

Review of Tim Bayne and Michelle Montague's *Cognitive Phenomenology**

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The contributions in *Cognitive Phenomenology* revolve around the thesis that there is a non-sensory or *cognitive* phenomenology in thought, something it is like to think that goes beyond mere sensory phenomenology.

It is fairly uncontroversial that there is visual, auditory, emotional, and other sensory phenomenology. It is also fairly uncontroversial that thinking is at least sometimes accompanied by such sensory phenomenology. The question is whether cognition has a *proprietary* phenomenology, a phenomenology different in character from sensory phenomenology. In this review, we reserve the term “cognitive phenomenology” for such proprietary phenomenology. The thesis that cognitive phenomenology exists is the *cognitive phenomenology thesis* (CP).¹

This anthology is a timely and welcome addition to the philosophy of mind literature. The question of cognitive phenomenology has attracted considerable interest over the past years. Apart from being intrinsically interesting, the question is important to other topics in philosophy of mind. It is particularly relevant to the debates on *representationalism*, the view that consciousness is a kind of intentionality (Dretske 1995; Tye 1995, 2000; Lycan 1996), as well as

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¹ Most of the papers in the collection focus on CP. Some papers also address the further questions of whether cognitive phenomenology is *distinctive*, meaning that thoughts with different contents have different phenomenal characters, and whether it is *constitutive* of thought content. Pitt (2004) introduces the notions of proprietary, distinctive, and constitutive cognitive phenomenology. They have proven useful in clarifying and focusing the debate.

the phenomenal intentionality theory, the view that intentionality is grounded in consciousness (Strawson 1994; Siewert 1998; Horgan and Tienson 2002; Loar 2003; Farkas 2008; Kriegel 2011). Both theories have received considerable attention in recent years, and both have implications for cognitive phenomenology. In particular, a central brand of representationalism, the reductive representationalism defended by Dretske, Tye, and Lycan, is committed to denying that there is cognitive phenomenology,² while phenomenal theories of intentionality seem to be committed to affirming the existence of cognitive phenomenology.³ While the anthology has a fairly narrow focus, the widespread implications of its subject matter make it of broad interest to philosophers of mind, phenomenologists, and cognitive scientists alike.

This collection is a microcosm of the literature on cognitive phenomenology. As far as we can tell, almost all the influential considerations found elsewhere in the literature are represented in this book. The collection is made all the more useful by Bayne and Montague's introduction, which does an excellent job of laying out the dialectical landscape and orienting the reader. The reader who needs to learn about the cognitive phenomenology debate in a few days could focus almost exclusively on this book.

In the remainder of this review, we briefly overview the content of the book before offering some reflections on the use of introspection in the debate.

Most contributions argue for or against CP. Terry Horgan, David Pitt, Christopher Shields, Charles Siewert, Galen Strawson, and David Woodruff Smith argue in favor of CP, while Peter Carruthers & Bénédicte Veillet, Joseph Levine, Jesse Prinz, William Robinson, and Michael Tye & Briggs Wright argue against CP. Maja Spener discusses the appropriate response to disagreement over the results of introspection. Uriah Kriegel and Michelle Montague develop views about the role of cognitive phenomenology in unconscious intentionality and the

² Dretske, Lycan, and Tye are committed to denying the existence of cognitive phenomenology because the accounts they give of the distinguishing feature of conscious as opposed to nonconscious intentionality entails that only perceptual states can be phenomenally conscious. See Bourget & Mendelovici (forthcoming) for discussion.

³ While most phenomenal theories of intentionality require CP, Bourget (2010) and Mendelovici (2010) develop versions that do not.

perception of objects, respectively.

Both the proponents and opponents of CP base much of their argumentation on broadly introspective considerations. The main introspection-based debate has the following overall shape. The proponent of CP invites the reader to consider various mental states in which cognitive phenomenology is particularly salient. Here is a simple example from Siewert:

I meet a friend, and she asks me, ‘Did you bring the book?’ For a moment I am at a loss as to what book she’s talking about---and then I realize in an instant what book it is. (p. 258)

According to Siewert, sudden realizations like these exhibit cognitive phenomenology. Siewert, Strawson, Shields, and Woodruff Smith discuss many other situations in which the presence of cognitive phenomenology is supposed to be particularly salient. We are invited to recall or imagine similar situations. In doing so, we are supposed to introspectively notice our cognitive phenomenology.

The opponents of CP have a surprisingly uniform response to the sorts of cases discussed by the proponents. This response is best articulated by Prinz and Tye & Wright. In a nutshell, the response is that all alleged examples of cognitive phenomenology are in fact examples of sensory phenomenology, such as the phenomenology of mental imagery, inner speech, or emotion.

The preceding summarizes the general form of the main introspection-based debate. While there are many ways of putting the arguments on both sides, the issue seems to boil down to a disagreement over what is the best explanation of the introspective evidence. Almost everyone agrees that the examples involve some kind of phenomenology; the disagreement is over whether it is merely sensory phenomenology or if cognitive phenomenology is involved.

The book involves a few other interesting lines of argument that don’t rely directly on introspection. One, originally due to Pitt (2004), argues that the best explanation of the sort of

knowledge we have of our occurrent, conscious thoughts is that they have characteristic phenomenal characters. In their contributions to this volume, Levine and Tye & Wright respond to this argument. Pitt's contribution refines the argument and responds to objections.

Pitt's contribution also develops an interesting new argument for CP that does not rely on introspection of cognitive states (though it may ultimately rely on introspection of other kinds of states). Roughly, he argues that in the case of non-cognitive conscious states, consciousness supervenes on phenomenology (how conscious states are qua conscious states supervenes on how they are phenomenally). It would be bizarre if cognitive states were unlike other mental states in this regard. So, we should accept CP.

Other kinds of arguments rely on epistemic criteria for phenomenal consciousness, such as susceptibility to zombie thought experiments. Horgan argues that since partial zombies lacking cognitive phenomenology are conceivable and phenomenally different from us, we have cognitive phenomenology. Also relying on epistemic criteria for phenomenal consciousness, Carruthers & Veillet argue that there is no cognitive phenomenology because thought is not susceptible to the explanatory gap. Incidentally, the reverse argument is made by Kriegel (forthcoming, Ch. 1): The explanatory gap applies to thought, so there is cognitive phenomenology.

Only two contributions do not directly address the question of whether there is cognitive phenomenology. Kriegel's contribution offers an interpretivist account of nonconscious intentionality on which it is derived from cognitive phenomenology. Montague focuses on the phenomenology of particularity in perception, the phenomenology of experiencing individual objects. She argues that the phenomenology of particularity is best explained by cognitive phenomenal contributions in perceptual experience. If our best account of the phenomenology of particularity invokes cognitive phenomenology, this lends indirect support to CP.

The structure of the debate reflected in *Cognitive Phenomenology* raises interesting methodological questions. Many arguments for or against CP are based on introspection, but the

two sides of the debate seem to disagree on what we introspect. Spener's contribution asks what we should do in the face of such introspective disagreement. She suggests that since there is no special reason to think that either side has made a mistake, both parties should lower their credence in their positions.

While this may be the correct initial response, perhaps there is a way to move forward towards a resolution. The very fact that there is introspective disagreement is useful data. Perhaps one view can do a better job than the other at explaining the disagreement itself.

Two contributors attempt to make progress on this front by suggesting explanations of their opponents' errors. Strawson, a proponent of CP, suggests that thinking a thought is consuming in a way that makes it difficult to notice its phenomenology. When we think a thought, we focus on the content of the thought and find it hard to step back and examine the phenomenology (pp. 295-6). If this is right, then it would explain why some people have difficulty noticing cognitive phenomenology, even if CP is true.

Prinz, an opponent of CP, suggests that the proponents of CP are subject to a kind of introspective illusion (pp. 192-3). They are mistaking one type of phenomenology for another (e.g. a sensory phenomenology for a proprietary cognitive phenomenology), or a representational feature for a phenomenal feature (e.g. the representation of elephants for an elephantine phenomenology). If this is right, then it would explain why some theorists earnestly claim to observe cognitive phenomenology, even if there is none.

We want to suggest three other factors that might combine to fuel the introspective disagreement. The first is that parties to the debate might disagree on what would even *count* as cognitive phenomenology. Both sides agree that cognitive phenomenology is phenomenology that goes beyond sensory phenomenology, and that sensory phenomenology includes the phenomenology of emotion, mental imagery, and inner speech. However, it is not clear to us that everyone agrees on what counts as emotional, imagistic, or verbal phenomenology. If there is some disagreement here, then the phenomenology whose status as cognitive is under dispute

might count as sensory for some but not for others. This kind of terminological discrepancy could easily occur if the allegedly cognitive phenomenology is continuous with uncontroversially sensory phenomenology. For example, perhaps there is no sharp boundary between clear cases of imagistic phenomenology and the allegedly cognitive phenomenology. The difference might be simply a matter of level of detail, vivacity, or abstractness. In this case, it would not be surprising if participants in the debate drew the line between “cognitive” and “sensory” phenomenology in different places, resulting in disagreement over whether the phenomenology they introspectively observe in thought counts as “sensory” or “cognitive.”⁴

Another factor might be simply that the allegedly cognitive phenomenology is hard to notice, focus on, and scrutinize. It is faint and fleeting, and largely overwhelmed by the uncontroversially sensory phenomenology of perception, emotion, imagery, and inner speech.

In short, it's unclear what would count as cognitive phenomenology, and the relevant introspective observations are difficult to make in the first place. These difficulties could be exacerbated by a third factor: Cognitive phenomenology has important implications for other debates in philosophy of mind. There might be some bias towards taking unclear evidence as supporting the position one has antecedent theoretical reasons to prefer. It is no surprise that reductive representationalists oppose CP and that proponents of phenomenal accounts of intentionality endorse CP. Of course, it is difficult to determine the direction of causation (perhaps reductive representationalists endorse reductive representationalism partly because they do not believe in cognitive phenomenology, and not the other way around). We are merely suggesting that in explaining the existence of introspective disagreement, we might do well to consider the broader contemporary context of the cognitive phenomenology debate.⁵

In conclusion, *Cognitive Phenomenology* is an excellent collection of articles on an important debate in contemporary philosophy of mind. We strongly recommend it to anyone

⁴ In a similar vein, Bayne and Spener (2010) suggest that disagreement over what counts as phenomenal character might be fuelling the debate.

⁵ Bayne and Spener (2010) also discuss the possibility that theoretical considerations infect introspective judgments in this case.

interested in consciousness or philosophy of mind more generally.

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