assumption might be questioned in future work.

5.4. Continuity in conscious thinking

Our initial characterization of instantaneous thoughts suggested a picture of our overall experience being chopped in discontinuous distinct cognitive units succeeding each other. One thought comes after another and nothing ever stands still. But to say that there is just no continuity at all seems also an exaggeration. As much as our conscious thoughts are fleeting in the way I suggested so far, *there is* also some continuity in our conscious thoughts. We *can* consciously keep in mind some thought-content. How should we account for that? And how is this compatible with the instantaneous character of conscious thoughts?

In what follows I will sketch some possible ways there is continuity in our conscious thinking. The aim is not to provide a full account of this phenomenon but rather to illustrate how one can carry on this issue starting from the topic of instantaneous thoughts.

We can distinguish at least two kinds of continuity in thoughts. One kind of continuity is a matter of having constantly the *same thought* in mind whereas the second kind is then a matter of having a succession of distinct types of thoughts in mind that are nevertheless in some sense in some relation of continuity – one thought following from another.

But how are we to make sense of the idea that one can keep in mind a thought-content given what we said with respect to the Thesis of non-Strict Instantaneity of Entertaining? Primarily, there are examples that contradict this last thesis. For instance, when one is giving a talk, one can also constantly have in mind what a particular person in the audience is thinking. Or, when one is looking after his keys but already behind schedule one may have in mind the thought that one has to go. Or still, another case would be when one is trying to answer a question. One may think of different things although one is also all along keeping in mind the same question.

Holding a proposition. One way to make sense of this kind of continuous thoughts is perhaps Chudnoff (2015)'s account of holding in mind a proposition. He argues that:

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"[...] [holding a thought] in mind will partly consist in other mental states and events obtaining or occurring. For example, various other thoughts about how I might use this proposition proceeding with the proof will occur to me. Holding the thought that p in mind is not merely bearing a certain attitude – judging, entertaining, recollecting, or whatever – to the proposition that p . It is a more complicated mental state or event that consists in various other mental states or events obtaining or occurring. Holding the thought that p in mind is cognitive. And it can be counted as having a propositional structure: there is the holding in mind attitude and there is the proposition that p . But it does not just have propositional attitude structure. It is more like reasoning through the proof." (p.99).

The basic idea of holding in mind a proposition is then that it does not consist in just one single attitude or mode but is rather constituted by several of them. And although Chudnoff does not explicitly acknowledge any temporal extension of the mode of holding in mind a proposition this seems clearly to be part of that kind of psychological mode. This is implicit when he compares holding in mind to a process of reasoning through a proof.

Accordingly it seems that one can hold and thus keep in mind a thought-content p in the sense that one has various successive or perhaps even co-occurring thoughts about p . For instance, while thinking whether p is true, one may wonder about what the consequences of p are or whether one should accept a weaker thesis than p etc.

But then the sense in which one can keep the same thought that p in mind is simply that the content p is part of the successive thoughts one will be entertaining throughout a given period of time. However, even though it seems plausible that *sometimes* one keeps the same type of thought in mind by way of entertaining the same content with different successive mental episodes, this seems not to fully capture a sense in which one keeps constantly the same thought in mind. It seems that the examples I have started with concern cases where the thought has more "stability". The way Chudnoff conceives of holding in mind a proposition seems to involve too much variety in the way one keeps in mind of thought and ultimately this seems unable to account for "stability" present in the initial examples. Of course, all this does not mean that there is no such thing as holding in mind a proposition but only that it is not what accounts of the kind of continuity we are looking for.

Focal and non-focal thoughts. By considering the examples of thoughts that one seems to be able to keep in mind for a while, one may have the impression that these thoughts are different from the cases of thoughts that lead us to the Thesis of non-Strict Instantaneity of Entertaining. Another way to think of having continuity in thinking by keeping the same thought in mind is then to resort to the distinction between *focal* and *non-focal* conscious thoughts. Roughly the suggestion is then that although some thoughts are constantly changing while *in the focus of our attention*, some thoughts can be kept in mind to the extent that they recede into the non-focal area.

The distinction between focal/non-focal conscious episodes is likely to be more plausible in the case of visual experiences. Kriegel (2009: 173-4) argues however that one would be mistaken to think of conscious thinking as simply the succession of discrete intellectual or

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cognitive episodes. He thinks that thoughts admit just as much of focal and non-focal occurrences:

“If we could examine in detail a stretch of this stream, we would be liable to find a number of propositions before the mind at any one time. Thus, as I focally think of tomorrow’s lecture, I may also peripherally think that I have yet to pay last month’s electricity bill.” (p.174)

The distinction between focal and non-focal thoughts if workable at all illustrate then how there are different ways to have something in mind than what was perhaps implicitly suggested in the second chapter. In all we have seen so far we have already distinguished several different ways to have something in mind.

First, there is simply the having in mind that the mobile phone is at home and where this a case of a focal thought. Second, as we saw in relation to the abstracted manner in which we entertain things, when we have in mind that the mobile phone is at home, we might also have in mind that the mobile phone is something. I argued that if a subject *S* has in mind that the mobile phone is at home, then if *S* also has the mobile phone in mind as having any other properties, then it is purely a contingent matter. But that does not prevent that in certain circumstances a subject has in mind a given object of thought as also having various other properties. Consequently, granted that there are possible situations in which one thinks that the mobile phone is at home and one also has in mind that the mobile phone is something, one should nevertheless recognize that the way one has in mind the location of the mobile phone and the way one has in mind that the mobile phone is something are completely different ways in which one has something in mind. We could say that in our example one has in mind in a *primary way* that the mobile of phone is at home and that one has in mind in a *secondary way* that the mobile phone is something.

Third, considering the case of non-focal thought we can make further distinctions. There are various different ways in which one has something in mind in a non-focal way. For instance, it seems that in the case where I am late and that I have in mind the non-focal thought that I have to leave to take the bus this is different from the case where the non-focal thought is not related to a temporary element like the urgent need to leave home. For instance, everyday sitting in my usual office, I have also in mind that I am in the office. One may object to this last suggestion that this thought-content *I am sitting in the office* is not something that is really phenomenally conscious. I agree and perhaps Siewert (2013) is right when he writes that in some cases all there is to such non-focal thoughts is that one may easily entertain them but not that one is actually entertaining them.

“For example, while I am thinking (“focally”) about what to say in an email I am writing, I am “marginally conscious of” the need to finish soon to get ready to go to the airport. But when this thought does “come to the fore,” breaking my concentration on the message, am I to say I recall that even before this I had been continually having the conscious thought that I needed to finish to get to the airport on time? Perhaps all

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there was to my having been marginally conscious of the need to finish (and all there was to having the need to go to the airport “dimly before my mind”) is that the very character of my experience of thinking while focused on composing the message was also such as to make me more readily inclined to consciously think that I needed to finish soon than to think many other thoughts of which I was capable, so that thought keeps coming back to me even after I turn my attention elsewhere.” (p. 248).

More generally, it is tempting to say that some non-focal thoughts are not even part of what one has in mind in the phenomenal sense I have been assuming all along. Some non-focal thoughts are perhaps better understood in terms of the easiness with which one can bring them back to mind. As far as thing stands, I prefer the view that there is continuous variation in the way in which a thought is non-focal. Some non-focal thoughts are then phenomenally conscious but only in a very faint manner and some thoughts that one would want to count as non-focal are not even part of the stream of consciousness anymore. At another end, one may reject this picture altogether and deny that there are any non-focal thoughts at all. Apparent cases of non-focal thoughts are best understood in terms of the easiness with which they might be brought back to mind.

Finally, there is also the way what we have in mind occurs as connected to other thoughts or mental episodes. I discussed some aspects of that phenomenon in the previous chapter and will come back to it later.

The various ways in which we can have in mind something suggests then how we can keep in mind a thought-content while this remains compatible with the Thesis of non-Strict Instantaneity of Entertaining. In particular, it is the distinction between focal and non-focal thoughts that can be one way to account for the continuity in our thoughts. A thought can be kept in mind in the sense that even though it will be non-strictly instantaneous as a focal thought, it will then recede and become a non-focal thought. Alternatively, another way to account for continuity in our thought is to appeal to the cases where one can easily bring to mind a given thought-content. Accordingly, one could argue that a focal thought-content that is non-strictly instantaneous indeed disappear from the stream of consciousness as soon as it occurs but nevertheless seems to be kept in mind in the sense that it can easily be brought back to the mind. According to such a second view, the continuity of some of our thought would be explained in terms of the easiness with which they can be brought back to mind.

Connected thoughts. Keeping in mind the same thought-content is nevertheless not the only way to have some continuity in our conscious thinking. There is continuity also in the sense that a thought can be experienced as *following from other mental episodes*. More precisely we can say that a subject *S* has an experience of a given thought as continuous with other mental episodes in the sense that when *S* has in mind that *p* then *S* has also in mind that *p* is in connected in a manner *R* to another mental episode *M*. In other words, a thought being experienced as coming after other mental episodes is matter of having a specific kind of content – one has in mind that

one has in mind that p comes after M . And we can experience continuity in our conscious thinking in the sense that at a moment t_1 one can have in mind that p , and then later at t_2 one can have in mind that one has in mind that q comes after having in mind that p ". Accordingly one can have in mind that p at t_1 and t_2 .

We can then distinguish different experiences of connected thoughts in terms of either the kind of mental episodes that are involved in these connected thoughts or by the connecting relations that hold between different thoughts or mental episodes.

Association. In the previous chapter I briefly considered some ways thoughts are causally connected. I suggested that a clear case was random association of thoughts. But there are cases that are not entirely random but still are clearly causally connected. For instance, some occurrences of thoughts are not experienced as actively brought about but still might contribute to satisfy the desire to know certain kinds of things. Consider, for instance, the case where it occurs suddenly to someone that his mobile phone is at home and this happens *because* he was thinking that he needs to call a friend. In such circumstance, the occurrence of thought is not completely random but still experience as causally connected to another thought. (Besides, it also is experienced as being connected to what the subject wants to know.) Still, another case of an experience of causally connected thoughts happens when we see something and this *makes* us think of something else. There are various cases. Some thoughts will be randomly associated and some will perhaps even provide justification. Proust's madeleine illustrates the case of a sensory perception that causally triggers various memories.

In the preceding chapter I argued that the core phenomenal aspect of agency of a conscious thought had as a necessary part that the thought is experienced as intended. And a thought is experienced as intended to the extent that it is experienced as connected to reasons. For instance, one has in mind that one has mind that Rome is fun because one had the intention to think a thought that would satisfy the desire to know a city that is fun. As I mentioned it is not necessary that one explicitly hand all this in mind when the thought is experienced as actively brought about by the subject.

Once one has accepted that some that some thoughts are experienced as connected to practical reasons, one may wonder whether something parallel holds with regards to epistemic reasons. Consider again the thought-content *Rome is fun*. When it occurs and is experienced as intended in the sense explained above do we also experienced as connected to reasons that speaks for its truth? It seems that it is at least often not the case. When it occurs to me that Rome is fun I might just not have in mind at all why believe that Rome is fun. Still, it seems that thought that occurs in response to our intention to think a thought of a given kind tend to be things that we believe. (This is fortunate to the extent that these thoughts are supposed to satisfy a certain desire for knowledge.) However, this is not always the case. In some circumstances a thought occurs that

turns out to be something that we do not take to be true. But the significant point is that *when they occur*, these thoughts seem to be thoughts that we take to be true. It is only after they occur that we may realize that they are not true or that there are reasons to reject them. Sometimes this happens immediately after they occur. The upshot from all this is that thoughts that we experience as actively brought about occur without being experienced as connected to epistemic reasons.

Conscious inference. Another closely related case is that of conscious inference. But this concerns a completely different cognitive situation and it is highly more plausibly that one will experience a given thought (a conclusion) as being connected to other thoughts (premises). This goes well together with the view defended by Nes (2016). According to Nes, “[i]n conscious inference, we have a sense of meaning in that we have a sense of what certain presumed facts mean, where ‘mean’ expresses what Grice called ‘natural meaning.’” (p.101) And he takes it that it is also a form of evidence. A common example of a claim of natural meaning is the case of smoke meaning fire. But it need not be always a matter of a causal relation proposition like *That the number two is even and a prime number means that there are even primes* and *That N.N. has failed attend at more than three meetings this year means that he is ineligible to stand for being chair* involve also the natural sense of “meaning”.

Although independent of the proposal that in a conscious inference there a sense of natural meaning, Nes notes the appealing similarities that exist between the case of conscious inferences and speech understanding experiences. In the case of speech understanding, the a sense of “what is said” is one of non-natural meaning but its phenomenal aspects seem to be parallel to that of the sense of meaning involved in conscious inference. More precisely, the sense of what is said appears to have a relational content.

“When I fluently understand your utterance, I do not merely, on the one hand, have an awareness of your utterance, and, on the other hand, grasp the content that happens to be what is said by your utterance; I am also aware of the latter content *as what is said by* your utterance.” (p.103)

It seems that something exactly analogous happen in the case of a conscious inference. The concluding thought is experienced as following from the premises, or, more precisely and if Nes is right, as meant by the premises. Further, among other similar features, Nes notes that the sense of what is said has a “fore versus background structure”. “Typically, we focus more on the content expressed than on the utterance expressing them, and more on either of these two than the relation of being-what-is-said-by, or the fact of its being obtaining.” (p.104) And so likewise in the case of conscious inference, the premises and the conclusion are not focally not on the same footing; one naturally tends to have the conclusion focally in mind.

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There are many things to consider with respect to Nes' account. How, for instance, it fares when contrasted with alternative accounts.¹⁷⁴ But also how, we can integrate it to an account of conscious mental actions since, arguably, when we infer something we are actively bringing about a thought-content. More specifically, when considered in relation to my account of active conscious thinking, the question is to see how the occurrence of a thought-content can both be experienced as practically motivated and as being meant by non-focal conscious thoughts – if we accept Nes' proposal. One thing at stake is an experience of an epistemic motivation in the case of the occurrence of thought-content in the context of conscious active thinking. I suggested that when one undergoes the experiences of actively bringing about the thought-content *Rome is fun*, then, usually the reasons one has to think that indeed Rome is fun are not part of the phenomenal character of the this conscious thoughts. But if *Rome is fun* can be actively brought about by being inferred, then it will also be experienced as connected to premises and therefore being, in some sense, epistemically motivated.

Finally, all the ways thoughts can be experienced as connected did, I believe quite obviously, involve a temporal dimension; one thought occurs *after* others. This seems to be part of the experiences of all connected thoughts. In the case of randomly associated thought it is clear that when the second thought occurs, one has in mind that the thought that caused it occurred at an earlier time. Similarly in the case of conscious that are actively brought about or inferred from other thoughts.

All these various ways that thoughts can be experienced as connected to other thoughts are interrelated and to a large extent compatible. But for some friends of cognitive phenomenology, all these connections are perhaps too much. In opposition to this abundance, one might favor something more economical. An extreme alternative to the picture I just sketched is to reject all this experiences of connected thought. According to such an account, what we have in mind does not involve any other mental episodes to which we are connected. Similarly to the case of a philosopher who wants to reject non-focal conscious thoughts, one can reject these experiences of connected thoughts and argue that strictly speaking they are not part of what it is like to think at a given moment, but that they are thought-contents that we are disposed to easily entertain. More generally, this would be part of a scarce account of cognitive phenomenology where there is just grasping and entertaining of thoughts at a given moment and no non-focal thoughts and no experiences of experiences of how thoughts are connected.

However, in order to give justice to our sense that there is some continuity, it seems that the existence of non-focal conscious thoughts and experiences of how thoughts follow each other makes more sense. But a friend of a more economical view may still find it preferable to appeal

¹⁷⁴ Nes (2016: 107-13).

to our dispositions to entertain certain further thoughts in order to account for our sense of the continuity that there is our conscious thinking.

To conclude this section, one should also note that it is not straightforward that one is always entertaining thoughts. Accordingly, the impression of a cascade of brief thoughts concerns only the situation in which thoughts are actually occurring. There might be cognitive gaps filled in by continuous sensory perceptual experiences. But I leave this issue for another occasion and although there is much more to say on all this, I hope to have shown that even if occurrences of conscious are short-lived this does not imply that there is no continuity in our conscious thinking.

5.5. The non-sensory phenomenal aspect of instantaneous thinking

In opposition to some opponents to cognitive phenomenology who think that the instantaneous character of thought speaks against the existence of a distinctive conscious aspect of thoughts, I will finally consider the idea that some of the temporal features we have discussed so far provide some support to the Minimal Thesis.

One reason to think that the strict instantaneous character of a thought support the Minimal Thesis is that the first conscious elements that are usually recognized by opponents to cognitive phenomenology – visualizations and auralizations – are all extended in time. Accordingly, if grasping a thought-content is a conscious aspect that is not extended in time, then it seems that there is something over and above all these sensory perceptual accompaniments. Searle (1992) suggests that:

“The stream of thought contains not only words and images, both visual and otherwise, but other elements as well, which are neither verbal nor imagistic. For example, a thought sometimes occurs to one suddenly, “in a flash”, in a form that is neither in words nor images.” (p.128).

Is then the instantaneous aspect of grasping a thought-content an indication of the non-sensory perceptual nature of conscious thinking? There are two problems with this suggestion. The first problem – more specifically related to Searle’s description – is that if we say that some cases a thought occurs “in a flash”, this suggests a visual experience of light and thus is in agreement with what is acceptable to opponents to cognitive phenomenology. If we say that the phenomenal aspect of the instantaneity of grasping is to be described in terms of a “flash” it seems that we are already using the “visual vocabulary” – a flash is seen or visualized – of an opponent to cognitive phenomenology.

But a second more serious objection is that the strict instantaneous character of grasping a thought-content reveals nothing specific to thought. As I suggested earlier, there are many instantaneous events that are completely unrelated to thoughts. Moreover, some sensory perceptual experiences like getting into touch the feel of table are arguably also instantaneous

events, accordingly if the conscious grasping of a thought has an instantaneous aspect, this still does not show in any way that the distinctive non-sensory perceptual character of conscious thoughts.

If the strict instantaneous character of conscious grasping does not bring us any support for the Minimal Thesis, some aspects of the continuity in our conscious thoughts are more promising. In the preceding chapter I have already argued that a necessary condition for a thought to be experienced as actively brought about was that it is experienced as connected to reasons. Since in some cases this features in the way a subject has something in mind it is sufficient to distinguish a thought from non-thoughts.

Furthermore, one may also hope to find additional reasons to reject the view of opponents to cognitive phenomenology, by looking at the other ways there is continuity in conscious thinking. However, this turns out to be not as promising as it might appear at first glance. First, I take it that with respect to experiences of connected thoughts, the most easily noticeable kind is that of randomly causally associated thought. I presume that opponents to cognitive phenomenology will find this phenomenon palatable and will accommodate it with successive swirling visualizations and episodes of inner speech. Furthermore, in order to make sense of the phenomenon of thoughts meaning other thoughts, they might resort to experience of surprise and familiarity that are understood in terms of some kind affective phenomenon. Of course, I disagree with such a view but I will have to defend this on another occasion.

5.7. Conclusion

I hope to have shown that there is no mystery in the idea that conscious thoughts or judgements are instantaneous. Furthermore, it was also my ambition to show that the instantaneous character of conscious thinking is compatible with there being a phenomenal aspect of continuity in our thoughts. Finally, although the instantaneous aspect of conscious thoughts does not provide support for the Minimal Thesis of cognitive phenomenology, the way occurrences of thoughts are experienced as practically motivated furnish some support for the Minimal Thesis as it was already established in the previous chapter.

Conclusion

6.1. *What it is like to think*

What it is like to think? This is the question I have discussed throughout this thesis. The crux of my answer is that the core aspect of conscious thinking is the experience of *having something in mind*. When it occurs to you that your mobile phone is at home, there is a distinctive phenomenal sense in which your mobile is present to your mind. The whole thesis is thus an attempt to grasp the contours of this aspect of our conscious lives.

The most striking feature of what it is to have something in mind is the way we abstract properties from the objects of our thoughts. When it occurs to you that your mobile phone is at home, you do not have in mind that it is an artifact, that it has some weight, that it is a physical object or that it is located on the surface of the Earth, etc. All these things you believe about your mobile phone are things that you could have in mind but that most likely you do not at the moment it occurs to you that your mobile phone is at home.

The way we have things consciously in mind differs from the doxastic way we have things in mind. You certainly have in mind that birds fly but not in the phenomenal sense I am considering here. You believe or judge that birds fly but it is not something that you were consciously thinking before I mentioned it. However, some philosophers think that the way we believe or judge things is part of the conscious ways we have things in mind. Somehow, it *strikes us* that something is the case. Some take this to be the conscious mark of belief or judgement. I argued nevertheless that this conscious aspect cannot be adequately characterized in the doxastic terms of belief or judgement. There is an ontological incompatibility between this experience and belief and there is a temporal incompatibility between this experience and judgement. On the one hand, to be struck that something is the case is a conscious occurrence that easily cease to exist, but beliefs are states that cannot easily cease to exist because it is part of their nature to be episodes that guide actions and they could not guide actions if they ceased easily to exist.¹⁷⁵ On the other hand, to be struck that something is the case, although admittedly short-lived, is a conscious experience extended in time. However, a judgement or the event of grasping a thought is an instantaneous event that is not extended in time. To have something in mind is thus exclusively to be understood in terms of *what* we entertain. No conscious aspect of it can be adequately described in terms of belief or judgement.

There is nonetheless an important diversity in the ways and in what we entertain. When it occurs to you that your mobile phone is at home, you are focally attending to the fact that your mobile phone is at home. This contrast with the case in which you have something in mind that

¹⁷⁵ See Crane (2013).

is only phenomenally present in the background of your mind. When you are in a hurry to leave and desperately trying to find your keys, you may be focally thinking about places you may have put them although you also non-focally have in mind that you have to leave. There is a continuous gradation in the way something you have in mind can be at the focus of your attention and then slip out to the periphery of what is in the focus of your attention. In some cases, it becomes difficult to say whether it is still something that you have in mind in a distinctive phenomenal sense.

Among the diverse ways we can have something in mind, a noteworthy case is the way having things in mind occurs *as connected* to other mental episodes.¹⁷⁶ A common way this happens is when something we entertain occurs as causally connected to something else we have entertained previously. Random associations of thoughts are good examples. When you hear somebody saying something about mobile phones, it can make you think that your mobile phone is at home. In this case, when it occurs to you that your mobile phone is at home, you do not just have in mind that fact. It is part of what you have in mind that it is because of your neighbor's remark that you had in mind that your phone is at home.

Another way that what we have in mind occurs as connected to other mental episodes is the way we actively bring about things we think. Suppose you wonder whether you should take your mobile on vacation, and you end up thinking that your mobile phone should be left at home. Here again, not only do you have in mind that your mobile phone should be left at home, but also that this conscious thought is connected to the practical reasons you have to think about whether you should take your mobile on vacation. Part of what you have in mind is that thinking that your mobile phone should be at home is connected to your intentions to think a thought about whether you should take your mobile phone on vacation.

The way what we have in mind can be connected to reasons we have to think certain things indicates that our conscious thinking is not exhausted by having something in mind. What we have in mind *comes to our mind*. Conscious thinking is often dynamic, and no account of what it is like to think would be complete if it left this aspect out of the picture.

However, the phenomenal character of active thinking is not exhausted by its connection to practical reasons. Things that come to our minds can respond to practical reasons we have although we are not actively bringing them about. Accordingly, a second necessary experiential aspect of the way things actively come to our minds is that we experience ourselves as the cause of the occurrence of a thought. We experience ourselves as having the power to bring about conscious thoughts. Combined with the way what we have in mind is experienced as connected to reasons, this constitutes our experience of conscious active thinking.

¹⁷⁶ See also Peacocke (1998).

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A noteworthy aspect of this account of conscious active thinking is that there is always a passive dimension to what we think. We never decide to think a particular thought.¹⁷⁷ What we decide or intend to think are always thoughts of a certain kind. We have then the power to bring about particular thoughts, which we did not choose as the particular thoughts they are, but that respond to what we wanted to think (when things go well).

The passive or active ways things come to our minds do not exhaust the dynamic dimension of occurrences of our conscious thoughts. There is also a temporal dimension to take into account. The way a thought comes to our mind is instantaneous in the sense that we *grasp at once* all the conceptual constituents of a thought-content. Thinking is not like uttering a sentence, in which words occur one after the other. Thinking, in the sense of grasping, is simply a kind of temporal boundary of something starting or ending. When we grasp a thought, we *start* or *enter* the episode of entertaining a thought. Accordingly, our experience of grasping is not more mysterious than any other experiences of instantaneous events. We visually perceive a cart starting to move, and we instantaneously get into tactile contact with a table we touch. These are experiences of instantaneous events and provide us with a model to understand our experiences of instantaneously grasping a thought.

Once thoughts are grasped, they can also be entertained for a while. But as Locke already observed, it is hard to keep something in mind for a long time, and there is always a fast and constant change from one thought to another. Consequently, there is also a weaker sense in which thoughts are entertained instantaneously in that they are hard to keep in mind and tend to quickly disappear.

However, constant change in our thoughts does not mean that that there is no continuity at all. As we have already observed, things we have in mind frequently occur as connected to previous mental episodes. This is one way in which we can keep something in mind, but there is another. If what we have focally in mind is subject to constant changes, this does not mean that what recedes in the non-focal area is of the same nature. Things we have non-focally in mind need not change as quickly as things we have in the focus of our attention.

Therefore, what it is like to think consists of the way we have things in mind and the way they come to our minds. The descriptive account of conscious thinking I have just sketched provides us also with a means to make clear in what sense conscious thinking constitutes a proper kind of experience. What is fundamentally distinctive about conscious thinking is the way things are present to our minds. We have things in mind as abstracted from many of their properties. More precisely, a given thing we have in mind does not require us to have anything else in mind. When it occurs to you that your phone is at home, you do not need to have in mind that your mobile phone is a thing, a physical object, located somewhere or a thing with a weight. This does not

¹⁷⁷ Peacocke (1998), Strawson (2003).

mean that when we entertain a thought like the one about the mobile phone, we do not also have in mind other things about phones. The claim is only that there is no further particular thing that one will necessarily also have in mind if one is already thinking that the mobile phone is a home.

The difference between conscious thoughts and sensory perceptual experiences is that in the latter, the way properties of ordinary objects are given does not allow for the kind of independence that exists in the way we have something in mind. For instance, in visual perception the way the shape and color of an object look to us cannot come apart. We do not visually experience a color without a shape. Furthermore, in a pain experience, the way an aversive property feels cannot occur independently of an experience of a spatial property of a location. We do not experience pains that are not located somewhere in our body.

The independence with which things are given in conscious thought may seem strange at first. How can you have in mind that your mobile phone is at home independently of thinking that it has a shape, a function or a color? How can something appear to be at some place without seeming to have a shape or a color? In a sense, I have nothing to say about this. However, I would add that it is the same with visual experiences. Why do colors look entangled with shapes the way they do? It seems that in one sense, there is also nothing to say about this. It is a *sui generis* fact of our visual experiences that they have the phenomenal character they have. Similarly, I take the independence with which we have things in mind abstracted from some of their properties to be a *sui generis* fact of our conscious experience of thinking. Having said this, there is a way to be puzzled by this fundamental feature of conscious thinking that would be misguided. If you cannot visually figure out what it like to have a shape in mind abstracted from its color, then there is a simple reason for that: Thinking is not to visually conceive of things. The best way to make the episode of having something in mind palpable is therefore to consider some of your thoughts and wonder *what* you had in mind. The suggestion I have elaborated on in the previous chapters is that frequently there are many things that are not part of what we have in mind and unless we think more, they are not part of our overall experience.

6.2. Further issues

The account of conscious thoughts I have offered is still fairly sketchy and can be developed in two further ways. On the one hand, one can dive further into the details of what it is like to think. It should be clear that there is a lot more to say about what it is to have something in mind. For instance, in what sense are we referring to an object with what we have in mind given that this object of thought can be abstracted from most of its properties? In what sense does what I have in mind allow me to think about my mobile phone – when it occurs to me that it is at home – given that I do not need to have also in mind that it has a shape, that I can use it to communicate, that I own it and so on? Furthermore, how should we think of the relation between what we

have in mind and the way things visually appear? For instance, how should we characterize cases of demonstrative thoughts based on visual perceptions? How does this case differ from the case of speech understanding experience? It seems that in the case of the demonstrative thought, the perceptual object is involved in a different manner in the thought-content compared to the case of speech understanding. The sentence I hear is not involved in what I understand in the same way the perceptual object is involved in a demonstrative thought. Moreover, there are questions that concern more elusive phenomenal aspects. For instance, how should we account for the clarity we attribute to some thoughts? What is it to have something clearly in mind? Is this a further phenomenal aspect or just a dispositional feature? Is this aspect to be analyzed in term of indeterminacy? Finally, after all these questions about the conscious contents of our thoughts, there are of course numerous further questions about psychological modes, conscious mental agency and the temporal unfolding of conscious thinking.

On the other hand, there also various questions that concern the non-phenomenological implications of this account.¹⁷⁸ The number of issues here is almost endless. First, some philosophers argue that if there is cognitive phenomenology, then a reductive physicalist account of consciousness is more difficult to achieve.¹⁷⁹ Is this true? And in what sense is it difficult? Second, given what I have said about the way we abstract properties of the things we have in mind, in what sense can the cognitive phenomenal character of a conscious thought be sufficient to determine some intentional content? Is my account unfriendly to proponents of phenomenal intentionality? Third, I have argued against the existence of phenomenology of doxastic attitudes, but what exactly are the consequences for self-knowledge of our own beliefs and judgements? Are some theories ruled out by my descriptive account? Fourth, cognitive phenomenology might also have consequences for issues in the philosophy of art – more precisely, in the philosophy of literature. How can an account of what it is to have something in mind contribute to characterize the experience of reading a novel? How exactly do we have in mind the characters of a story told in a novel? Arguably, an answer to these questions may be part of an answer to another question: “Why do we value reading novels?” Fifth, and related to the question about the instantaneous character of thought, many philosophers seem to assume that conscious episodes are events or processes. Many philosophers always speak of mental states or events – without even considering the question of whether or which are events or states. But these points generate a question about the ontological profile of mental episodes in general – conscious or not. What exactly does it mean that a given mental episodes falls into one ontological category rather than another?

¹⁷⁸ See also Chudnoff (2015b), Siewert (2011: 238).

¹⁷⁹ Bayne & Spener (2010: 13).

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To sum up, further work on conscious thoughts should thus focus on delineating the contours of cognitive phenomenology and spell out its significance beyond the mere bounds of what it is like to think *for* a given subject of experience.

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