Reflections on Phenomenal Concepts

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Four Key Themes

1. Phenomenal Knowledge
2. Phenomenal Concepts
3. Awareness/Acquaintance
4. Physicalism/Dualism
Four Vertices

P-Knowledge ------- Physicalism
|      X      |    |
|-----------|
P-Concepts ------- Awareness
Connecting the Vertices

- Knowledge to dualism (Jackson; Michael, Derek, Torin, Par)
- Knowledge to concepts to physicalism (David, Esa, Benj)
- Knowledge to (concepts to) awareness to dualism (Martine, Joe, Dave, Philip; Geoff)
- Concepts and awareness (Daniel, Helen)
I. Phenomenal Knowledge
Inflating Phenomenal Knowledge

- Inflationist: phenomenal knowledge is
  - new
  - underivable (Torin)
  - substantial (Joe, Dave)
  - revelatory (Martine, Philip)
Deflating Phenomenal Knowledge

- Deflationist: phenomenal knowledge is
  - subjective (Benj)
  - objectual (Michael)
  - not new or underivable (Derek)
  - not revelatory (Esa)
My View

• I think it’s very plausible that phenomenal knowledge is underivable, objective, substantial propositional knowledge.

• I also think it’s revelatory, but this isn’t a dialectically strong premise for an argument against materialism.

• But underderivability and substantiality suffice for dialectically strong arguments.
2. Phenomenal Concepts

• Concepts can be abstract entities or mental representations.

• For current debate what matters are mental representations (of phenomenal properties)

• Specific types of representations of phenomenal properties (or: types of grasping of abstract phenomenal concepts)
Mary’s New Concept

• When Mary leaves the room she acquires a new representation of p-properties:
  • grounded (introspectively?) in p-state
  • non-deferential (with mastery)
  • a direct phenomenal concept
• [Likewise for her phenomenal knowledge]
Accounts of Phenomenal Concepts

- Direct phenomenal concepts are
  - recognitional (Esa), demonstrative (Michael), expressive (Benj), copies (Derek)
  - constitutive/quotational (Dave, David, Helen)
  - revelatory (Martine, Philip)
Do P-Concepts Explain P-Knowledge

- Many materialists: these features of p-concepts explain p-knowledge
- Some: deflate p-knowledge (...)
- Some: p-concepts explain new/substantial/objective p-knowledge (Esa, David; Geoff)
My View

- My view: direct phenomenal concepts epistemically rigid, grounded in acquaintance and constitution.

- No physicalist has yet adequately explained their epistemic rigidity and their role in contributing to substantial knowledge.
3. Awareness/ Acquaintance

- Most: in experience subjects are aware of external properties (e.g. redness)
- Many: in experience subjects are aware of phenomenal properties (e.g. what it’s like to see red)
Ubiquity of Awareness

• Subjects are always aware of phenomenal properties (Dave, Martine, Philip, Torin, Joe)
• Subjects are sometimes aware of phenomenal properties (Daniel, Geoff?)
• Subjects are never aware of phenomenal properties (Benj, Michael?)
Kind of Awareness

- Awareness is merely structural (Esa, Geoff?)
- Awareness is substantial (Dave, Joe)
- Awareness is revelatory (Philip, Martine)
My View

• I think: we at least sometimes have awareness of and attention to phenomenal states, not grounded in prior concepts or knowledge.

• Phenomenological case against strong transparency

• I think it’s (abductively) plausible that we always have this awareness and that it’s revelatory -- but I wouldn’t take this as a premise.
4. Physicalism and Anti-Physicalism

- Physicalists: Benj, David, Derek, Esa, Geoff, Michael
- Anti-physicalists: Dave, Joe, Helen, Martine, Philip, Torin
- Agnostic/Neither: Daniel, Par
Awareness and Materialism

• If awareness is revelatory, there’s a quick argument against materialism.

• But even if awareness is merely substantial (nondescriptive, nondemonstrative awareness of nonstructural qualities of experience), there’s a big challenge.
Challenge

• How can materialism explain substantial nonstructural awareness of phenomenal properties?

• Some deny the awareness (Benj, Esa?)

• Others want to explain it (David, Esa, Geoff?) -- but details of the explanation are elusive!

• Biggest residual challenge for materialists.
My View

• My view: materialists can’t explain substantial awareness/knowledge of consciousness.

• Explaining this requires some sort of irreducible relation of awareness.
5. Phenomenal Concepts without Materialism (or Dualism)

- The phenomenal concepts literature has largely been defined by its connection to materialism and dualism.
- But there are many issues here that are hugely important even independent of that connection.
i. Semantics for Phenomenal Concepts

• What is the content of phenomenal concepts (and meaning of phenomenal expressions)?
  • Expressive (Benj)
  • Fregean, Russellian? (Some physicalists)
  • Epistemically rigid 2D content (Me)
• [Q: Are there Frege cases for p-concepts?]
ii. Metasemantics for Phenomenal Concepts

- Metasemantic question: How do phenomenal concepts get their contents? In virtue of what do they refer to phenomenal qualities?
  - Helen: attentional/dispositional
  - Esa: causal?
  - Me: acquaintance/attention/constitution/inferential
iii. Chemistry for Phenomenal Concepts

- What are the most fundamental phenomenal concepts?
- What is the structure/composition of more complex phenomenal concepts?
- Concepts of total or atomic states?
- Perceptual, cognitive, ...
- Phenomenal or protophenomenal?
My View

• My view: the most fundamental phenomenal concept is that of (phenomenal) awareness.

• This combines with concepts of specific (Edenic) qualities, e.g. (perfect) redness

• E.g. phenomenal redness = awareness of Edenic redness

• Then: chemistry of Edenic concepts?
Role of Phenomenal Concepts

• Odd tension:

• The phenomenal-concept/mind-body literature stresses the isolation of phenomenal concepts from other concepts.

• But there are deep connections between phenomenal concepts and other concepts.
Phenomenal and Perceptual Concepts

- E.g. *phenomenal redness* is closely connected to *redness*. Constitutively, especially given representationalism/relationism.

- So one’s account of phenomenal concepts should be tied to a corresponding account of perceptual concepts.

- Quotational/recognitional/demonstrative accounts of perceptual concepts?

- Direction of priority?
Other Concepts

• Perceptual concepts are presumably closely/constitutively connected to most scientific/theoretical concepts.

• Phenomenal concepts play a constitutive role in many other mental concepts, and thereby in social concepts and so on.

• Arguably: we need to understand phenomenal concepts to properly understand all concepts.
Imperialist Conclusion

- So: phenomenal concepts may be the most important concepts of all.
- Time for phenomenal concept theorists to broaden their horizons and conquer the world!