

Are Phenomenal Theories of Thought Chauvinistic?

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Abstract. The phenomenal view of thought holds that thinking is an experience with phenomenal character that determines what the thought is about. This paper develops and responds to the objection that the phenomenal view is *chauvinistic*: it withholds thoughts from creatures that in fact have them. I develop four chauvinism objections to the phenomenal view—one from introspection, one from interpersonal differences, one from thought experiments, and one from the unconscious thought paradigm in psychology—and show that the phenomenal view can resist all four.

Key terms: conscious thought cognitive phenomenology chauvinism phenomenal intentionality introspection

1. Introduction

The phenomenal view of thought holds that thinking is an experience with phenomenal character: that is, there is something it is like to think a thought. What's more, the phenomenal character of thought plays a content-determining role: what you're thinking about is determined, at least in part, by what it's like to think the thought.

This paper develops and responds to the objection that the phenomenal view is *chauvinistic*: it withholds thoughts from creatures that in fact have them. In making phenomenology a requirement for having a thought, one might think that the phenomenal view needlessly constrains thought possession. It may not seem at all obvious why there should be something it's like for one to think, for example, that "pandemics are global epidemics." The goal of this paper is to defend the phenomenal view from four different versions of this chauvinism objection. My overall response is that, when faced with alleged counterexamples to the phenomenal theory, the proponent of the theory can either incorporate them or explain them away.

Here is the plan. I begin by laying out the phenomenal view of thought (§2) before explaining what it is for a theory of mind to be chauvinistic (§3). The next four sections develop four chauvinism arguments against the phenomenal view: from introspection (§4), from interpersonal differences (§5) from functionalist thought experiments (§6), and from the unconscious thought paradigm in psychology (§7). The upshot of the paper is that what might initially look like a persuasive objection to the phenomenal view of thought does not hold up after careful scrutiny.

2. The Phenomenal View of Thought

What determines the contents of our thoughts? When I think, for example, that two plus two equals four, in virtue of what is this thought about the number four, as opposed to something else? The phenomenal view of thought says that to have this thought is a matter of having an experience with a particular phenomenal character. The phenomenal character of my thought determines that this thought is about the number four, rather than something else.

Proponents of the phenomenal view of thought hold that thoughts are kinds of experiences that occur in the stream of consciousness (Crane 2013). Thoughts thus have phenomenal character, i.e., there is something it is like to have a thought. The kind of phenomenal character had by thoughts isn't just phenomenology simpliciter, but *cognitive* phenomenology—of a kind with judgments, intuitions, and other cognitive experiences. Further, these cognitive-phenomenal properties are not merely contingently associated with thought, e.g. raw feels or “qualia” (Block 1996), but also play a role in determining the thought's intentional content (Horgan and Tienson 2002, Graham, Horgan, and Tienson 2007, Pitt 2009, Strawson 1994/2010, 2011, Siewert 2011). So, when I think that “two plus two equals four,” I think a thought with this content *because* I instantiate a cognitive-phenomenal property.

I'll now clarify what the phenomenal view is committed to. First, some proponents of the phenomenal view make a further commitment about the *nature* of the cognitive-phenomenal properties that determine thought content, namely, that they are *non-sensory*.¹ To say that thought has non-sensory phenomenal character is to say that it has a kind of phenomenal character different than the kind had by sensory perception broadly construed to include bodily sensation, perceptual imagery, and inner speech. While this further commitment has been disputed by opponents (see Prinz 2007, 2011; Tye and Wright 2011; Carruthers and Veillet 2011), it is a part of the phenomenal view for purposes of this paper.

Second, the phenomenal view is committed to there being some intentional content determined by thought's phenomenal character. This does not entail the further commitment that *all* intentional contents of thought are determined by phenomenal character. The view is therefore consistent with there being "wide" content determined by phenomenal character in conjunction with the natural and social environment of the subject. While some proponents of the phenomenal view deny the existence of wide content (Farkas 2008), others embrace it (Horgan and Tienson 2002).

Finally, the phenomenal view is a view about the intentional content of thought. Other proponents combine it with the view that intentional attitude types, including cognitive attitudes such as judging that *p* or doubting that *p*, are also determined phenomenally (Horgan and Tienson 2002). I leave this issue about the determination of attitude types open for purposes of this paper.

With these clarifications in mind, we can now state the phenomenal view as follows:

The phenomenal view of thought: for any content that *p*, there is some unique cognitive-phenomenal property *C* such that, necessarily: if you think that *p*, then you instantiate *C*; and there is some related content *p** such that, necessarily, if you instantiate *C*, then you think that *p**.

The phenomenal view implies that some phenomenal conditions are sufficient for thought possession. Notice that this part of the view is consistent with the final two clarifications made above. Necessarily, if you have some cognitive-phenomenal property C , the phenomenal view says this suffices for there being some content that you think. Content that is determined by phenomenal character in this way is *phenomenal content*. Phenomenal content is consistent, however, with the existence of non-phenomenally determined thought content, e.g., content determined by your natural or social environment. This is the reason why I distinguish between p and p^* in the formulation of the phenomenal view: they are either identical contents or overlapping contents. In the case that they are overlapping, p^* is a way of thinking the narrow content that p in different external circumstances, i.e., with different “wide” content. Regarding the attitudes: if cognitive-phenomenal property p is an attitudinal property that determines an attitude type (e.g., “thought”), this entails the existence of some content, for one cannot have an attitude without it being directed at some content or other.

The phenomenal view places a phenomenological necessary condition on thought possession. One might think this enforces too high a barrier to entry for having a thought: that the phenomenal view is chauvinistic. The next section explains what it is in general for a theory of mind to be chauvinistic.

3. Chauvinism

A theory of mind is chauvinistic when it denies mental states to entities that in fact have them. In other words, the accusation of chauvinism can be understood as a complaint about the extensional adequacy of a theory: a chauvinistic theory overlooks certain important cases of mentality. Consider, for example, the mind-brain identity theory. The identity theory is chauvinistic because it says that creatures who do not have neural states do not have mental states at all. As David Lewis (1980)

reminds us, however, there might be a Martian who feels pain just as we do, but whose pain differs from ours in its physical realization.

Common-sense functionalism seeks to avoid this problem by allowing for the multiple realizability of the mental. Mental states, according to common-sense functionalism, are individuated by their functional role as specified in terms everyone understands (i.e., by *folk psychology*). Take, for example, pain. Pain just is the kind of state that tends to be caused by tissue damage and tends to cause aversive behavior. So long as a state has this functional profile, it counts as pain, regardless of whether it is realized in human brains or Martian brains. Common-sense functionalism faces its own version of the problem of chauvinism, however. We can conceive of a mad man who feels pain just as we do, but whose pain plays a different functional role than the role typically played in us. As Lewis writes, “If I want a credible theory of mind, I need a theory that does not deny the possibility of mad pain” (Lewis 1980, p. 216).

We are able to conceive of these Lewisian Martians and madmen having mental states because we have a distinctly first-personal way of thinking about our own experiences through the use of *phenomenal concepts* (Chalmers 1996; Smithies, Lennon, Samuels 2022). Our phenomenal concept of pain allows us to imagine the feeling of pain coming apart from its normal physical realization and functional role. It thus might be thought that theories of mind that individuate mental states in terms of phenomenal character, like the phenomenal view of thought, arrive at the correct verdict in countenancing the possibility of Martians and madmen. By counting these cases as genuine instances of thought, the phenomenal view avoids the problem of chauvinism to which identity and functionalist theories succumb.

Alas, the phenomenal view of thought cannot escape so easily. In the following three sections, I develop four different versions of the chauvinism objection to the phenomenal view of thought: one from introspection, one from interpersonal differences, one from well-known philosophical thought

experiments, and one from the unconscious thought paradigm in psychology. My aim is to show that the phenomenal view can resist these chauvinism objections as well.

4. The Introspection Objection

The first chauvinism objection against the phenomenal view is from introspection. To develop the objection, I draw on a passage by Robert A. Wilson (2003). Responding to Horgan and Tienson's (2002) pleas to "pay attention to your own experience" to appreciate the plausibility of the phenomenal view, Wilson writes:

I thought first that George Bush is President of the United States, and had CNN-mediated auditory and visual phenomenology that focused on one of his speeches. I then took a short break, doodled a little, wandered around the room, and then had a thought with that very same content and . . . nothing. Or at least nothing distinctly Bush-like, as in the first case. I just drew a blank, realized my coffee was finished, and moved on. (p. 417)

Wilson first reports having the thought that George Bush is President of the United States with a certain visual and auditory phenomenal character. He then reports having the very same thought about Bush without any phenomenal character at all.

I suspect some readers will feel sympathetic to Wilson's introspective reports. While they might hold some initial attraction, it's my aim to show that they are not persuasive. We can sharpen his introspective reports into the following argument against the phenomenal view:

Introspective Premise For any cognitive-phenomenal property Q, a subject can think that *p* without introspecting that they have Q.

Phenomenal Exclusion For any cognitive-phenomenal property Q, if a subject can think that p without introspecting that they have Q, then they can think that p without having Q.

Conclusion Therefore, for any cognitive-phenomenal property Q, a subject can think that p without having Q.

The first, introspective premise says that, for any cognitive-phenomenal property, one can have the thought that p without introspecting that one has that cognitive-phenomenal property. To show this, he reports having a thought (in his case, that “George Bush is President of the United States”) and reports having no phenomenal character at all (“and... nothing”). The second premise, Phenomenal Exclusion, says that it follows from this introspective premise that one can think that p without having a cognitive-phenomenal property. These premises jointly entail the possibility of thinking a thought without any cognitive-phenomenal character. Because the phenomenal view rules this out, it is chauvinistic.

My response is to deny the Phenomenal Exclusion premise. Against this premise, I argue that just because a subject does not introspect that they have any cognitive-phenomenal character when thinking that p , it doesn’t follow that they can think that p without having any cognitive-phenomenal character. The reason: failing to introspect that p can be mistaken for introspecting that not- p .

One motivation for the phenomenal exclusion premise is that our introspective judgments about our occurrent experiences are privileged in the sense of being especially secure, epistemically. Philosophers offer competing theories about the nature of introspection and the extent to which our introspective judgments have such epistemic security (see Schwitzgebel 2019). For our purposes, we need only subscribe to a notion of introspection as the distinctly first-personal way in which we know

our own minds. Importantly, we need not build into our account of introspection that our introspective judgments about our occurrent experiences are infallible.

One reason that a subject's introspective judgment about their phenomenology can be mistaken appeals to attention. What stands out to us as present in our experience when we introspect will partly be a matter of what we attend to. For example, unless you are attending to it, you may miss the feeling of your feet in your shoes. There is reason to suspect that such introspective inattentive blindness is present in Wilson's case. Recall the contents of his introspective report when first thinking that Bush is President. Wilson reports that he "had CNN-mediated auditory and visual phenomenology focused on one of his speeches" (417). When first thinking that Bush is President, the phenomenology he attends to is the accompanying sensory-phenomenal character of visual and auditory imagery of a Bush speech. He later has this same thought, with, according to him, none of the same phenomenal character before. This introspective experiment shows, according to Wilson, that one can think a thought without having any particular phenomenal character at all.

Wilson, I submit, is overlooking a phenomenal similarity between the two instances of thought because he is attending only to the sensory-phenomenal character accompanying the thought. In judging that there is no phenomenal property in common between the two thought occurrences, he assumes that any phenomenal similarity would have to be a sensory one. But the proponent of the phenomenal view can grant that there is no sensory-phenomenal overlap between his two Bush thoughts. By focusing his attention on the sensory-phenomenal properties of the imagery accompanying his Bush thoughts, Wilson is missing the cognitive-phenomenal properties that proponents of the phenomenal view insist determine the content of thought. His failure to introspectively notice these cognitive-phenomenal properties does not entail that these properties are not present in his experience, however: failure to introspect an aspect of one's experience can be mistaken for introspecting its absence (Armstrong 1968).

Wilson's sensory-phenomenal properties of the mental imagery accompanying his first thought that Bush is President are not rich enough to determine the thought's content, though they may distract him from noticing the cognitive-phenomenal character of this thought. We often think using mental imagery; when one thinks that it's raining outside, one might have a visual mental image of rain falling, or the auditory image of "it's raining outside" running through one's head in inner speech. But we also sometimes have conscious thoughts that occur without any accompanying mental imagery or inner speech (Siewert 1998; Hurlburt and Akhter 2008). When I suddenly realize that I have just locked my keys inside my apartment, this thought occurs without any visual image of a key or hearing that phrase in inner speech. The sensory-phenomenal properties of our accompanying mental imagery, then, cannot determine the content of our thoughts; though when they are present, they can distract us from noticing the cognitive-phenomenal properties that *are* content-determining. This, I suggest, is what is occurring in Wilson's case. He is disposed to miss the phenomenal similarities between his two thoughts that Bush is President because his attention is focused on the sensory-phenomenal differences between them.

I conclude that the chauvinism objection from introspection against the phenomenal view can be resisted by its proponents. One may miss phenomenal similarities between occurrences of one's thought that p in introspection because one is distracted by sensory-phenomenal properties.

A final response to Wilson is worth making. Wilson reports first thinking that Bush is President first with "CNN-mediated phenomenology" and later with "nothing." He thus seems to assume that he has introspective access to his own thoughts; if he didn't grant this, how could he know that these two thoughts are about the same thing, i.e., Bush being President? In making this assumption, however, he appears tacitly committed to the position that his case seeks to undermine. Arguably, he could not have the kind of self-knowledge of his thoughts, and what they are about, without there being something it is like to have those thoughts with their particular content. Indeed,

this argument from self-knowledge is one of the central cases given for cognitive phenomenology determining thought content (Pitt 2004). One may opt for an alternative story as to how we know our own thoughts that doesn't appeal to consciousness (Nichols and Stich 2004), though those alternatives are controversial (Smithies 2019). My task is not to argue for the phenomenal view here, but it is worth noting that, by the lights of his opponents, Wilson is helping himself to something he's not entitled to in pressing this objection.

5. The Interpersonal Differences Objection

There is a different but related objection that one might make at this stage: two subjects could have the same thought that p while differing in cognitive-phenomenal character. Call this objection the interpersonal differences objection. The interpersonal differences objection is suggested by Wilson when he says the following:

What an arbitrarily chosen pair of people share phenomenologically when they both entertain the thought that George Bush is President of the United States is anyone's guess (Wilson 2003, p. 416).

What Wilson is suggesting here is that my thought that p and your thought that p can differ in phenomenal character, and so phenomenal character can't be necessary for thought possession. To make the argument explicit:

Subject Variance

Two subjects can think that p without overlapping in phenomenal character.

Phenomenal Exclusion

If two subjects can think that p without overlapping in phenomenal character, then, for any cognitive-phenomenal property Q , a subject can think that p without having Q .

Conclusion

Therefore, for any cognitive-phenomenal property Q , a subject can think that p without having Q .

The interpersonal differences objection threatens the phenomenal view, which says that having some cognitive-phenomenal property C is *necessary* for thinking a thought that p . In response, I argue that the Subject Variance premise is false.

The first line of defense against the interpersonal objection is to again distinguish between the cognitive-phenomenal properties that determine the content that p and the accompanying sensory-phenomenal properties. When I have the thought Bush is President, I might experience the sentence “Bush is President” running through my head in inner speech, while you might have a flash of the White House in visual imagery. Despite these sensory-phenomenal differences, there will be some cognitive-phenomenal property in common insofar as our thoughts are both about the very same topic – namely, Bush being President.

There are other explanations for the vast phenomenal differences between two subjects thinking a thought with the same content. While we sometimes have thoughts that occur in relative isolation from other thoughts, such as when we have spontaneous thoughts or when our mind wanders (Fox and Christoff 2018), very often our thoughts occur in close temporal relation to one another. For example, our thoughts can be related associatively, as when my thought that Bush is President causes me to recall a trip to Washington, D.C. in episodic memory. Our thoughts can also be related inferentially, as when I use the thought that Bush is President and the thought that if one is

President, then one is Commander in Chief to infer that Bush is Commander in Chief. We might focus on these nearby associative and inferential thoughts and their phenomenal character when we attribute thoughts to ourselves, such as “Bush is President.” It is likely that these associative and inferential connections to the same thought will vary widely between different subjects (perhaps your thought that Bush is President causes you to think about an upcoming election), it’s not surprising that there will be phenomenal differences between subjects that grab our attention in virtue of these different “downstream” thoughts. But this is again consistent with there being a cognitive-phenomenal similarity between subjects in virtue of having the same thought to which these downstream thoughts are connected, namely, that Bush is President.

One might protest: even once we account for our sensory-phenomenal differences, can’t we still think about Bush in very different ways, i.e., with non-overlapping phenomenal character? There might still be vast interpersonal variation in the cognitive experience of how you and I think about Bush. This is again no threat to the phenomenal view, as the proponent of the view can grant that there might be cognitive-phenomenal differences between your Bush thought and my Bush thought while maintaining that these differences are consistent with there being phenomenal similarities. When you and I think about Bush in different ways, we’re thinking a thought with the same coarse-grained content, but we do this by thinking different fine-grained content. Since we think the same coarse-grained content, there is a cognitive-phenomenal property we share. By instantiating this property by thinking the thought with different fine-grained content, however, there will also be cognitive-phenomenal properties on which we differ.

It's natural to use the *determinate-determinable* distinction to describe how experiences are structured in this way (Crisp 2006; [reference removed]). There is some determinable phenomenology we share, the phenomenology of a Bush thought, although we instantiate different determinates of this determinable: more fine-grained ways of thinking about Bush. Consider an analogy: you and I

might share the determinable sensory-phenomenal property of perceiving red, and so overlap in sensory phenomenal character, though we instantiate different determinates of that determinable (e.g., you experience crimson while I experience scarlet). Despite differing in our determinate experiences, we overlap in our determinable experiences. And what goes for sensory experiences and their content will go for cognitive experiences and their content.

I conclude that the chauvinism objection from interpersonal differences can be parried by proponents of the phenomenal view by denying the Subject Variance premise. Interpersonally, two subjects with the thought that p may differ in both sensory phenomenology and cognitive phenomenology, but these differences are consistent with there being cognitive-phenomenal overlap between the subjects in virtue of their thinking that p .

If, like Wilson, one found phenomenal character unsuitable as a ground of thought content, one might be motivated to adopt a functional account of thought content. On a functional account, a subject has the thought that p so long as the thought plays the functional role that the thought that p typically plays (i.e., what the thought that p tends to cause and be caused by). Are phenomenal theories of thought chauvinistic by denying that typical functional role is sufficient for thought? Answering this question is the goal of the next section.

6. The Objection from Functionalist Thought Experiments

Our thoughts play a causal role in our psychology. For example, my thought that it is raining outside tends to cause me to grab an umbrella, and tends to be caused by viewing raindrops falling down a window. An opponent of the phenomenal view might think that these functional properties constitute the content of thought: that what it is to have a thought that it is raining outside just is to have a state that tends to play a certain causal role. On this view, having the functional role typical of thinking that p suffices for thinking that p , while the thought's phenomenal properties are irrelevant to its content.

The functional view sketched here sometimes goes by the name *functional role semantics* (see Harman 1987 and Peacocke 1992).

We can press into service familiar characters from the functionalism literature to develop a third chauvinism objection to the phenomenal view. Consider, for example, cases of absent qualia or “zombies” (Chalmers 1996). Zombies are creatures functionally equivalent to human subjects, but there is nothing it is like to be a zombie. When I have the thought that it’s raining outside, this thought has phenomenal character and functional profile. My zombie twin will have a state with the same functional profile but without any of the accompanying phenomenal character.

Consider also phenomenal inverters (Shoemaker 1975), creatures whose causal profiles are the same as ours but whose phenomenal properties are “swapped.” Phenomenal inverters have traditionally been deployed to test intuitions about sensory-phenomenal properties. The sensory-phenomenal state I have that is typically caused by viewing a stoplight and typically causes me to press the brake is phenomenal red; in my phenomenal inverter, the state that plays this functional role is phenomenal green. Phenomenal inverters can be extended to cognitive-phenomenal properties too. When I have the thought that it’s raining outside, this state’s functional profile might be instantiated in my phenomenal inverter with the cognitive-phenomenal properties that I have when I think it’s *not* raining outside, and vice versa. We can stipulate that in inverter cases we permute the cognitive-phenomenal properties of various thoughts while holding fixed everything else about the inverter’s mental life, including their sensory-phenomenal properties and desires.

So, my zombie twin has a state that functions like my thought that it’s raining outside without any phenomenal character. My phenomenal inverter has a state that functions like my thought that it’s raining outside, but with swapped phenomenal character. Do my zombie twin and phenomenal inverter have the thought that it’s raining outside? Those inclined to answer “yes” can press the following argument against the phenomenal view:

- Functional Sufficiency* If phenomenal zombies and phenomenal inverters have a state that plays the functional role of the thought that *p*, then phenomenal zombies and phenomenal inverters can think that *p*.
- Zombie-Invert Premise* Phenomenal zombies and phenomenal inverters have a state that plays the functional role of the thought that *p*.
- Conclusion* Therefore, phenomenal zombies and phenomenal inverters can think that *p*.

This argument entails that the phenomenal view of thought is chauvinistic: phenomenal zombies and phenomenal inverters can have the thought that *p*, but the phenomenal view rules this possibility out. Note that the opponent of the phenomenal view must assume that zombies and inverters are conceivable in order to run this objection.

Why believe the Functional Sufficiency premise? Zombies and phenomenal inverters display all the behavior we typically display when thinking, for example, that it's raining outside. We can predict and explain their rain behavior by attributing this thought to them. They certainly *seem*, from the outside, to think that it's raining outside. So denying them this thought might be deemed chauvinistic.

Notice, however, that the same reasoning goes through when it comes to the phenomenology and functional profile of *pain*. Pains tend to cause me to wince and cry and tends to be caused by scratches and burns. My zombie twin will function in the same way without any of the typical pain phenomenology, while my phenomenal invert might function in the same way, but the functional role is played by pleasure phenomenology. Despite it being true that we can explain and predict my zombie twin and phenomenal invert's behavior by attributing pain to them, we shouldn't. To do so would be to get the wrong result. Despite them acting as if they are in pain from the outside, it's clear from the

inside that they don't feel pain at all. And what goes for pain goes for thought. It might seem *as if* my zombie twin thinks that it's raining from the outside, but it's clear from the inside that it doesn't have this thought at all.

The committed functionalist might balk at this parity of reasoning: they might deny that what goes for pain goes equally for thought. While it may be natural for us to attribute pain states wherever there is pain phenomenology, it is less clear that thought phenomenology ought to dictate our thought attributions. Why think we should treat these cases analogously?

We ought to treat these cases analogously because otherwise we fail to capture the *irrationality* present in phenomenal invert cases. My phenomenal invert talks and behaves as if it is raining outside, yet they have the cognitive-phenomenal character as if it is *not* raining outside. This seems patently irrational: their judgment feels from the inside as if it isn't raining, but they do things like assert “it's raining outside” and reach for an umbrella. The phenomenal view can capture this irrationality, for it says that my invert behaves in conflict with their thoughts: they think that it isn't raining but behave as if it is raining. The functionalist cannot capture this irrationality. According to the functionalist, for whom thoughts are determined by a state's functional profile, the phenomenal invert thinks that it is raining outside. For the functionalist, all is in good order with our phenomenal invert. But this is the wrong result.

Considering a phenomenal invert for pain drives this home. The phenomenal invert feels pain, but says things like “I like this!” and seeks out more of it. This is patently irrational, and yet the functionalist cannot capture this irrationality, as they do not attribute pain to the invert, but pleasure. According to the functionalist, there is no irrationality in the phenomenal invert, but this is again the intuitively wrong result. This is why we should treat these cases analogously: for both pain and thought, there are rational conflicts present in the phenomenal invert that the functionalist can't capture.²

One might think that there's no way to explain what it is that we think *but for* appeal to functional role, that what a thought is about can only be determined by what it *does*. I have two responses to this claim. First, much of the motivation of the phenomenal theory of thought is to give an alternative account of content determination (Horgan and Tienson 2002). By assuming that what a thought does, rather than what it feels like from the inside, is our only resource for grounding its intentional content, this claim begs the question against the phenomenal view. Second, a thought's functional role need not be completely irrelevant to its content. As mentioned in §2, the phenomenal view is compatible with the existence of wide content, where this “wide” content is determined by causal connections to natural or social environment in conjunction with phenomenally-determined internal content. On this view, my twin on twin earth and I share phenomenally-determined water thoughts, but their thought also has external content in virtue of his thought being causally connected to twin water.

One may wish to give a purely functionalist account of thought content determination, excising any phenomenally-determined content. This seems to be driven by a motivation to reduce intentional content to naturalistically kosher ingredients (Fodor 1987). On this view, while consciousness is mysterious, intentionality seems more amenable to naturalistic explanation. The phenomenal view of thought should therefore be resisted, the objection goes, on pain of the hard problem of consciousness infecting our explanation of intentionality (see Smithies 2019: Ch. 1). I have three responses. First, if one is a naturalistically-minded philosopher, this is no particular reason to deny a role for consciousness in content-determination. Consciousness need not be considered non-natural or otherwise mysterious (see Seth and Bayne 2022 for a recent review of biological and physical theories of consciousness). Second, reductions are very hard to come by, both in general and for intentionality in particular (Pautz 2013). If one is open to a non-reductive view of intentional content, then the phenomenal view of thought becomes an attractive option. Finally, and regardless, whatever

problems consciousness and intentionality might pose for naturalists, thoughts having phenomenal content does not make those problems worse.

I conclude that the chauvinism objection from thought experiments can be rebuffed by the proponents of the phenomenal view. In the argument above, the Functional Sufficiency premise is false. I've tried to undercut the motivation behind thinking that functional properties of thought suffice for determining what the thought is about. The objection loses its grip once we abandon the reductive motivations behind it.

7. The Objection from Unconscious Thought

The final chauvinism objection starts with a familiar phenomenon. When working on a complex problem or weighing a difficult decision (e.g., deciding what to major in at university), people often report that they arrive at an answer by directing their attention elsewhere, or by sleeping on it. Not consciously thinking about an issue can help one come to a solution.

This phenomenon has empirical backing from the Unconscious Thought (UT) paradigm in psychology developed primarily by Ap Dijksterhuis.³ In a series of experiments, Dijksterhuis and colleagues prompted some subjects to make a decision after a period of conscious deliberation, while other subjects were asked to make a decision after a period of distraction. In Strick, Dijksterhuis, and Van Baaren (2010), for example, all subjects were first presented with a decision problem: they were asked to imagine they were looking for a new roommate, and then presented with information about potential candidates. Next, different groups of subjects were given different instructions. One group was told that they would be asked to choose a candidate in a moment, and instructed to think carefully about their decision for the next few minutes. Another group was also told that they would be asked to choose a candidate in a moment, but were instructed to do an anagram task for the next few minutes. Finally, both groups were asked to choose a roommate (Dijksterhuis and Strick 2016: 122).

Notably, the subjects who made their decision after a distraction period tended to make a better decision on the prompt than the subjects engaging in conscious deliberation. The decision is “better” according to either an objective criterion (e.g., the choice has more positive attributes according to experts) or subjective criterion (e.g., the best option is created on the basis of participants’ pre-experimental rankings) (Dijksterhuis and Strick 2016, p. 119). Dijksterhuis and colleagues argue that what best explains this result is that the distracted subjects engage in unconscious thinking about the decision being made while they are consciously attending to some other activity.

An opponent might thus ask: does the phenomenal view of thought deny these unconscious changes in thought supported by the UT paradigm? Recall that the phenomenal view of thought places a necessary condition of phenomenology on thought content: necessarily, if you think that content *p*, then you instantiate cognitive-phenomenal property *C*. The UT studies present a possible counterexample to this necessary condition: that there are cases of a subject thinking that *p without* instantiating cognitive-phenomenal property *C*.⁴

As before, as we can state the chauvinism argument from unconscious thought in premise-conclusion form:

<i>Empirical Premise</i>	Subjects in UT paradigm experiments make better decisions after a period of distraction than after conscious deliberation.
<i>Abductive Premise</i>	The best explanation of subjects in UT paradigm experiments making better decisions after a period of distraction is that they engage in unconscious thought.
<i>Conclusion</i>	Therefore, there exist unconscious thoughts.

This argument entails that the phenomenal view of thought is chauvinistic: the UT experiments suggest the existence of unconscious thoughts, but the phenomenal view denies their existence.

How can the proponent of the phenomenal view respond? To begin, we can first make a distinction between “thought” as referring to a state and “thinking” as referring to a process. The statement of the phenomenal view of thought above construes thoughts as states. There are then processes that operate over these states, and we can refer to these processes as “thinking.” Thinking, then is a process, referring to an operating over states construed as thoughts. It’s notable that Dijksterhuis and colleagues in the UT paradigm explicitly define unconscious thought as a process and not a state: “Unconscious thought (UT) . . . refers to cognitive or affective decision-related processes that take place outside conscious awareness—that is, while people are consciously occupied with something else” (Dijksterhuis and Strick 2016: 117). An initial line of defense would be to deny the Abductive Premise: the phenomenal view is committed to thoughts (qua states) being conscious, but it is not committed to thinking (qua processes over states) being conscious.

An opponent of the phenomenal view might push back as follows. Suppose that our subject consciously thinks p at time t_1 , undergoes some change to this thought during a process of distraction at t_2 , and then consciously thinks that $not-p$ at t_3 . The objection is that, in order for this change to occur, some unconscious inference-like process must have occurred during the distraction period to take p to $not-p$. But an unconscious inference-like process requires some unconscious state upon which an inference is being performed. So there must be some unconscious state with the content that p (and one with the content that $not-p$) present during t_2 . In short, thinking qua unconscious process necessarily involves unconscious thoughts qua states.

The phenomenal view of thought says that thoughts are occurrences in the stream of consciousness. A state that doesn’t have phenomenal character will therefore not count as a thought. What should the proponent of the phenomenal view say, then, about these unconscious states revealed

by the UT studies? One answer is that while they are not themselves thoughts, they are intentional states that share their content with thoughts.

This idea can be motivated by noticing that thoughts stand in close relation to another unconscious intentional state type: belief. Beliefs are plausibly standing states, persisting in a subject even when their contents are not occurrent in the subject's stream of consciousness. This is why it's reasonable to attribute the belief that two plus two equals four to me even when this thought content is not present in my consciousness. This thought content plausibly reflects the content of standing beliefs: I'm disposed to have the occurrent thought that "two plus two equals four", when I consider the question whether this is true, because I have a standing belief with that content. So thought contents can share their content with unconscious states. That beliefs are usually regarded as unconscious states suggests that this sort of machinery is familiar.

Moreover, the contents of our beliefs can undergo unconscious changes. I might unconsciously infer from my belief that it's Wednesday today and my belief that I need to pick up my son early from daycare on Wednesdays to the belief that I need to pick up my son early from daycare today. This standing belief might then issue in a conscious thought with the same content when the question arises (perhaps a student asks if I can meet this afternoon). Beliefs, on the phenomenal view, are not thoughts, for thoughts are occurrences in the stream of consciousness, and beliefs are standing states. But beliefs stand in a certain relation to thoughts, as dispositions to have a thought with a certain content (Crane 2013, Smithies 2019: Ch. 4). Changes in the unconscious state entail a change in the conscious state the subject is disposed to have.

Having said this about belief, we can tell a similar story about the unconscious intentional states revealed by the UT studies. Suppose that, before the distraction period, a subject forms a quick impression about how they would answer a prompt, e.g. "roommate A is best." During the distraction period, there is an unconscious inferential transition from this state to another unconscious state, e.g.

“roommate B is best.” This new state is the result of an unconscious change from other states, but its content is just that of the conscious judgment the subject is disposed to have when conditions are appropriate (such as when asked by an experimenter which roommate they deem best).

Does this response concede the charge of chauvinism? No. The proponent of the phenomenal view can insist that the states revealed by the UT paradigm aren’t thoughts, but unconscious intentional states that share their content with conscious states. Recall that the phenomenal view is a thesis about *thought* content determination in particular. Allowing for unconscious intentional states that are not thoughts does not threaten it. The proponent of the phenomenal view can maintain that the content of these unconscious intentional states is determined by their manifestations in conscious judgment. In other words, the unconscious intentional states have their content *derivatively*, as their content is derived from their connections to conscious states (Kriegel 2011, Mendolovici 2018). This need not be seen as capitulating to the chauvinism objection, as it exploits relations to unconscious intentional states that proponents of the phenomenal view ought to already accept.

I conclude that the Abductive Premise in the chauvinism argument is false: the best explanation of subjects in the UT paradigm experiments making better decisions after a period of distraction is not that there exist unconscious *thoughts*, but unconscious intentional states that are related in the right way to thoughts.

8. Conclusions

First, the proponent of the phenomenal view of thought can resist the chauvinism objection from introspection. It does not follow from the fact that one does not detect cognitive-phenomenology in introspection that such phenomenology is not present. What we find in introspection is often a matter of what it is we’re looking for. When looking for sensory phenomenology that accompanies our thoughts, we can miss the cognitive phenomenology determining the content of our thoughts.

Second, the proponent of the phenomenal view can resist the chauvinism objection from interpersonal differences. Two subjects can differ widely in overall phenomenology while overlapping in cognitive phenomenology in virtue of thinking that *p*.

Third, the proponent of the phenomenal view can resist the chauvinism objection from functionalist thought experiments. Cases where the phenomenal properties and functional properties of thought come apart, like zombies and phenomenal inverters, support the insufficiency of functional properties for determining thought possession.

Fourth, cases of unconscious thinking revealed by the unconscious thought paradigm in psychology do not threaten the phenomenal view. The phenomenal view is consistent with the existence of unconscious changes to one's thoughts, and the states that this paradigm implicates are best viewed as unconscious intentional states that share content with conscious thoughts.

One way of appreciating the phenomenal view is that it says thoughts are similar to pain. Like our thoughts, pain's phenomenal character determines pain's intentional content. We can sometimes miss pain in introspection. The functional profile of pain doesn't suffice to determine pain states. If there is empirical reason to posit "unconscious pain" (Gligorov 2008), then these states will best be thought of as intentional states that bear the right relations to conscious pains. The burden is on those who want to tell a different story for how pain states and thought states are individuated.

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¹ Strawson (1994/2010), Siewert (1998), Horgan and Tienson (2002), Pitt (2004), Kriegel (2015), and Montague (2016).

² In previous work, I have argued that the conceivability of cases like phenomenal inverts puts pressure on the claim that a subject having intentional states conceptually entails that the subject is minimally rational contra Davidson (1970) and Lewis (1994); see [reference removed] and [reference removed].

³ The psychological literature on the UT paradigm is large. See Dijksterhuis (2004) and Dijksterhuis and Nordgren (2006) for early results, Bargh (2011) for critical discussion, and Dijksterhuis and Strick (2016) for a recent review.

⁴ Here I am assuming, contra Coleman (2021) and Pitt (forthcoming), that phenomenal states are never unconscious.