

Phenomenal Contrast Arguments Still Fail

Abstract

Phenomenal Contrast arguments have become important in analytic philosophy of mind. I argue that a recently suggested variant of such arguments, so-called ‘glossed’ phenomenal contrast arguments, falls prey to a powerful general critique.

Keywords: phenomenal contrast, phenomenal contrast arguments, minimal pair arguments, knowledge of consciousness, cognitive phenomenology, intuition, Elijah Chudnoff

1. Introduction

In philosophy of mind, *phenomenal contrast arguments* have recently become important.¹ These arguments have been central in the debate about cognitive phenomenology—the view that there something it is like to think that p , which is different from what it is like to think that q —but have been used to support many other claims as well.² I have argued that a large class of such arguments systematically fail: they cannot rationally persuade us of their conclusions (omitted). Elijah Chudnoff has presented his own critique, but also argued that arguments of a new type—*glossed* phenomenal contrast arguments—are sound (Chudnoff 2015).³

In this paper I briefly recap my critique against phenomenal contrast arguments, and explain Chudnoff’s glossed contrast arguments, before arguing that they fall prey to a version of my original

¹ The term ‘phenomenal contrast’ was, so far as I have been able to determine, coined by Susanna Siegel in her ‘Subject and Object in the Contents of Visual Experience’ (Siegel 2006a). She also discusses it at length in ‘How Can We Discover the Contents of Experience?’ (Siegel 2007).

² Among them, that natural kinds and causation are represented in perceptual experience (Siegel 2006b; Siegel 2006a); that a ‘mere desire’ is phenomenally distinct from a ‘felt demand’ (Tolhurst 1998); that perceptual experience and intuition both have phenomenology of objectivity (omitted), and that there is a phenomenology of first person agency (Horgan, Tienson, and Graham 2003). For many more examples, see (omitted).

³ Unaccompanied page-numbers refer to this paper.

critique. I then consider and reject the objection that I put the bar for rational persuasion unreasonably high, before concluding that glossed phenomenal contrast arguments are no better than their less shiny counterparts.

2. The Critique

Every day you enjoy⁴ a multitude of conscious experiences: gustatory, olfactory, visual, proprioceptive, and tactile experiences, moods, emotions, and bodily sensations. There is *something it is like* to taste coffee, something (else) it is like to have a headache, and something (else again) it is like to be elated. *What* it is like to experience each of these things, the particular way that it feels, is the phenomenal character of that local conscious experience. In addition, there is also a global conscious experience: at any given time there is something it is like to be you overall. The global experience also has a phenomenal character, and this character somehow reflects the characters of all the local experiences you are, at the time, enjoying. The flipside of this is that local experiences all *contribute* to what it is like to be you overall.⁵

One should not argue too much about labels—they usually don't matter much (Chalmers 2011). Any argument in which a central role is played by the claim that two or more situations differ from each other with respect to the character of experience could be said to employ phenomenal contrast. I have argued that we can single out an important and widely used sub-class of such arguments, which we may call *minimal pair* arguments. These are a more unified bunch, both with respect to aim and method. The *aim* of minimal pair arguments is to rationally persuade us that a particular mental feature M contributes to the character of overall experience.⁶ The *method* is to describe a pair of situations which differ from each other with respect to M. There are two desiderata for this description. First, the pair should come as close as possible to differing *only* in M; to being a *truly minimal pair*. Second, it should produce as clear as possible a reaction that what it would be like to be in one of the situations differs from what it would be like to be in the other.

⁴ 'Enjoy' is a technical term, applicable to pleasant, neutral, and unpleasant experiences.

⁵ I take these to be a priori truths about local and global experiences, but will not argue for this claim here, so these claims can be read as stipulative. For more on the relationship between local and global experiences, see (omitted).

⁶ Phenomenal contrast arguments are (as noted) often presented for other conclusions, such as claims about what enters into the content of experience. However, were they successful, what they would immediately establish are conclusions like: exercising one's ability to immediately recognise pine trees makes a difference to the character of the subject's overall experience. That pine trees are part of the content of the experience would then have to be reached by an additional step; usually abductive, and often left implicit.

In the ideal case there is a) no doubt about this, and b) the pair is truly minimal. No explanation for the contrast can thus be given in terms of differences in *acknowledged contributors*; mental features which both sides take to be contributors. A new feature must be responsible. Since the pair is truly minimal, M is the only difference between the situations, so M must be it.

In practice, the two desiderata pull in opposite directions. The closer we get to a truly minimal pair, the less certain we are that there would be a difference in the character of overall experience. The more certain we are of this, the further we get from a truly minimal pair, and the less pressure there is to conclude that M is responsible. Real examples of minimal pair arguments strike a balance by describing situations that approximate minimal pairhood without attaining it. Real instances of minimal pair arguments are therefore inferences to the *best* explanation, and differ in this respect from their ideal counterpart, where only one explanation is available.

In regimented form, minimal pair arguments look like this:

- (1) If a person were to find herself in one of the described situations, she would be different with respect to M from what she would be in the other.
- (2) The character of her overall experience would also differ.
- (3) That M contributes to the character of overall experience is the best explanation for the difference mentioned in (2).
- (4) So we have good reason to believe that M contributes to overall experience.

Minimal pair arguments fail. To see why, begin by noting that our mental lives are *rich*: several remembered, occurrent, and imagined perceptual experiences, bodily sensations, moods, and emotions occur at the same time (or near enough). Moreover, our mental lives are in constant *flux*: a remembered bodily sensation may last only a fraction of a second, one second I imagine seeing my children at the door when I come home but the next I have moved on; attention changes around often, and so on.

Second, note that we can be rationally persuaded only relative to agreement on a set of background claims: a *common ground*. Suppose that there's agreement that *occurrent*, *remembered*, and *imagined* perceptions, bodily sensations, moods, and emotions all contribute to the phenomenal character of a person's overall experience, and that attention modifies the contribution each of

these makes. This common ground has the virtue of in fact being accepted by most participants in this debate but the details don't matter here, since *any* remotely reasonable common ground will acknowledge a significant number of different contributors. That's all we need.

Finally, note very carefully that minimal pair arguments *by stipulation* invoke what I will call 'the general explanandum', namely *the existence of a difference* in the phenomenal character of overall experience. That is how premise (2) should be understood.

And now we have all we need. Since human mental lives are rich with activity, a large numbers of contributors obtain at any given time: many occurrent, remembered, and imagined perceptual experiences, bodily sensations, moods, and emotions all contribute to the character of a person's overall conscious experience at any given moment. Since human mental lives are in constant flux, the set of contributors will, barring an astronomical coincidence,⁷ be (very) different at any other time: *different* occurrent, remembered, and imagined perceptual experiences, bodily sensations, moods and emotions will then determine the character of her overall experience. But this entails that there are *just exactly as many* candidate explanations for the explanandum—which, I stress again, is *the existence of a difference* in the character of overall experience—as there are differences between the two sets of contributors. This is because each of the many contributors that vary between the two sets is capable of producing *a* difference in overall experience—*that's what it is to be a contributor*. Moreover, each alternative explanation is just exactly as good as the hypothesis that M contributes. That is because, when what you aim to explain is *that there is* a difference between A and B, anything which can produce such a difference can do the explaining (bracketing differences in the probability of producing a difference—a wrinkle which plays no role in this debate at all). The hypothesis that M is a contributor is therefore not the unique best explanation of the datum—far from it. Premise (3) is false, and the argument fails.

⁷ Isn't the fact that someone *might* enjoy a truly minimal pair of experiences the thin edge of the wedge here, ultimately paving the way for a plausible argument based on idealisation? No. First, since our mental lives are rich and in flux, the vast majority of people will never experience such a pair, and thus have no starting point from which to idealise. (Chudnoff agrees; see p. 93.) Second, even if someone were sincerely to claim to *remember* such a pair we would have little reason to believe them: it is much more likely that they have forgotten the many other differences between the situations. (Forgetting most of our rich mental goings-on is completely routine for humans—see (omitted) §§5.3 and 6.2.) Finally, *stipulating* a truly minimal pair won't help either, since our intuitions about such cases—completely alien as they are from our own mental life—quickly give out, and are anyway not to be trusted. See (Omitted), §5.2 for the first point, and §5.1 for the second. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing this worry.

3. Glossed Phenomenal Contrast Arguments

Chudnoff's focus is not phenomenal contrast arguments in general, but their specific application to the cognitive phenomenology debate (on which see for example Smithies 2013a; Smithies 2013b). As he notes, it is not always clear what that debate is about, and philosophical progress often depends on clarifying such questions (p. 103). So he considers a series of related theses (§1), and argues that the one endorsed by advocates of cognitive phenomenology is **Irreducibility**, the thesis that "some cognitive states make phenomenal differences that are irreducible to those made by sensory states" (p. 87).⁸ For reasons I give elsewhere,⁹ I suspect that Chudnoff is right to focus on the *change* local experiences make to the character of our global experience, but for present purposes it's better to focus on the following formulation, which I take to capture the target thesis:

Some cognitive states are such that, because of being in that state, one is in a mental state *with a phenomenal character* for which the phenomenal characters of no sensory states suffice, either singly or in combination.¹⁰

How can one argue for this conclusion with phenomenal contrast? As is conventional, Chudnoff begins by characterising the two cases to be contrasted (p. 98):

Case 1: You entertain the proposition that if $a < 1$, then $2 - 2a > 0$ and do not "see" that it is true. In particular you do not "see" how a 's being less than 1 makes $2a$ smaller than 2 and so $2 - 2a$ greater than 0.

⁸ Chudnoff suggests 'officially' formulating this thesis as: 'Some cognitive states put one in phenomenal states for which no wholly sensory states suffice' (p. 87). However, given the definition of phenomenal states (p. 84), this formulation unnecessarily commits one to the thesis that mental states can be individuated by their phenomenal character, a controversial and (I think) minority view, so I set it to one side here.

⁹ Briefly, because I suspect we can sensibly talk about something being a conscious experience even if there is *no* guarantee of any similarity in what it is like to be the person enjoying it each time it occurs, so long as overall experience is changed in systematic ways by the 'addition' of this local experience. My current favourite example is 'going stereo'; the experience had when driving while listening to radio, when stereo reception suddenly is acquired. There is, it seems to me, something it is like when this happens, but (among other reasons) because the music playing is different each time, there won't be any similarity in what it is like overall afterwards. Instead, 'going stereo' counts as a conscious experience because it changes your overall experience in systematic ways each time. For more on this theme see (omitted) §3.3.

¹⁰ See p. 87 for discussion of the relevant sense of 'because'.

Case 2: You entertain the proposition that if $a < 1$, then $2 - 2a > 0$ and do “see” that it is true. In particular you do “see” how a 's being less than 1 makes $2a$ smaller than 2 and so $2 - 2a$ greater than 0.

And then follows his proposed argument (p. 98 – I've changed the numbering):

- (5) Case 1 and Case 2 contain different phenomenal states.
- (6) The difference consists, at least in part, in this: in Case 2 but not in Case 1 you are in a phenomenal state P that makes you seem to be aware of an abstract state of affairs.
- (7) No possible combination of wholly sensory states puts one in P.
- (8) Some cognitive state—e.g. the state of intuiting that occurs in Case 2—puts one in P.
- (9) Some cognitive states put one in a phenomenal state for which no wholly sensory states suffice—i.e. Irreducibility is true.

The innovation here is supposed to be contained in premise (6). This premise gives, Chudnoff says, a ‘gloss’ on the contrast between the two cases—a tentative description of it—and it is what sets his argument apart from the varieties of phenomenal contrast arguments which he criticises (p. 99; the critiques are in his §2-3).

4. Glossed Phenomenal Contrast Arguments Fail

I'll shortly argue that glossed phenomenal contrast arguments systematically fail, and that they therefore offer no hope of rescue for the (in my view doomed) phenomenal contrast method. Before getting to my main critique, however, I want to make some initial points about Chudnoff's approach.

The first concerns the scope of his argument. Although phenomenal contrast arguments have been important in the cognitive phenomenology debate, they have, as noted, been put forward for many other conclusions as well (see §1, and further references in [omitted]). But the presentation of Chudnoff's account depends crucially on features specific to thought. Even if successful, therefore, his approach offers meagre comfort for proponents of phenomenal contrast arguments more generally, in that it applies only to the phenomenology of thought, and not, for example, to the phenomenology of agency, to the phenomenology of perceptually representing natural kinds, causation, objecthood, and so on.

It gets worse, for Chudnoff's account doesn't even apply to all of cognitive phenomenology. The argument depends on his view of the nature of intuitional experience, developed in detail in various

other places (Chudnoff 2011b; Chudnoff 2011a; Chudnoff 2013; Chudnoff 2012). Intuition justifies belief, Chudnoff argues, because perception does, and because intuitional experience, just like perceptual experience, has presentational phenomenology in that it is an experience “in which we both represent that p , say, and seem to be aware of an item that makes it the case that p ” (Chudnoff 2011a, p.321, *et passim*). Many philosophers would agree, Chudnoff says, that when you entertain a proposition about your immediate environment and also see it to be true, you are in a mental state in which it appears to you that you are aware of that in virtue of which the proposition is true. For example, if the proposition is about there being mail in your mailbox, the mental state you’re in makes it seem to you as if you’re aware of the mail sitting there, in your mailbox (p. 100). According to Chudnoff, case 2 from his glossed argument (in which you ‘see’ that since a is less than 1, this makes $2a$ smaller than 2, so $2 - 2a$ is greater than 0) is structurally similar, for this, too “make[s] you seem to be aware of a state of affairs that bears on the truth of a proposition you consider” (p. 100).

Even if Chudnoff is right about intuitional experience, these glosses are naturally only available for cognitive states in which it seems to the thinker that she is aware of a state of affairs bearing on the truth of the proposition she considers. But large chunks of thought are not like this at all, in part because the truth of propositions is not always at issue.¹¹ When I plan what to do this afternoon I am at no point in a state where it seems to me that I am aware of a state of affairs that bears on the truth of a proposition I am considering, for I am not considering the truth of any proposition. When I wonder how long I would last in the Cretaceous period: the same. So, even if one accepted the glosses in the cases discussed, Chudnoff’s account would not only be limited to cognitive phenomenology—as opposed, for example, to the phenomenology of representing natural kinds, causation, and so on—but to a smallish subset of cognitive phenomenology, to boot.¹² So even if my

¹¹ Chudnoff argues that instances of presentational phenomenology can be found in both introspective, imaginative, and recollective experiences, in addition to perceptual and intuitional ones, but even on his view, “[p]lenty of experiences lack presentational phenomenology” (Chudnoff 2012, 64). Note that I’m not suggesting we get less from these arguments than what *Chudnoff* wants, just that we get less than what some might (reasonably) expect from a defense of phenomenal contrast arguments.

¹² Nor does his account easily apply to all cases where the truth of propositions are at issue. Consider, for example, Charles Siewert case, in which he “was briefly struck by a thought ... about [his] preoccupations with the topic of [his] book, the effects of this, and its similarity to other preoccupations and their effects, ... [specifically how his] preoccupation with the topic of [his] book has made the world seem especially alive with examples of it, references to it, so that it can’t help but seem to [him] that the world is more populated with things relevant to it than previously ... [and how] this is similar to the way in which new parenthood made the worlds seem to [him] burgeoning with babies, parents, the paraphernalia of infancy, and talk and pictures of

case against *glossed* contrast arguments should fail, the more general critique would still be effective against the vast majority of phenomenal contrast arguments.

The second point is that Chudnoff doesn't provide a plausible account of, and thus (*a fortiori*) also no plausible defence of, phenomenal *contrast* arguments. That's because the contrast element is completely incidental to the 'glossed' version of the argument. Chudnoff says that what is glossed is the "phenomenal differences" between the cases (p. 84) but that is not true. As a careful reading of (6) makes clear, the gloss applies to a single member of the pair. To illustrate this point, note that the following amended argument is just as convincing, or (as I hold) otherwise, as the original:

(10) People are sometimes in conscious mental states which makes them seem to be aware of abstract states of affairs.

(11) No possible combination of wholly sensory states puts one in such mental states.

(12) Some cognitive state—e.g. the state of intuiting that occurs in Case 2—puts one in such states.

(13) So, some cognitive states put one in a phenomenal state for which no wholly sensory states suffice—i.e. Irreducibility is true.

Again, we should not quarrel too much about labels, but it *is* reasonable to demand that in a supposed phenomenal contrast argument, the *contrast* should play a central role. These are, precisely, arguments which aim to show that *the difference* between what it would be like to be in one state and what it would be like to be in another is best (or, in the ideal version, can only be) explained by a certain mental feature being a contributor. The explanandum is a difference in phenomenal character between two mental states (premise (3) above), and the presence in one case and absence in the other of the mental feature M is what's supposed to explain this difference.

That's not what's going on here. As noted, and as (10) shows, what really requires explanation here is the phenomenal character of *one* conscious state, or, perhaps, the claim that that phenomenal character can aptly be glossed a certain way. It is then claimed that no combination of sensory states puts one in a state with a character aptly glossed in this way. It is true that if both these premises were accepted it would force us to acknowledge a new contributor—but contrast would have played no role. Even were it successful, therefore, Chudnoff's argument would be no threat to my claim

these" (1998, 277). It seems implausible in the extreme that Siewert then seemed to be aware of a state of affairs bearing on the truth of this proposition. What would *that* be like?

that phenomenal *contrast* arguments cannot rationally persuade their audiences, and his assertion that there are sound phenomenal contrast arguments should be rejected.

However, Chudnoff's argument is not successful. The reason is simple: the crucial claims beg the question (and begging the question is an insurmountable obstacle to rational persuasion).

What phenomenal contrast arguments *are supposed to establish* is that there are facts about phenomenal experiences, namely *that certain pairs of experiences differ* in what it is like to enjoy them, which are inexplicable if one accepts only the contributors in the common ground. This is what in the ideal version forces acceptance of M as a new contributor, and in non-ideal versions strongly recommends this (by showing that M contributing is the best explanation).

However, this is not what the glossed argument aims to establish. Instead, it is what premises (6) and (7) combine to say! And to assume what an argument is supposed to establish is just what begging the question is. Glossed phenomenal contrast arguments cannot rationally persuade their audience because the audience rejects that we are ever in a mental state such that no combination of (the phenomenal characters of) sensory states can yield the phenomenology of that state.

It is true that one probably could give a gloss which would make at least some deniers of cognitive phenomenology agree that no combination of broadly sensory states could put one in a mental state like *that*. But this doesn't help, since these people would deny that we are ever in such states. On the other hand, there are many glosses such that proponents of cognitive phenomenology deny, but opponents of cognitive phenomenology affirm, that combinations of occurrent, remembered and imagined sensory states, in the wide sense here at issue, can put one in a state with a character aptly thus glossed. Again, to take as premises both these things at once is to assume what's supposed to be established.

In my earlier critique of phenomenal contrast arguments I raised exactly this point, in reply to a version of an oft-raised objection. The oft-raised objection is the claim that phenomenal contrast arguments 'really' rely on a different explanandum than the general one (recall: *the existence of a difference* in the character of overall experience between the two cases), which the arguments of my focus by stipulation invoke. It is easy to show that this is implausible, since many influential minimal pair arguments clearly are most reasonably interpreted as relying on the general explanandum (omitted, §3). Moreover, many of those who explicitly discuss these arguments make it perfectly clear that that is how they understand them. Still, this type of objection dies surprisingly hard.

The objection comes in different varieties, and no variety is convincing. Call the variety currently at issue *the kind reply*. As noted, Chudnoff's argument is not really a contrast argument at all, but the

closest counterpart of it which *is* a contrast argument is of just this type: it alleges that the contrast or difference between two cases is (partly) *of a kind* such that the differences in other contributors cannot explain (a certain aspect of) it. That's what the gloss is supposed to contribute.

But again, those who proponents of contrast arguments seek to convince hold, *precisely*, that these contributors *can* explain all there is to explain. Taking as *one's starting point* that this is false is to beg the question. Whatever exactly rational persuasion requires, it certainly requires avoiding this.

At this point it's important to keep firmly in mind what is and isn't at issue. What *is* at issue is whether phenomenal contrast arguments can rationally persuade their audience. What is *not* at issue is whether a person might be convinced that there is cognitive phenomenology (or that causation, representation of natural kinds, or what have you, contribute to the character of experience) by having her attention drawn to an experience she had, until then, simply overlooked.¹³ *Of course that's possible!* She might then agree that none of the contributors she had hitherto acknowledged explains *that* experience. But this is *not* to be convinced by a phenomenal contrast argument—as Chudnoff acknowledges (pp. 89-90). For one, if a person is convinced in this way, contrast might well play no role at all. Even if it does play a role, it is at most the means by which a person's attention is drawn to this type of experience. That this is possible says nothing at all about the power of phenomenal contrast *arguments* to rationally persuade their audience. Moreover—and to rehash a point that has been made many times over, and surely with *particular* potency regarding the cognitive phenomenology debate—to suppose that half the debate's participants have simply been overlooking the relevant parts of their conscious lives is implausible, to say the least.

So, Chudnoff *might* convince someone that there is cognitive phenomenology by drawing her attention to a type of experience, and this might be a species of rational persuasion. But he cannot rationally persuade his audience through the use of a glossed phenomenal contrast argument, since that argument assumes what it's supposed to establish.

5. Rational Persuasion

Am I demanding too much of proponents of phenomenal contrast arguments generally, and of Chudnoff in particular? Is the bar for rational persuasion set so high that it cannot be crossed *by anyone*?

To see that these questions should be answered in the negative I first want to show that, if our mental lives had been different, phenomenal contrast arguments *would* have been rationally

¹³ On ostensive uses of phenomenal contrast, see (omitted).

persuasive. My critique of such arguments is *not* that they are inherently flawed, and that no argument of this kind could ever work, no matter the empirical reality. There are, of course, legitimate objections of this type to purported forms of arguments—for example to logically fallacious ones—but mine is not of this sort. Instead, I claim that contingent truths—but *truths*—about human mental lives systematically block the arguments from rationally persuading us.

Here is how those arguments *could have* worked, had the world been different. In the first step T, who's the target of rational persuasion, would have been invited to consider two different situations in which a person might find herself, and to conclude that what it would be like to be in one of those situations would be different from what it would be like to be in the other. That is, she would have been invited to accept *the general explanandum*; the existence of a phenomenal difference between two situations. She would have done so, and rationally.

In the second step, she would have been invited to list the contributors she thought was present in the two situations. That is, she would have been invited to consider those mental features which by her own lights contribute to the character of a person's overall experience, and to write down which of these she took to be present in the two situations. And for some pairs of situations such as those mentioned in step one she would have come up with *identical lists*: according to her, there would be no difference between the two situations in mental features which contribute to overall experience.

This would leave T under rational pressure, since there now is something which *by her own lights* she cannot explain. She believes, on the one hand, that the two situations would differ with respect to phenomenal character, but on the other, that no feature which could explain this difference varies between the situations. So, in step three, T recognises that she is under rational pressure to accept that her list of contributor mental states should be expanded, and adopts that belief.

In step four, T's attention is drawn to two further things which she either already rationally accepts, or immediately accepts upon consideration. The first is that a mental feature M, which T has hitherto not been acknowledging as a contributor, was present in one situation but absent in the other (the representation of a natural kind, say). The other is that no other mental feature is present in one but absent in the other situation. The rational pressure now gets more specific. In step three, T was under rational pressure to acknowledge that her list of contributors had to be expanded. In this step, T is under pressure to acknowledge that the expansion should take the form of an acknowledgement that M is, in fact, a contributor. As a result, T adopts this belief.

In this process, T is convinced of a conclusion she was previously unwilling to accept. Indeed, for all that's been said it may well have been one she vehemently opposed. Yet every step in this process is

rational, and obviously so. T is rationally persuaded through being supported or enabled to see that commitments she already has, along with commitments she unhesitatingly takes on upon consideration, entail a further conclusion.

As in all deductively valid arguments, T was in some sense already committed to the conclusion before accepting it. But there is still no hint of begging the question here, no sense of that which is to be established being assumed: T's rational persuasion is brought about by her being led to realise that her commitments (along with what she unhesitatingly accepts upon consideration), when put together, have a consequence she had not thus far realised that they had. Quite clearly, then, the notion of rational persuasion with which I am operating does *not* set the bar unreasonably high, easily allowing, for instance, that deductively valid arguments can be rationally persuasive. Of course, phenomenal contrast arguments cannot, in my view, *in fact* rationally persuade us. But that is because our mental lives just are not such as to allow us to go through a process like this. In particular, there are no situations which *for us* (rationally) yield identical lists of contributors. But had our mental lives been different, phenomenal contrast arguments would have worked.

By contrast, there can be no point in the process of advancing a glossed argument in which a target can be led to see that *by her own lights* there is something she cannot explain. That is because anyone who does not *already* accept the conclusion will reject either premise (6) or premise (7)—they will either reject the claim that some experience we actually at times enjoy is glossed as in premise (6), or that no combination of sensory states ever put us in a state with that gloss.

Some are misled by the fact that the target can reject *either (6) or (7)* into thinking that no question begging is occurring. This is a mistake. For the charge of begging the question, it makes no difference whether what's to be established is contained in one premise or in two, so long as it is found in the premises.

6. Concluding Remarks

I ended my original critique by considering an amendment to the kind reply, and I end the present critique by explaining how that amendment applies here. The idea is to begin 'at the other end', by fixing one's attention on a particular contrast, and comparing each of the many alternative explanations that that our rich and fluctuating mental lives throw up to the thesis that M is a contributor.¹⁴ Perhaps Chudnoff would want to suggest a version of this move in support of his premise (7). Chudnoff says that no possible combination of sensory states puts one in a mental state

¹⁴ This strategy was first suggested to me by NN.

with the character at issue, but he might retreat to the claim that a state with such a character is *much better* explained by the thesis that cognition contributes than by *any* alternative thesis.

Our introspective abilities, and our abilities to remember and compare the details of phenomenal characters of experiences, are nowhere near strong enough to bear the weight this suggestion requires of them. We cannot simply direct our attention to our experience and become aware of exactly what it is like to have it (see e.g. Schwitzgebel 2008; Smith 2012). The amended kind reply requires us to not only grasp the details of one experience but of *two*—the glossed experience, and the candidate concoction of actual, remembered, or imagined (broadly) sensory states that’s a candidate for bringing about the relevant phenomenal character—of course with at most one of them actualised at a time. Third, the details of how good a putative explanation the concoction is for the candidate glossed experience must then be committed to memory (just *how* exactly?), and this work must be repeated for each candidate—and there are *many* explanations to consider—before we systematically work through this very long list and somehow ascertain, with any degree of certainty, that M contributing outperforms them all. I trust that spelling out what would be required here is enough to show the implausibility of this reply: it’s abundantly clear that we can’t do any such thing. And this is not a problem local to Chudnoff’s particular example. Any *kind* reply to the critique will fail, because we are simply not in a position to judge what a concoction of occurrent, remembered and imagined perceptual experiences, moods, emotions, and bodily sensations might throw up, and so not in a position to say that there is a character of overall experience such that experiences like *that* could not be explained by a concoction of (broadly) sensory contributors.¹⁵ (So, in my view, even though there likely are glosses such that some opponents of cognitive phenomenology *would* agree that no concoction of occurrent, remembered, and imagined broadly sensory states could put one in a state like *that*, I think there are none for which they *should* agree.)

Conscious experience is of great importance to us, both personally, practically, and theoretically speaking. A significant obstacle to understanding the nature and significance of conscious experience better than we currently do is the fact that we lack good and widely supported methods for determining what the character of conscious experiences actually are: the problem of *missing methods*. According to a recently arisen optimistic consensus in western analytic philosophy, phenomenal contrast arguments can help us overcome this obstacle. I have aimed to show that phenomenal contrast arguments, in both matte and shiny varieties, are not up to the task. If that is right, the problem of missing methods is acute as ever, and the search for a solution must continue.

¹⁵ In addition to the reasons just given in the text, this is in part because contributors may affect one another—see (omitted).

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