

The Thesis of Revelation in the Philosophy of Mind: A Guide for the Perplexed

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Abstract

The thesis of experiential revelation—*Rev* for brevity—in the philosophy of mind claims that to have an experience—i.e., to be acquainted with it—is to know its nature. It is widely agreed that although at least moderate versions of *Rev* might strike one as plausible and perhaps even appealing, at least up to a certain extent, most of them are nonetheless inconsistent with almost any coherent form of physicalism about the mind. Thus far, the issue of the alleged tension between *Rev* and physicalism has mostly been put in the relevant literature in terms of phenomenal concepts—those concepts which refer to phenomenal properties, or qualia, and characterize them in terms of the peculiar quality(ies) they exhibit—and some kind of “special feature” those concepts allegedly possess. I call this version of *Rev* *C-Rev*. This paper aims to suggest that while it is true that phenomenal concepts reveal the nature of their referent(s)—i.e., it is *a priori*, for a subject possessing the concept and just in virtue of possessing it, what it is for the referent(s) of the concept to be part of reality—this feature of them, in turn, rests on a non-conceptual non-propositional kind of knowledge, namely, *sui generis* introspective knowledge by acquaintance of one’s own phenomenally conscious states. I call this version of *Rev* *A-Rev*. §1 provides some introductory material. In §2 I discuss two arguments that have recently been put forth to undermine the cogency of *C-Rev* against physicalism. §3 elaborates on the historical roots of *C-Rev*. §4 presents some of the major arguments which have been offered for *A-Rev*. A few concluding remarks close the paper.

Keywords: Revelation, Physicalism, Knowledge by acquaintance, Propositional knowledge, Phenomenal consciousness.

1. Introduction

David Chalmers has written:

We know consciousness far more intimately than we know the rest of the world, but we understand the rest of the world far better than we understand consciousness. Consciousness can be startlingly intense. It is the most vivid of phenomena; nothing is more real to us. But it can be frustratingly diaphanous (Chalmers 1996: 3).

The verb ‘to know’ appears twice in the passage above. Yet I think one might ask: was it meant to convey the same meaning in both of its instances? Or did Chalmers, instead, intend to use it to refer to two distinct kinds of state?

This essay aims to suggest that our knowledge of the phenomenology of our own phenomenally conscious states—*i.e.*, those states there is something it is like for a subject to be in (Nagel 1974)—is of a fundamentally different kind with respect to our knowledge of what Chalmers refers to as “the rest of the world”.

I also take it that it is *because* we know consciousness *so* intimately that it resists a reductive naturalistic explanation as the one that has been—and/or *is being*—offered for an astonishingly vast variety of *explananda* at least since the development of modern science: the mysteriousness of consciousness with respect to a naturalistic viewpoint broadly construed—*i.e.*, what Chalmers (e.g., 1995) labels “the hard problem of consciousness”—is *rooted* in its being more vivid than any other phenomenon to anyone who has ever been conscious.

It follows that even thinking about addressing the hard problem of consciousness without *eo ipso* also addressing the issue of our epistemic relation with phenomenal properties, will be inevitably doomed to fail as an endeavour: the hard problem, as a metaphysical issue, *forces us* to reconsider the way in which we know the phenomenology of our experiences. The reverse is also true: epistemological considerations, in the case of phenomenal consciousness, might have a huge import on the metaphysical investigation of the mind and of reality in general. It is no coincidence that the major arguments that have been offered against materialism about phenomenal consciousness¹ in the last decades—e.g., Chalmers’ (e.g., 1996;

¹ There is not, still, unanimous consensus on how physicalism about phenomenal consciousness should be formulated. According to type-identity materialism (Place 1956; Feigl 1958; Smart 1959; Armstrong 1968), types of phenomenal experience—say painful experiences—are identical to specific types of neural activations taking place in the brain—say c-fibers firing. Notoriously, this version of physicalism suffers from an objection raised by Putnam (1967) and Fodor (1975), among others. The main idea behind such an objection is that (conscious) mental states are *multiply realizable*: other species besides the human one do have (conscious) mental states very similar if not identical to our own (e.g., they do feel pain) despite having significantly different nervous systems, which is clearly incompatible with types of (conscious) mental states being *identical* to *specific types* of neural activations. Despite having often been considered as a fatal objection to type-identity materialism, this is not the only objection which may be raised against it (see, e.g., Kripke 1980). Even leaving type-identity theories aside, however, there are several options a materialist might resort to when trying to specify the kind of metaphysical relation she believes to hold between physical facts, states, processes and/or properties and phenomenal/conscious ones, including—but not limited to—*Realization* (Melnik 2003, 2006, 2018; Shoemaker 2007, 2014) *Constitution* (Pereboom 2011) and *Grounding* (Dasgupta 2014, Kroedel & Schulz 2016, O’Conaill 2018, Goff 2017). To complicate the matter, even providing a precise characterization of the *relata* in the very first place is far from being an easy task. My own preferred version of physicalism is the

2009) *conceivability-argument* and Jackson's (1982) *knowledge-argument* above all—all revolve around an attempt to draw metaphysical conclusions from epistemological premises. Likewise, as Stalnaker (2008: 26) has noted cogently, most of the major attempts to counter those arguments in one way or another attempt to decouple items of knowledge—facts, for instance—from metaphysical distinctions between possible situations in which those items obtain.

The thesis of experiential revelation—*Rev* for brevity—has come in the philosophical literature on the mental in a variety of slightly differently nuanced formulations. The term 'Revelation' was introduced by Johnston (1992) to refer to Strawson's (1989) claim whereby the nature of colors is fully revealed in color experiences, but already in Russell (1910; 1912: 47) one can find what is arguably a version of the thesis. *Rev* is generally understood as a thesis about the *essence* of phenomenal properties, where phenomenal properties, or qualia, in turn, are typically defined as properties of conscious mental states which type those states by what it is like for a subject to have them (Nagel 1974). *Rev* has sometimes been phrased (e.g., by Trogdon 2016; Nida-Rümelin 2007; Goff, 2011; 2015; 2017) in terms of phenomenal concepts—those concepts which refer to phenomenal properties and characterize² them in terms of the peculiar quality(ies) they exhibit (I will elaborate on this version of *Rev* in a moment). Others (e.g. Majeed 2017; Chalmers 2016) have phrased *Rev* in terms of introspection. Liu (2019; 2020; 2021; forth: 3) offers a rather general characterization of *Rev*: Given an experiencing subject S and a phenomenal property Q, "By having an experience-token with phenomenal property Q, S is in a position to know

one Coleman (2008: 93) calls *conventional physicalism*, namely, a view which states that phenomenal properties supervene upon the *non-experiential* physical. Conventional physicalism consists in the combination of two claims: (a) phenomenal properties supervene upon (fundamental) physical ones, that is, every metaphysically possible world that is a minimal physical duplicate of the actual world must also be a duplicate of the actual world with respect to every conscious property, *i.e.*, a *C-duplicate* of the actual world. This is Jackson's (e.g., 1998) version of physicalism. The addition of the word "minimal" is meant to avoid the so-called problem of epiphenomenal ectoplasms, namely, pure phenomenal entities of some kind which do not interact causally with anything else there is in a given possible world. A minimal physical duplicate of the actual world is a world which duplicates all the physical properties of the actual world *without adding anything else*. According to Lewis (1983), (a) suffices for what he calls minimal physicalism; (b) There are no fundamental phenomenal properties, that is, the view known as Russellian monism is false. It is widely acknowledged in the relevant literature that (metaphysical versions of) physicalism must imply at the very least the supervenience of phenomenal properties upon physical ones. As far as I know, only Montero (2013) and Montero & Brown (2018) deny this. The view they put forth, however, is definitely minoritarian among physicalists. As we shall see, Damnjanovic (2012) defends a version of the identity thesis. In what follows, unless otherwise specified I will use the words 'physicalism' and 'materialism' interchangeably to refer to conventional physicalism. This note owes a lot to my colleague and dear friend Giacomo Zanotti: see Zanotti 2020, 2021, 2022.

² The notion of a characterization is just aimed at capturing the idea that concepts always do characterize their referent(s) as being in a certain way or present it/them under a peculiar aspect. As Trogdon (2016) notes, this construal of what a characterization is requires a Fregean/two-factors account of reference and meaning according to which the referent and the cognitive significance of a concept are distinct.

that ‘Q is X’, where the predicate ‘X’ captures the essence of Q”.³ In other words: to have an experience—*i.e.*, to be acquainted with it—and possibly to attend to it, *is* to know its essence: just by having, say, a headache (and attending to it), one is put in a position to come to know what pain—or better, the painfulness of her experience—*essentially* is.

For the purposes of the present essay, I do think that a rather broad understanding of what the essence of something is will suffice. Since Kripke published his (1980) and Fine his (1994), talk of essence has regained a central poignancy in many debates in metaphysics, and is now deemed as perfectly legitimate (see Tomasetta 2016). Along with Fine (1994; 1995a; 1995b), Hale (2013) Lowe (2012) and Tomasetta (2016)—among several others—I do think the notion of ‘essence’ is primitive and not further analyzable. I will adopt a non-modal/definitional/Finean (Fine 1995a, 1995b; Dasgupta 2014; Liu, *forth.*) approach whereby the essence of a certain item *x* is what makes *x* the thing it is/belongs to *x*’s most core respects. *X*, thus, will be said to have a certain property *p* essentially if *p* belongs to the class of *x*’s most core respects, that is to say, to the class of those properties which make *x* the thing it is.⁴

It is widely agreed that although some moderate versions of *Rev* might strike one as *prima facie* plausible and perhaps even appealing, at least up to a certain extent, most of them are nonetheless inconsistent with almost any coherent form of physicalism about the mind. David Lewis’ (1995) *Should a materialist believe in qualia?* is arguably one of the *loci* where the tension between *Rev*—which Lewis refers to as *the identification thesis*—and materialism emerges most clearly. There (1995: 141-42) Lewis writes:

Unfortunately there is more to the folk-psychological concept of qualia than I have yet said. It concerns the modus operandi of qualia. Folk psychology says, I think, that we identify the qualia of our experiences. We know exactly what they are—and that in an uncommonly demanding and literal sense of ‘knowing what’ [...] If qualia are physical properties of experiences, and experiences in turn are physical events, then it is certain that we seldom, if ever, [know the nature of] the qualia of our experiences. Making discoveries in neurophysiology is not so easy!

³ Another broad characterization of the main idea behind *Rev* is offered by Stoljar (2009: 115).

⁴ As we shall see, one of the main ideas behind *Rev* is that phenomenal properties belong essentially to the states bearing them. I do believe that this might be shown to be the case under a modal account of the distinction between essential and accidental properties—as the one Balcan Marcus (1967), Kripke (1980), Zalta (2006), Correia (2007) and Brogaard and Salerno (2007a; 2007b; 2013) (among others) defend (see also Robertson Ishii and Philip 2020)—as well. Grossly, under a modal account of essentiality, a property *p* belongs essentially to an item *x* iff it is necessary that *x* has *p*, and it is necessary that *x* has *p* iff *x* has *p* in all possible worlds—or at least in all the possible worlds where *x* exists. Suppose now there’s someone, say Thomas son of Mary (Damnjanovic 2012), who’s feeling a sharp pain. Imagine now a possible world *W*¹ where instead of being acquainted with a “painful” phenomenal quality, Thomas is acquainted with a “joyful” one. Would you really say that it is *pain* that Thomas is feeling in *W*¹? Suppose now that Thomas is having a visual experience of, say, a red circle in the actual world, and is instead acquainted with a “bluish squarish” phenomenal character in *W*¹. Would you really say, again, that it is *the same experience* Thomas is having in the two possible worlds? The remarks Kripke draws in his (1980: 150-52) seem to go in the same direction.

The main idea Lewis wants to convey here is rather straightforward. On the one hand, as Goff (e.g., 2017: 107-108) and Stoljar (2009: 115), among others, have emphasized, we seem to be in a rather peculiar—not to say unique—epistemic situation with respect to the phenomenology of our own conscious states. However, it is obviously not the case that one can learn anything about the complex neuro-physiology of her brain *just by being in pain* (and attending to her painful experience). In light of this *impasse*, one is apparently left with two options:

- ¬*Rev*: Our relation to the phenomenal properties of our own phenomenal mental states does not, indeed, have any or most of the special features it appears to have. Therefore, nothing truly essential is—nor could be—actually revealed to us by the mere instantiation (and attentive awareness) of those properties. ¬*Rev* is compatible with any form of physicalism/functionalism about phenomenal properties.
- Rev*: The nature of the phenomenal properties of our own mental states is revealed to us by the mere instantiation (and attentive awareness) of them. If so, then those properties are arguably not identical nor completely reducible to a number of physical/functional properties and/or processes or states.

Thus far, the issue of the alleged tension between *Rev* and physicalism has mostly been put in the relevant literature in terms of phenomenal concepts and some kind of “special feature” those concepts allegedly possess. From now on, I will refer to this version of *Rev* as *C-Rev*. According to *C-Rev*, phenomenal concepts provide a (full) essential characterization of their referent(s) (see Trogdon 2017). A concept *C* is said to provide a *partial* essential characterization of its referent(s) iff there are some properties *p*, *q*, *r* (at least one) such that *C*'s referent(s) has/have those properties essentially and *C* characterizes its referent(s) as having those properties. *C* is said to provide a *full* essential characterization of its referent(s) iff for *any* property *p*, if *C*'s referent(s) has/have *p* essentially, then *C* characterizes it/them in terms of *p*.

Versions of *C-Rev* have been defended by Nida-Rümelin (2007) and Goff (2011; 2015; 2017; 2019) among others. Nida-Rümelin (2007) argues that via phenomenal concepts one is allowed to *grasp* the properties they refer to, where to grasp a property is to understand what that property essentially consist in, and to do so without any background knowledge besides the one provided by those concepts themselves. Likewise, Goff (2011) argues that phenomenal concepts are *transparent* where a concept is said to be transparent (Goff 2011: 15) “just in case it reveals the nature of the entity it refers to, in the sense that it is a priori (for someone possessing the concept and in virtue of possessing the concept) what it is for that entity to be part of reality”. More specifically, Goff (2011: 194) offers the following taxonomy: *transparent* concepts reveal the nature of their referent(s)—*i.e.*, provide a full essential characterization of their referents in the sense provided above; *translucent* concepts reveal part of, but not all, the nature of their referents—*i.e.*, provide a partial essential characterization of their referents; *mildly opaque* concepts do not reveal any essential property of their referent(s) but reveal some accidental features of them which uniquely identify it/them in the actual world; *radically opaque* concepts reveal neither essential nor accidental properties of their referent(s). Opaque concepts, that is, merely *denote* their referents, but say little or nothing about what it is for them to

be part of reality. The amount of what is revealed by a concept of its referent(s) coincides with what that concept allows to know *a priori* about it/them.

What I wish to suggest is that while it is true that phenomenal concepts allow a subject to grasp the properties they refer to *just by being had by her*, this feature of them, in turn, rests on a more primitive, pre-conceptual non-propositional kind of knowledge, which may be understood in analogy with what Pitt (2011) calls *acquaintance-as-knowledge* or *acquaintance-knowledge*, not to be conflated with knowledge *by* acquaintance, the latter being, for Pitt (2011), propositional in kind. Pitt's notion of acquaintance-knowledge draws from Levine's (2011) distinction between *implicit* and *explicit self-knowledge of thought*. The latter is, for Levine (2011: 108), "what we have when we explicitly formulate a meta-cognitive thought, such as 'I believe that San Francisco is a beautiful city'"; *implicit self-knowledge of thought*, by contrast (2011: 108-109) "is not the result of any explicit formulation or reflection. Rather, it's the knowledge that seems to come with the very thinking of the thought itself. [...] To implicitly know what one is thinking is just to think with understanding".

On the view I endorse, to "acquaintance-know" what it is like to have an experience—which I consider to be an essential property of the experience itself—would be, to paraphrase Levine, just to experience (with focusing). I will call this version of *Rev A-Rev*.

Here is how the paper is structured. In §2 I discuss two arguments that have recently been put forth to undermine the cogency of *C-Rev* against physicalism, namely, those put forth in Damnjanovic 2012 and Trogdon 2016. §3 elaborates on the historical roots of *C-Rev*. §4 presents some of the major arguments which has been offered for *A-Rev*. Few concluding remarks close the paper.

2. Damnjanovic and Trogdon on *C-Rev*

Following on Lewis' discussion of 'the identification thesis', Nic Damnjanovic writes:

[...] Lewis speaks acquaintance-knowledges of experiences 'identifying' qualia in a demanding way. But it is clear that to 'identify' qualia in this way—to know exactly what qualia are—is to have *propositional knowledge of their nature*, just as, as he explicitly says, knowing exactly what potassium is requires knowing its atomic number (Damnjanovic 2012: 72, emphasis mine).

It honestly does not strike me as obvious, as Damnjanovic seems to be here implying, that *any possible piece* of essence-revealing knowledge we might ever come to have—with the possible exception of knowledge how⁵—*must* be propositional in kind. That *any possible piece* of essence-revealing information about *any possible item* in the universe—or at least about those items whose essence we might ever come to know given our cognitive architecture—can only be conveyed by a (number of) proposition(s)—let alone a (number of) proposition(s) expressing

⁵ Even though there are authors—e.g., Stanley and Williamson (2001); Stanley (2011); Brogaard (2011), Williamson (2000)—who believe that even knowledge-how might indeed consist in the knowledge of a number of propositions.

some fundamental physical facts—is not a truism.⁶ Yet, surprisingly, it is merely taken for granted by Damnjanovic without being argued for at all.

Suppose now that someone, call him Thomas son of Mary, is tasting peaches for the very first time in his life. Damnjanovic's (2012: 73, emphasis mine) own proposed version of the argument from *Rev* against physicalism has the following form. Note that physicalism is here being treated as equivalent to a version of the identity thesis:

1. If Identity is true and Thomas is in a position to know the full nature of the taste of peaches, then Thomas is in a position to *know that p*.
2. Thomas is in a position to know the full nature of the taste of peaches [Revelation]
3. Thomas is not in a position to *know that p*.

Therefore

4. Identity is false.

I think this version of the argument from *Rev* misconstrues the actual meaning of the thesis in the very first place. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note—as Stoljar (2009: 124) has also done—that it—as well as similar versions of it that have been offered—would function against almost any identity statement, whether the alleged identity is between phenomenal properties and physical properties, or between phenomenal properties and “spiritual” properties, or between phenomenal properties and “aesthetic” ones, and so on.

Whilst I agree with both Stoljar and Damnjanovic that *Rev* as thus understood might imply an “uncompromising version of primitivism about experience according to which [qualia] are primitive items in the world, wholly distinct from everything else” (Stoljar 2009: 124), I disagree with them in that I do not regard this as a reason to dismiss the thesis; rather, I regard it as a rather natural conclusion stemming from it, a conclusion I am indeed willing to accept. As Tomasetta says,

That physicalism is indeed more a worldview than a well-grounded philosophical thesis is further buttressed by the almost religious fervency with which materialist views are often held (Bonjour 2010: 4). A fervour that is evident, for example, in Dennett's (1989: 37) declaration that “dualism is to be avoided at all costs”, a position which is certainly not well suited to a rational inquirer (Tomasetta 2015: 107).⁷

Just as (this version of) the argument from *Rev* would function against any kind of alleged identity between kinds of properties, the cogency of (one version of) the knowledge-argument largely depends on what we substitute for ‘p’ in the (allegedly propositional) new piece of knowledge Mary would acquire once confronted with a red item for the very first time. There are authors (e.g., Church-

⁶ Note, also, that *Prima facie* this *de facto* precludes non-linguistic individuals like newborns and animals from the possibility of knowing anything.

⁷ Pitt (2011: 2) says that skepticism about the existence of a distinctive, individuating and proprietary phenomenology of conscious thought is “more often based on prior theoretical commitment, or overreaching confidence in the explanatory resources of contemporary Naturalism [...] than on unbiased reflection upon our conscious mental lives, or careful evaluation of the arguments in its favor”. I believe his concerns may as well be raised with regard to skepticism against *Rev*.

land 1989; Bigelow and Pargetter 1990; Conee 1994, Balog 2012, just to mention some) who believe that there is no new proposition Mary would nor could learn. Rather, she would just *become acquainted* with a new phenomenal property. I quite agree with this; yet, again, I don't think this account, when properly developed, would undermine the cogency of the knowledge-argument—nor that of the argument from *Rev*—against physicalism. This is so because (a) I endorse a *constitutive* account—as opposed to a *causal* one (more on this taxonomy momentarily)—of the notion of knowledge by acquaintance whereby such kind of knowledge is *essentially constituted* by the relation of acquaintance rather than being merely caused or enabled by it; (b) I take this knowledge to be essence-revealing.

Once we interpret Revelation as claiming that by having an experience with a quale Q one is put in a position to gain complete *knowledge by acquaintance* of Q, according to Damjanovic (2012: 76, emphasis mine) “The argument from Revelation fails, therefore, because it *incorrectly supposes that Thomas’ complete knowledge of the taste of peaches implies that he knows certain truths about the nature of peaches*”. This does not seem to be right. *Rev* claims that by tasting peaches Thomas is put in a position to grasp the essence of the experience of tasting peaches—or what it is like to taste peaches; it does not claim, though—or at least it does not *have* to claim, that Thomas comes to know any new proposition about peaches.

Let us now have a look at the remarks Trogdon draws about *C-Rev*. Trogdon's (2016: 4-5) own proposed version of the argument from *C-Rev* against materialism goes like this:

1. PHENOMENAL RED provides an essential characterization of its referent, phenomenal red.
2. PHENOMENAL RED doesn't provide a physical/functional characterization of phenomenal red.
3. If PHENOMENAL RED provides an essential but not a physical/functional characterization of phenomenal red then this property isn't a physical/functional property.
4. Hence, phenomenal red isn't a physical/functional property.

Where for a concept to provide a physical/functional characterization of its referent(s) is for it to characterize that/those referent(s) as physical/functional in kind. Trogdon believes this version *C-Rev* against materialism fails to achieve its goal.⁸ The fact, according to Trogdon, is that while the first premise is plausible if ‘essential characterization’ is read as *partial* essential characterization, the linking premise only makes sense if ‘essential characterization’ is read as *full* essential characterization. That is to say: the concept ‘PHENOMENAL RED’ might characterize the property ‘phenomenal red’ as having *some* of the properties it has essentially; *prima facie* there is no reason, though, to think that ‘PHENOMENAL RED’ characterizes ‘phenomenal red’ as having *all* the properties it has

⁸ Let me emphasize, though, that according to Trogdon (2016: e.g. 1) (his reading of) *Rev* indeed poses an *indirect* challenge to physicalism. More specifically, it has the potential to undermine the so-called *phenomenal concepts strategy*, *i.e.*, one of the main strategies physicalists may invoke to respond to typical dualist objections against their view, including explanatory gap-style objections (Levine 1983) and the conceivability-argument.

essentially. More specifically, phenomenal red might have the property of being a physical/functional property essentially and still 'PHENOMENAL RED' might not characterize it as having such property—while nonetheless characterizing it as having some other property(ies) it has essentially. This seems compatible with materialism.

I have got some worries with this. The major worry I have is that there seems to be something wrong in taking *Rev* to be *primarily* and *only* a feature of concepts—rather than a feature of mental *states* or *events*—in the very first place. I will come to that in a moment. At any rate, as Goff (2011: 197) argues, it is dubious whether taking phenomenal concepts to offer only a *partial* essential characterization—or, which is the same, to be *translucent* rather than *transparent*—really can help the (*a posteriori*)⁹ physicalist. In fact, claiming that phenomenal properties are *wholly physical* ones, the physicalist is committed to say that *any component* of properties is wholly physical. A part of something *wholly* physical is wholly physical. Thus, even if phenomenal concepts were to reveal only an essential part of their referents, they should reveal such part to be physical, which they clearly don't.

3. More on *C-Rev*

The roots of *C-Rev* are to be traced back to Kripke's (1980) and Putnam's (1975) seminal work in the Seventies. According to what may be called the received theory of reference and meaning, the intension of a term/concept—namely, the peculiar manner in which the referent of that term/concept is selected—*determines* the referent/the set of referents of that term/concept—its *extension*—by fixing a set of conditions—and, some authors (e.g., Carnap 1947) argue, even a set of *criteria*—for being that referent or for belonging to that set; it follows that while two terms may have the same extension but different intensions—as in the 'creature with a kidney' versus 'creature with a hearth' case—the reverse cannot be the case: for two terms to differ in extension is for them to differ in intension.

Against what the received theory would hold, both Kripke and Putnam urged us not to conflate the way in which the reference of a notion is fixed (in a given possible world when that world is taken as actual)—which pertains to the epistemological/psychological domain and might be said to coincide, with some level of approximation, with what Chalmers (e.g., 1996; 2009) calls the *primary intension* of a concept—with the referent(s) of that notion, let alone its/their essence—which instead pertain to the metaphysical domain and is labelled by Chalmers as the *secondary intension* of the notion.

Severing the epistemological domain from the metaphysical one leads Kripke to conclude that *necessary a posteriori* judgments can indeed be formed

⁹ Chalmers (1996) distinguishes between *type-a*—or *a priori*—and *type-b*—or *a posteriori*—materialism. Although type-a views come in a broad range of varieties, they share the claim that the mental is logically supervenient on the physical, *i.e.*, is always possible to *a priori* deduce facts about consciousness from physical facts. Typically, type-a theorists deny both that phenomenal zombies are conceivable and that Mary learns anything new once set free from her black-and-white prison. Maintaining (at the very least) that phenomenal facts *metaphysically* supervene upon physical ones, type-b materialists, in turn, concede that consciousness is not *logically* supervenient on physical facts, *i.e.*, they accept the so-called standard story of the explanatory gap (Levine 1983; Schroer 2010).

and justified (*contra* Kant, 1781 [2016]): in fact, the *a priori/a posteriori* distinction is epistemological in scope, whereas the notion of necessity is metaphysical.

The reference of a term/concept can be fixed in various ways, namely, via an “original” ostensive gesture/baptism—as is typically the case with personal proper names such as ‘Francesco’—or by pointing to a property that is or seems to be shared by all the members of a given sample, or a number of them—as is typically the case with those concepts which refer to natural kinds such as ‘HEAT’, ‘BRONZE’ or ‘TIGER’. Also, the way in which the reference of a notion is fixed—*i.e.* the primary intension of the notion—does not, most often, depend from empirical factors: Being that which *determines* the way in which the actual world should turn out to be in order for a given concept to have a certain extension, it is not itself *dependent upon* how the actual world turns out to be.¹⁰ A term like ‘water’ will therefore have the same primary intension both in the actual world and in TWIN-EARTH: in all the possible worlds in which it is not void, in fact, it picks the clear drinkable liquid which fills the oceans, etc.

The secondary intension of a notion, by contrast, *does* depend upon empirical factors: one needs to do research to get to know that water is actually H₂O rather than XYZ. TWIN-EARTH, thus, is not a world where water is XYZ; rather, it is just a world without water, or better, a world in which something that *is not* water merely gets *called* ‘water’. In light of this, the judgment ‘water is H₂O’ is necessary—*i.e.*, true in all possible worlds—but still *a posteriori*, as it is justified empirically.

Crucially, both Kripke (1980:150-52) and Chalmers (e.g., 1996: 131) agree that phenomenal notions do constitute a notable exception to the framework I have just tried to outline.

In most cases, in fact, the referent of a term/concept is picked by pointing towards a property which belongs *only contingently* to that which is referred to by it. The primary intension of a concept like ‘HEAT’, for instance, would be something like ‘the phenomenon which causes the sensation S in humans’. A certain amount of empirical research having been done, we now know that heat essentially is molecular motion, whereby we are able to identify ‘molecular motion’ as the secondary intension of the concept ‘HEAT’. Heat is thus identical to molecular motion in any possible world, including a world populated with creature whose somatosensory apparatus does not produce the experience S, or even one with no conscious subject at all.

Consider now a state like pain. The referent of the concept like ‘PAIN’ is presumably fixed by pointing towards a class of experiences which share the same phenomenology, namely, *painful* experiences. This is not a contingent property of pain, though: to be an experience with a “painful phenomenology” *just is* to be an instance of pain. Phenomenal concepts, thus, have identical primary and secondary intensions—thus being transparent/providing a full essential characterization of their referents. In other words, in the case of phenomenal consciousness the epistemological sphere collapse on the metaphysical and *vice versa*. To conceive a world in which people are acquainted with the feeling of pain, again, *just is* to conceive a world where there is pain.

¹⁰ Also, the primary intension of a notion fixes an *explanandum*. If I were to ask someone “what is water?”, I would in effect be asking her to explain to me what the liquid transparent thing, which fills the oceans, etc., is.

Liu (forth.; see also Pitt: 2011: 146) labels the principle whereby there is no distinction, in phenomenal consciousness, between appearance and reality NARD (No Appearance-Reality Distinction). A formulation of NARD can already be found in Nagel (1974: 444-45); other formulations of it are also spelled out in Searle (1997: 456) and Horgan (2012: 406), among others. Most notably, however, NARD has been made famous by the arguments Kripke draws for it in his (1980).

What I wish to suggest is that while it is true that phenomenal concepts are transparent/provide a full essential characterization of their referent(s) in the sense given above,¹¹ this feature of them rests on a form of non-propositional knowledge—acquaintance-knowledge—of phenomenal properties. Let me unpack this.

4. Introspective Knowledge by Acquaintance: Causal Versus Constitutive Approaches

Russell (1910; 1912) distinguished between two kinds of knowledge one might have: *knowledge of truths* and *knowledge of things*. Knowledge of truths is ordinary propositional knowledge, *i.e.*, the kind of knowledge one has when she *knows that* something is the case, *e.g.*, that Joe Biden is the president of the United States. Knowledge of things, instead, is a kind of *objectual* knowledge: what one knows in knowledge of things is an *item*, rather than a (body of) proposition(s). In turn, knowledge of things can be of two kinds: *knowledge by acquaintance* and *knowledge by description*. Knowledge by description is grounded on the subject having at least some propositional knowledge concerning the item she knows. Knowledge by acquaintance, on the other hand, does not depend on the subject forming *any propositional judgment* about the item she knows. It is also described by Russell as a kind of *direct* knowledge: in acquaintance we are immediately and directly presented with specific (mental) particulars.

Accordingly, *introspective* knowledge by acquaintance will be defined as the kind of knowledge we have of what we are directly aware of—or presented with—in introspection. There is not, still, unanimous consensus on what objects of introspection are, namely, on what is that one would allegedly have access to via introspection. In his (1910: 110) Russell claims that the objects of introspection are complexes consisting of objects plus various cognitive and conative relations we entertain towards them. So, in seeing the sun and introspecting her visual act, one would become aware both of the sun itself and of her seeing the sun. In (1912), in turn, Russell explicitly says that what we are aware of in introspection are the sense-data which make up physical objects, at least when we introspect our own perceptual states. Here, unless otherwise specified, along with Giustina (2022)—among others—I will assume that the objects of introspection are one's own conscious states.

Now, there are at least two possible ways to construe the expression 'knowledge by acquaintance'—thus the notion of knowledge by acquaintance itself, namely, a *causal* approach and a *constitutive* one. According to a causal ac-

¹¹ Whether only phenomenal concepts are transparent is debatable. Goff (*e.g.*, 2011; 2017) argues that geometrical concepts—*e.g.*, the concept 'SQUARE' 'TRIANGLE' etc.—are also of this sort.

count the relation of acquaintance—*i.e.*, a kind of direct and immediate access to specific (mental) particulars—is only epistemically relevant inasmuch as it causes, or enables, or justifies knowledge by acquaintance but is not epistemically relevant *per se* (see Depoe 2018; Hasan and Fumerton 2020; Gertler 2011). Moreover, causal views typically take knowledge by acquaintance to be propositional, therefore not *sui generis* (Giustina 2022). A given piece of knowledge is *sui generis* iff it cannot be reduced to any other kind of knowledge. According to a causal approach to knowledge by acquaintance, thus, the only possible *sui generis* kinds of knowledge available to a subject are propositional knowledge and (possibly) knowledge-how.

Under a constitutive account of knowledge by acquaintance, instead, the expression ‘knowledge by acquaintance’ is interpreted as ‘the knowledge which is *constituted* by acquaintance’. Thus, these views take the relation of acquaintance to *be, in itself, a sui generis* kind of knowledge. Constitutive views, although still regarded as heterodox, are now beginning to gain currency, and are held by (among others): Duncan (e.g., 2020; 2021), Giustina (e.g., 2021; 2022), Fiocco (2017), Coleman (2019). This is also the view Russell (1910; 1912) most likely had.

I do believe that a constitutive account of introspective knowledge by acquaintance offers the best explanation for the transparency of phenomenal concepts. There are a number of arguments that may be provided for a *A-Rev*. In what follows I will mention those which strike me as more cogent.

4.1 Ordinary Propositional Knowledge and (Non-Propositional) Knowledge by Acquaintance Have an Analogous Normative Status (Duncan 2020, 2021)

As Duncan (2020: 7 and below) notes, phenomenal experience *simpliciter* seems to display several “hallmarks” which give the impression of a “rational or otherwise normative status parallel to that of justification for beliefs”. For instance, it seems that at least some of our perceptions and/or somatosensory states can be rationally adjusted and are under our voluntary control—at least up to a certain extent: we can selectively focus on certain specific aspects or components of the perceptual field we are acquainted with, use learning and habituation to improve our capabilities of discrimination, discard hallucinations or optical illusions as non-veridical, and so on.

Moreover, the more attentively one introspects her own experiences, the larger the amount of details and of (non-propositional) information she will be put in a position to detect and get to know. (see Giustina 2022: 20) Thus, on this approach ‘to justify an experience’ would amount to providing reasons for its veridicality (e.g., “I was paying attention”).

4.2 An Argument for the Best Explanation (Giustina 2022)

Giustina (2022) argues that taking introspective acquaintance-knowledge to be *sui generis* provides the best explanation for cases where there is—or there seems to be—an epistemic asymmetry between subjects which cannot be exhaustively explained by an appeal to differences in the amount of propositional knowledge those subjects have.

People who are affected by an extremely rare pathological condition called *congenital analgesia* cannot experience physical pain. Suppose now you're trying to get a congenital analgesic to know what pain feels like. Arguably, no matter how hard you try, you won't manage to convey an informative, non-circular and non-trivial (e.g., "pain is painful") characterization of the peculiar qualitative character of pain. Imagine now a possible world—call it NON-PROPOSITIONAL-EARTH—where people, although capable to introspect their phenomenal experiences, for some reason—say due to how their cognitive architecture is structured—are unable to form any propositional judgment about them. Take now a subject A and a subject B on non-propositional earth and suppose that A has felt pain at least once in his life whereas B has not. According to Giustina (2022) there would still be, in NON-PROPOSITIONAL-EARTH, an epistemic asymmetry between A and B that is taking to the one there is between you and the congenital analgesic.¹²

4.3 The Argument for Phenomenal Concept Acquisition (Giustina 2021)

Phenomenal concepts can either be *basic* or *non-basic*. *Basic* phenomenal concepts provide the foundational layer upon which all other phenomenal concepts are formed (Giustina 2021: 7). The class of phenomenal concepts include concepts like 'PHENOMENAL YELLOW', 'OLFACTORY EXPERIENCE', 'THIRST', 'HOT' and so on. *Non-basic* phenomenal concepts, by contrast, are formed by combining basic ones: these are concepts like 'EXCRUCIATING ITCHING', 'BITTERSWEET GUSTATORY EXPERIENCE', 'PHENOMENAL ORANGE' etc. The argument from phenomenal concepts acquisition for the existence of a *sui generis* kind of introspective acquaintance-knowledge of the what-it's-like-ness of phenomenal experiences has the following form (Giustina 2021: 8): Unless one wants to buy a very implausible form of nativism whereby *all* or *the vast majority* of our phenomenal concepts—including 'MELANCHOLY' or 'PHENOMENAL RED'—were innately possessed by us, we must concede that (almost) all basic phenomenal concepts are acquired. Moreover, it is most likely that they are acquired via introspection. If all introspective states were conceptual/propositional in nature, however, it could not be the case that most of our basic phenomenal concepts were acquired via introspection, therefore we must conclude that at least some of our introspective states are not conceptual/propositional in kind.

4.4 The Argument(s) from Immediate Identification of Conscious Mental Particulars (Pitt 2004, 2009, 2011, 2019)

The arguments Pitt draws in his (2004; 2009; 2011; 2019) are mainly aimed at defending the existence of a proprietary, distinctive, and individuating phenom-

¹² I do think this argument to be reminiscent of the knowledge-argument against materialism. Pitt (2011: 148) writes: "When Mary leaves the Black and White Room, she comes to know what it's like to see red when she experiences it. In having the experience of red, she acquaintance-knows what seeing red is like". Note that what Pitt calls 'acquaintance-knowledge' arguably corresponds, with some level of approximation, to Giustina's notion of primitive introspection.

enology of cognitive states. I do believe, however, the remarks he makes to apply to more paradigmatic instances of phenomenal states as well.

Dretske (1969) has drawn a distinction between *simple seeing* and *epistemic seeing*. A subject *S* *simply sees* an object *O* iff she is able to differentiate it from its immediate environment immediately and non-inferentially, that is, only on the basis of how it looks to her. For Dretske, one does not need to identify¹³—*i.e.*, know—what is that she is seeing in order to be able to differentiate it from its environment in such an immediate way, as this ability does not require the formation of any explicit judgment¹⁴ a given perceptual content—say, an apple—just “strike” one as different from its immediate surroundings—the table, the pen...—it appears so independently of whether one does know that it is an apple that she is seeing or not. Thus, for Dretske, simple seeing does not amount to knowledge. In order for *S* to see that *O* is *F* by being acquainted with it—have knowledge by acquaintance of it—a number of conditions must verify.¹⁵

Now, it is the opinion of Pitt (e.g., 2004) that the distinction between simple seeing—which is a form of simple acquaintance—and epistemic seeing—knowledge by acquaintance—can be generalized not only to other kinds of sensory experiences but to any kind of conscious state whatsoever, including cognitive states. But, Pitt’s (*Ibid.*) argument goes on, this would not be possible unless those states had a proprietary, distinctive and individuating phenomenology, thus we must conclude they have one. Dretske (1969) is clearly in favour of a causal reading of the notion of knowledge by acquaintance in the sense specified above. I have a couple of remarks on this, though.

(1) I do agree with Pitt that the distinction between simple acquaintance and (propositional) knowledge by acquaintance can be generalized to all kinds of conscious mental particulars. If this is the case, though, I really cannot see how one could be able to differentiate the phenomenal properties of her own experiences from each the others without *eo ipso* somehow (non-conceptually, non-propositionally) *identifying* them: to be able to differentiate a phenomenal property—say the redness of an apple—from others she is or has been acquainted with, one must recognize those properties as not identical—e.g., the redness as not identical to the brownness of the table, nor to the painfulness of the headache she has, and so on. I do think this should be regarded, if not as a full-fledged form of knowledge, at the very least as a cognitive achievement *by itself*.

¹³ Pitt (2004; 2009; 2011) says that in being attentively aware of her own conscious states one is immediately—*i.e.*, without the intermediary of any explicit judgment or reflection—able to *identify* her own experiences—e.g., to distinguish each of them from the others. This choice of words strikes me as particularly interesting, as Lewis (1995) refers to revelation as ‘the *identification* thesis’.

¹⁴ Likewise, as we have seen, for Levine (2011: 108) implicit self-knowledge of thought “is not the result of any explicit formulation or reflection”.

¹⁵ *S* is said to see that *O* is *F* iff: (i) *S* simply sees *O* (*i.e.*, is acquainted with *O*); (ii) *O* is *F*; (iii) the conditions under which *S* simply sees *O* are such that it would not look to *S* as it does unless it were *F*; (iv) *S* believes (iii) to obtain; (v) *S* believes *O* to be *F*. Notice, also, that *O* does not necessarily have to appear as *F* to *S* in order for her/him to see (*i.e.*, have knowledge by Acquaintance) that it is *F*: in fact, a given object *O*—say an apple—might appear, e.g., brown to me but I might know that—say, due to a particular law of refraction of the light in this room—it would not appear brown unless it were red, thereby knowing that it is red *via my being acquainted with his brownness*.

(2) Is there something more obvious than the fact ‘being painful’ is an essential property of an experience or pain, or that ‘being red’—where ‘red’ here refers to a specific phenomenal quality—is essential for an experience of a red surface to be the experience it is (see Kripke 1980: 150-52)?

5. Concluding Remarks

I do think that taking the awareness we have of our own phenomenal mental states to constitute *per se* a peculiar kind of knowledge and taking this knowledge to be essence-revealing might have severe implications upon a materialist framework broadly construed about phenomenal consciousness and about reality in general.

I do believe that *Rev* threatens what Coleman (2008) calls conventional physicalism, namely, a view which consists in the combination of a positive claim and a negative one: phenomenal properties supervene upon (fundamental) physical ones and there are no fundamental phenomenal properties—i.e., the view known as Russellian Monism is false. Since it is widely acknowledged in the relevant literature that any coherent form of physicalism must at the very least imply the supervenience of phenomenal properties upon physical ones, if conventional physicalism is threatened, *a fortiori* more committed forms of physicalism such as the one that Damnjanovic (2012) defends—i.e., form that spell out the relation between phenomenal and physical properties in terms of *identity* or *grounding*—are also threatened. I have also suggested that phenomenal properties should be considered as essential properties of the state bearing them both under a definitional/non-modal and under a modal account of essentiality.

As Giustina (e.g., 2022) has noted, contemplating the idea that the relation of acquaintance is *in itself* peculiar a kind of knowledge might be a way of gaining new insights on how we understand the notion of knowledge in the very first place.

There is a number of issues left open that might be worth to be addressed in the future, spanning from metaphysical issues (do phenomenal concepts provide only a *partial* essential characterization of their referents—phenomenal properties—or do they provide a *full* essential characterization of those properties? is partial *Rev* compatible with physicalism?) to issues in epistemology (does acquaintance *alone* suffice for knowledge? What is the role of attention in introspective acquaintance-knowledge? Is introspective acquaintance-knowledge infallible? Is it knowledge of types or knowledge of tokens? Is introspective acquaintance-knowledge the only kind of acquaintance-knowledge one might have or are there other possible kinds of acquaintance-knowledge? What about, for instance, *perceptual* acquaintance-knowledge, *intuitional* acquaintance-knowledge and so on? How can one use acquaintance-knowledge to build a specific repertoire of concepts? And in particular, how does one use it to build a repertoire of concepts that are at the very least translucent if not transparent?) and even to issues in aesthetics and the philosophy of art (can one imagine phenomenal experiences she has never been acquainted with? can art elicit acquaintance-knowledge?)

I also do think that envisaging the possibility that our epistemic access to our minds and to reality outstrips the possibilities of our propositional knowledge may bring us to reconsider the role of the humanities and of the liberal arts in the academia and in our cognitive endeavour overall. Lodge (2003)

has argued that literature can offer a type of knowledge that is essential and complementary (not opposite) to scientific one. Paying to the view that experience is knowledge (Duncan, 2020) as well as to *Rev* the attention they merit may help further develop Lodge's ideas: in producing e.g., an emotional condition in those who read them, great novelists and poets would not just be merely entertaining us: they would as a matter of fact be revealing to us nature of our very own conscious states and thus, ultimately, of ourselves.¹⁶

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