

The Epistemic Insignificance of Phenomenal Force

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Abstract: Does phenomenal force, the distinctive phenomenology attributed to perceptual experience, really form an integral part of the latter? If not, what implications does it have for perceptual justification? In this paper, I first argue for a metacognitive account, according to which phenomenal force constitutes a separate, metacognitive state. This account opens up a previously unexplored path for challenging phenomenal conservatism or dogmatism, which has been a prominent theory of perceptual justification over the past two decades. Moreover, I investigate several alternative possibilities in which phenomenal force might still be deemed as significant, but ultimately demonstrate that its epistemic role remains marginal at best.

Keywords: metacognition, perceptual justification, phenomenal conservatism/dogmatism, phenomenal force, source monitoring

1. INTRODUCTION

It is an attractive idea in contemporary epistemology that perceptual experiences can provide us with immediate justification for beliefs about the external world, such as “There is a cat in the grass,” and “It is raining outside.” Immediate perceptual justification is generally construed as having the following feature: the epistemic support we receive from perceptual

experiences for propositions about the external world is not mediated by the justification we have for any other propositions (Pryor, 2000, 2014).

One argument for immediate perceptual justification is just by reflection on examples. Suppose that I believe that there is a cat in the grass based on a visual experience. There does not seem to be anything else that mediates my justification for this proposition. In such a case, what explains my perceptual justification does not include my justification to believe that I am undergoing a specific experience, or that my experience is likely to be true. Another argument stems from the discussion of the regress problem. It is highlighted that all non-foundationalist proposals are untenable. As a result, we have good reasons to endorse the notion of immediate justification, which encompasses immediate perceptual justification.¹

If perceptual experiences can provide us with immediate justification for beliefs about the external world, then a further question to examine is: in virtue of what do they have such justificatory power? A satisfactory answer to this question needs to meet two conditions. On the one hand, it should distinguish perceptual experiences from various kinds of mental states that are deemed incapable of offering immediate justification. On the other hand, the answer should say something about why the proposed justification-conferring feature is epistemically significant.

The phenomenal approach to immediate perceptual justification posits that it is at least partly in virtue of their phenomenal character that perceptual experiences immediately justify

¹ Concerns have been raised about immediate perceptual justification. Some worry that it might make it too easy to have justification to doubt a skeptical thesis, or to trust in the reliability of perceptual experiences (Cohen, 2002, 2005; White, 2006). For a reply, see Silins (2008). More recently, McGrath (2017, 2018) contends that the scope of immediate perceptual justification is considerably constrained, as various simple perceptual beliefs can only be justified indirectly.

beliefs about the external world. My paper focuses on a prominent view under this approach, which contends that perceptual experiences exhibit a distinctive phenomenal character known as phenomenal force; it is this phenomenal force that accounts for their justificatory power:

The phenomenal thesis: For any experience, if it has phenomenal force with respect to its content that P, then it thereby provides us with prima facie immediate justification to believe that P merely in virtue of having this distinctive phenomenal character.²

Such a view is called phenomenal conservatism or dogmatism. For simplicity, I will refer to it as “dogmatism” in the rest of this paper.

Given that phenomenal force is construed as a unique phenomenal quality of perceptual experiences, dogmatists can maintain that it serves as a differentiating factor, setting perceptual experiences (at least the majority of them) apart from other mental states that are incapable of providing immediate justification for beliefs about the external world. Consider Pryor (2004)’s characterization of phenomenal force:

“I think there’s a distinctive phenomenology: the feeling of seeming to ascertain that a given proposition is true... When you daydream or exercise your visual imagination, you represent propositions (the same propositions you represent when you perceive), but it does not feel as though you can thereby just tell that those propositions are true.”

(Pryor, 2004: 537)

² Some proponents are Bengson (2015), Berghofer (2020), Brogaard (2013), Chudnoff (2013), Huemer (2001), Kriegel (2023), Lycan (2013), McCain and Moretti (2021), McGrath (2018), Pryor (2000), Silins (2014), Skene (2013), Smithies (2019), and Tucker (2010).

Pryor's statement suggests that what makes perceptual phenomenology different lies in how perceptual experiences represent their contents, giving us a sense of assurance in the truth of the contents.³ Daydreaming, imaginings, beliefs, and various other mental states typically lack such a phenomenal character.

With respect to the epistemic significance of phenomenal force, dogmatists sometimes point out that the evaluation of epistemic justification is tied to the goal of getting at the truth and avoiding the falsehood. When a perceptual experience seems to assure us of the truth of the propositional content that P, and we have no defeaters against it, from our point of view, the most reasonable doxastic attitude for us to adopt is to believe that P. For it seems to satisfy the goal of getting at the truth and avoiding the falsehood better than disbelief or suspending judgment (Huemer, 2001).

Recent criticisms of the phenomenal thesis have brought our attention to two kinds of counterexamples. First, it is argued that various strange or even dangerous propositions can appear true to us, such as "This walnut tree was planted on April 24, 1914," or "Religion X is true, and we should kill anyone who does not subscribe to X" (Littlejohn, 2011; Markie, 2005; Tooley, 2013). It would be excessively permissive to grant justification to these propositions. Another argument proposes that perceptual experiences can be influenced by beliefs, desires, and other personal-level psychological states in ways that are epistemically inappropriate. Such cognitively penetrated experiences could lack justificatory power, despite having phenomenal force (McGrath, 2013a; Siegel, 2012, 2017; Teng, 2016, 2021).

³ For a somewhat different characterization, see Chudnoff (2013; 2018) and Smithies (2019). For criticism of this alternative characterization, see Brogaard (2017).

In response to these objections, some dogmatists may acknowledge the cogency of one or both kinds of counterexamples, and modify their theory in various ways. For example, they might restrict the scope of the phenomenal thesis to only include sensory experiences, but not other kinds of mental states (Smithies, 2019), or they might constrain the thesis to mental states that meet specific etiological conditions (Brogaard, 2013; McGrath, 2013a). Alternatively, other dogmatists may choose to stand their ground, and assert that the relevant mental states indeed have justificatory power because of their phenomenal force (Huemer, 2014).

In this paper, I will introduce a different line of argument against the phenomenal thesis, in which I defend two related theses. First, I put forward a novel account of phenomenal force, according to which phenomenal force does not form an integral part of perceptual experience, but is instead a separate, metacognitive state that normally accompanies the former. Second, I contend that if phenomenal force plays an essential justificatory role in perceptual justification, then the kind of justification can only be mediate in nature; consequently, it is not in virtue of phenomenal force that perceptual experiences confer immediate justification.

After rejecting the phenomenal thesis, I proceed to examine several other perspectives regarding the potential epistemic significance of phenomenal force. I argue that while this state exerts an important impact on our psychological processes of belief formation, its contribution to everyday perceptual justification is, at best, limited.

Here is the outline for the discussion. In section 2, I present our metacognitive account of phenomenal force. In sections 3 and 4, I draw out the account's implications for perceptual justification. I conclude in section 5.

2. THE SOURCE-MONITORING ACCOUNT

In this section, I propose and argue for a metacognitive account of phenomenal force, according to which the latter is a type of epistemic feeling generated by certain metacognitive mechanisms.⁴ The account might be formulated as follows:

The source-monitoring account: Phenomenal force is generated as an epistemic feeling only if source-monitoring mechanisms determine that an experience is likely to be triggered by the external stimulus that makes the experience veridical.⁵

A couple of terms need explanation. I say more about metacognition and epistemic feelings in subsection 2.1, and source monitoring in 2.2. Then I support the source-monitoring account with two arguments in 2.3, followed by the consideration of objections in 2.4.

2.1 Metacognition and Epistemic Feelings

Metacognition is often described as thinking about one's own thinking. In my usage of the term, it refers to the mental processes that monitor one's own first-order mental processes and states, such as perceptions, memories, imaginings, and reasoning. Besides, metacognition also includes the mental states generated by these monitoring processes.⁶ For example, when engaging in mathematical reasoning, you may simultaneously monitor the appropriateness of your thoughts. The mathematical reasoning constitutes a first-order mental process, while the

⁴ Similar arguments for this account are developed in more detail in Teng (forthcoming).

⁵ In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on understanding the psychological and neural mechanisms that distinguish perceptions from sensory imaginings (Dijkstra et al., 2022; Gershman, 2019; Lau, 2019, 2022). The source-monitoring account of phenomenal force aligns with this trend. For related discussions in philosophy, see Dokic and Martin (2017) and Gładziejewski (forthcoming).

⁶ For a comprehensive introduction to metacognition, see Dunlosky and Metcalfe (2009). For a recent discussion in philosophy, see Proust (2013).

monitoring forms a metacognitive process. In addition, your metacognitive process can result in a judgment about the rationality of your mathematical reasoning, which, in turn, constitutes a metacognitive state.

It is important to note that not all metacognitive processes are deliberate and conscious. Sometimes, you might experience a metacognitive state that spontaneously arises in your mind. In such cases, your metacognitive process operates automatically and unconsciously, although it eventually gives rise to a conscious metacognitive state.

Generated metacognitive states could also take the form of intuitive experiences (Koriat, 2007). In our mathematical-reasoning case, you might instead encounter a feeling of rationality, based on which a metacognitive judgment is subsequently formed. Such an intuitive experience is referred to as a noetic or epistemic feeling. Apart from the feeling of rationality, the feeling of knowing and tip-of-the-tongue are two other examples. Although the distinction between judgment and epistemic feeling need not align perfectly with the distinction between deliberate and automatic processes, when arguing that phenomenal force is an epistemic feeling, the kind of metacognitive processes I have in mind are automatic and unconscious in nature.

2.2 Source Monitoring

I have generally explained what metacognition and epistemic feelings are. My second clarification is about a particular kind of metacognition—namely source monitoring, which I take to be responsible for generating phenomenal force to accompany a first-order experience. As its name indicates, source monitoring evaluates the origins and nature of one's own mental processes and states. This includes monitoring whether an ongoing mental state is externally

caused or self-generated, whether a recalled content was previously learned through perception or imagining, and so forth (Johnson, 2006; Lindsay, 2008).

Over the past few decades, there has been abundant research on source monitoring in memory, showing that retrospective source attributions track the standard features of memory processes and states. For example, in differentiating between memories originating from past perceptions and past imaginings, source-monitoring mechanisms rely on heuristics such as:

Sensory information: Memories of past perceptions are more detailed and vivid (Dobson and Markham, 1993; Kensinger and Schacter, 2006).

Cognitive operations: Memories of past imaginings contain more information about cognitive operations (Finke and Johnson, 1988; Kensinger and Schacter, 2006).

Moreover, researchers have also investigated factors that contribute to experiencing an object as old or familiar. One particularly important heuristic is:

Processing fluency: The perceptual processing of a familiar object is relatively fluent (Whittlesea et al., 1990; Westermann et al., 2002).

Mental processes and states sometimes deviate from the norm. As revealed by the cited research, source-monitoring confusion can happen when first-order mental processes or states show non-standard features. In a study by Finke and Johnson (1988), the number of cognitive operations needed for carrying out certain imagining tasks was manipulated. Subjects tended to mistake the memories of past imaginings for those of past perceptions when the imagining tasks originally required fewer cognitive operations. Besides, Whittlesea et al. (1990) controlled the fluency with which certain pictures were perceived. Subjects tended to experience a sense

of familiarity with the pictures that they processed more smoothly, even if these pictures were entirely new.

2.3 Arguments for the Source-Monitoring Account

After explaining the terms, I present two arguments for the source-monitoring account of phenomenal force. First, the generation of phenomenal force aligns well with the function of source monitoring. Considering the wide array of sensory experiences, including perceptual experiences, sensory imaginings, and episodic memories, it is crucial to accurately differentiate and utilize these experiences. Source-monitoring mechanisms emerge as viable candidates for facilitating this distinction. One key feature of perceptual experiences is that they are primarily externally caused. I therefore posit that source-monitoring mechanisms generate phenomenal force to accompany a sensory experience only when they ascertain that the experience is likely to be triggered by the corresponding external stimulus.

To further support this proposal, I draw our attention to some recent advancement in source monitoring research, which looks into auditory-verbal hallucinations in schizophrenia. Hallucinations of this kind activate the auditory cortex area linked to both the outer- and inner-speech production. Some researchers therefore argue that these hallucinations are more likely to be states of imagination rather than perception (Beck, 2018). However, hallucination-prone schizophrenics frequently mistake their hallucinatory experiences for genuine perceptions, and report a sense of reality associated with the former. This indicates the presence of phenomenal force in such instances.

A number of empirical studies have demonstrated impaired memory source monitoring among subjects with schizophrenia. These subjects tend to show a bias toward retrospectively

misattributing self-generated contents to some external sources (Simons et al., 2017). Moreover, there is a strong correlation between this kind of dysfunction and the reduced activation in the anterior medial prefrontal cortex (amPFC) in individuals with schizophrenia (Garrison et al., 2017; Subramaniam et al., 2020). It is worth mentioning that previous research has consistently established the crucial role of the amPFC in memory source monitoring. In a study by Simons et al. (2006), healthy subjects were either presented with complete word pairs (e.g., “bacon and eggs”), or incomplete word pairs with a question mark (e.g., “bacon and ?”). The subjects were later asked to determine whether a particular word (e.g., “bacon”) was originally perceived or completed by themselves. Simons and colleagues observed greater activation in the amPFC of the subjects during this task than a different memory task.

Finally, another important finding is that the severity of hallucinations in schizophrenics is closely linked to their impaired memory source monitoring as well as the reduced activation in their amPFC (Yanagi et al., 2020). These findings suggest, tentatively, the existence of some domain-general metacognitive mechanisms, which are responsible for both retrospective and real-time source monitoring. In addition, the findings further lend plausibility to the following explanation of auditory-verbal hallucinations in schizophrenia: individuals with this condition suffer from a general dysfunction in source monitoring, leading them to mistakenly categorize self-generated imaginings as genuine perceptions; the phenomenal force accompanying these experiences results from real-time source-monitoring confusion. Such an explanation supports our theory that phenomenal force is generated by source-monitoring mechanisms.

Our second argument builds on the research on memory source monitoring introduced in 2.2, and offers a more detailed mechanism to illuminate the generation of phenomenal force. Earlier in the section, we saw that retrospective source attributions track the standard features

of memory processes and states. In light of these findings, I contend that source-monitoring mechanisms also depend on similar heuristics in the real-time scenarios. Some such heuristics include:

Sensory information*: Perceptions contain detailed and vivid sensory information (Dijkstra et al., 2022; Koenig-Robert & Pearson, 2021).

Cognitive operations*: Perceptions involve few cognitive operations (Dijkstra et al., 2022; Koenig-Robert & Pearson, 2021).

Processing fluency*: Perceptual processing is relatively fluent (Dijkstra et al., 2018).

Not only do these heuristics align with the latest findings about the neural mechanisms that differentiate perceptions from sensory imaginings (as cited in the parentheses), but they also hold important explanatory power. The heuristics enable source-monitoring mechanisms to efficiently classify perceptual processes and states, and generate phenomenal force to inform us about their nature; this explains why perceptual experiences are normally accompanied with phenomenal force. On the other hand, when first-order processes and states depart from their usual features, real-time source-monitoring confusion can occur. Our proposal offers a further advantage by demystifying cases in which perceptual experiences seem devoid of phenomenal force, or sensory imaginings appear to possess phenomenal force.⁷ An example illustrating this is the Perky effect.

In her experiment, Perky (1910) instructed subjects to visualize a few objects, such as a banana, a leaf, and so forth, while unbeknownst to them, faint pictures were projected onto a

⁷ This does not mean that such cases are prevalent. There might be evolutionary reasons why we rarely mistake perceptual experiences for sensory imaginings, and vice versa, in ordinary circumstances.

place where they fixated their eyes. The pictures surpassed the overall visual threshold of the subjects. In fact, the subjects reported contents closely linked to these pictures. However, they barely suspected the nature of their experiences, and thought that everything was a product of their imagination. Perky's ingenious study has been subsequently replicated (Segal & Gordon 1969), and is often cited to demonstrate the absence of phenomenal force in some perceptual experiences (Ghijssen, 2014; Siegel & Silins, 2015; Teng, 2018).⁸

Our proposal can explain the lack of phenomenal force in the Perky effect. First of all, the projected pictures were rather faint, and hence the subjects' perceptual experiences of them were less detailed and vivid. As the subjects looked at these pictures, they were simultaneously imagining the requested objects, potentially increasing the perceived cognitive exertions in the process. Some replications of this experiment further revealed that deliberate imagining could hinder detection (Craver-Lemley & Reeves, 1992; Segal & Fusella, 1970). So, the perceptual processing probably also experienced a decrease in fluency. In response to all of these features, the subjects' source-monitoring mechanisms erroneously determined that their perceptions of the pictures were mere imaginings and failed to generate phenomenal force to accompany such experiences.

So far, I have presented two empirically informed arguments for the source-monitoring account. One looks into the function of source monitoring. The other provides a more detailed mechanism for the generation of phenomenal force.⁹

⁸ For some recent Perky-style experiments, see Dijkstra et al. (2021) and Dijkstra and Fleming (2023).

⁹ Although this is still controversial, some empirical research indicates that children and non-human animals have metacognitive abilities (Beran et al., 2012; Carruthers & Williams, 2022). The source-monitoring account could be extended to include them. It is important to note that even if some creatures lack metacognition, our account does not imply that they are without consciousness.

2.4 Objections and Replies

I consider three objections in this subsection. First, one objection maintains that source monitoring could be processes within perception. If so, then phenomenal force might remain an integral part of perceptual experience.

There are two important reasons to question the classification of source monitoring as processes within perception. First, the research on memory source monitoring and auditory-verbal hallucinations in schizophrenia supports the existence of some domain-general source-monitoring mechanisms. The latter evaluate diverse mental processes and states, including not only perceptions but also imaginings and episodic memories. Second, whereas perception has the function of representing the world in a way that depends on stimuli, source monitoring is predominantly directed at one's mental processes and states. Both of these reasons go against the proposal.

The second objection emphasizes that even if source monitoring is not a component of perception, it could still be composed of entirely subpersonal mechanisms, and might not give rise to any personal-level metacognitive states.

I point out that the research on memory source monitoring and schizophrenia provides further evidence that source-monitoring mechanisms belong to personal-level metacognition. Recall our inference about domain generality. If what is involved in the retrospective scenarios is personal-level metacognition, then we have good reasons to posit that the source monitoring responsible for generating phenomenal force is of the same kind. Let's consider the tasks used to assess memory source monitoring. As showed by Simons et al. (2006), subjects are typically asked to make explicit judgments about the etiologies of the recalled contents (e.g., was "bacon" originally perceived or completed?). I find it plausible that this kind of monitoring implicates

personal-level metacognition. Consequently, what is involved in the generation of phenomenal force probably also constitutes personal-level metacognition, despite the fact that the relevant metacognitive processes operate automatically and unconsciously.¹⁰

The third objection recognizes that phenomenal force is a personal-level metacognitive state, but challenges the point that it is an epistemic feeling rather than simply a metacognitive judgment.

I offer three reasons to take phenomenal force as an epistemic feeling. First, dogmatists such as Pryor (2004), whom we quoted in the introduction, characterize phenomenal force as a feeling. Second, an important rationale for such a characterization is that if phenomenal force is instead a judgment, then obtaining a defeating judgment should result in the disappearance of its distinctive phenomenology, which does not seem to be the case. Moreover, when setting aside introspective justification, judgment usually fulfills its justificatory role through inference. It would be harder to explain immediate perceptual justification in terms of phenomenal force. I therefore make my epistemological task more demanding by interpreting phenomenal force as an epistemic feeling.

In this section, I have argued that phenomenal force is not an integral part of perceptual experience, but is instead a separate, metacognitive state—an epistemic feeling—that normally accompanies the perceptual experience. Skeptical readers can nonetheless assume the truth of our account and explore its epistemological implications in the sections below.

¹⁰ I construe the personal/subpersonal distinction primarily in terms of psychological explanation. Personal-level explanations attribute mental states and processes to the individual, while subpersonal-level explanations attribute states and processes to a functional subsystem rather than the individual. Unconscious belief inferences illustrate that personal-level processes do not necessarily require deliberation or consciousness (Teng, 2021).

3. THE IMPLICATION FOR THE PHENOMENAL THESIS

Dogmatists claim that perceptual experiences can immediately justify beliefs about the external world in virtue of having phenomenal force:

The phenomenal thesis: For any experience, if it has phenomenal force with respect to its content that P, then it thereby provides us with *prima facie* immediate justification to believe that P merely in virtue of having this distinctive phenomenal character.

More clarification needs to be made about the phenomenal thesis. To begin with, the thesis assumes that perceptual experiences, like beliefs, have propositional contents, although it leaves open whether perceptual experiences have high-level or rich contents, such as being a cat, and being grass, in addition to low-level or thin contents, such as a thing's color, shape, volume, and so forth. I write as if there are high-level perceptual contents; our rejection of the phenomenal thesis does not hinge on this assumption.

Second, the phenomenal thesis is about propositional justification rather than doxastic justification. Generally speaking, propositional justification focuses on having good reason to believe a proposition. It does not make a difference to propositional justification whether the reason is properly used in belief formation—nor does it make a difference whether a belief is formed at all. Doxastic justification requires having good reason and also properly using such reason to form a belief. This is why a doxastically-justified belief is often called a well-founded belief.

Third, immediate justification and mediate justification are notions about the structure of justification. A belief might only be mediately justified even if it is not consciously inferred

from another proposition. For example, you might find out what temperature it is by looking at your phone's weather app. Suppose that it displays 73 degrees Fahrenheit. This experience seems to justify believing the relevant proposition only in conjunction with your background knowledge that the app is reliable, no matter whether you in fact intentionally go through such an inference.

When epistemologists talk about immediate perceptual justification, what they have in mind is that the justification from perceptual experiences for propositions about the external world is not mediated by justification for any other propositions. This implies that if either of the following possibilities holds, then the justification fails to be immediate:

- (1) Perceptual experiences are not the sole anchor of justification; they justify in virtue of our having some independent justification for other propositions.¹¹
- (2) Perceptual experiences are the sole anchor, but the chain of justification involves some intermediate steps for other propositions.¹²

An illustration of (1) might be the weather app case, in which your justification for the current temperature is not only anchored in your perception but also your memory about the reliability of the app. On the other hand, a case exemplifying (2) may be: your perception of rain justifies "It is raining outside or today is Friday" through an intermediate step of justification for "It is raining outside." In both scenarios, your justification for the resulting proposition is mediated by your justification for some other proposition.

¹¹ In some cases, one's justification for beliefs about the external world might be over-determined. For example, when one gets both perceptual and testimonial justification for the same proposition, two separate justifications are obtained. Here testimony constitutes a distinct anchor, but its justification does not serve as a mediating factor in the perceptual justification.

¹² For a similar discussion of immediate justification, see McGrath (2013b).

I mentioned in the introduction that considerations from the regress problem provide another argument for immediate perceptual justification. It is worth clarifying that the fact that a mental state can serve as a regress stopper does not necessarily imply that this state is capable of conferring immediate justification. Consider the longstanding dispute between dogmatism and the conservatism proposed by Wright (2007). The conservatism view holds that perceptual experiences can justify beliefs about the external world only when supported by independent, non-evidential justification (which Wright calls “entitlement”) that allows us to reject skeptical hypotheses concerning these experiences. Based on this model, perceptual justification always involves mediation, although the chain of justification need not extend beyond the occurrence of perception.

Finally, according to the phenomenal thesis, perceptual experiences provide immediate justification specifically because of their phenomenal force. This means that dogmatists ascribe an essential justificatory role to phenomenal force rather than simply the role of an enabler, or a mere necessary condition. To better understand the concept of an enabler, let’s contemplate how the acquisition of relevant concepts can facilitate belief formation. Moreover, to illustrate the concept of a mere necessary condition, we may reflect on the fact that whenever we obtain justification for a perceptual belief, we further attain justification to believe that we exist. Our justification in our own existence does not account for our perceptual justification; rather, the former simply serves as a necessary condition for the latter (Silins, 2008; Neta, 2010).

With these clarifications in mind, let’s turn to examining the implication of the source-monitoring account for the phenomenal thesis. Dogmatists endorse the phenomenal approach to immediate perceptual justification, and assume that phenomenal force is an integral part of perceptual experience. However, if phenomenal force turns out to be a separate, metacognitive

state, and yet it plays an essential justificatory role in perceptual justification, then the kind of justification can only be mediate in nature. This suggests that it is not in virtue of phenomenal force that perceptual experiences provide immediate justification for beliefs about the external world.

I defend this conclusion first through an inspection of the range of beliefs phenomenal force could aptly justify. According to a well-accepted view in the epistemology of perception, an experience could, at best, immediately justify beliefs whose contents are among, or suitably close to, the experience's own contents (Siegel & Silins, 2015; cf. Silins, 2011). If a perception represents that there is a giraffe, then it cannot provide immediate justification to believe that there is an octopus. Depending on what is meant by "suitably close," such an experience might still be able to immediately justify believing that there is an animal.

I have not yet discussed the question of whether phenomenal force is representational, and if so, what kind of contents it has. Both cognition and metacognition are informative. The former informs us about our surroundings, whereas metacognition informs us about our own mind. For example, we frequently rely on the feeling of knowing or tip-of-the-tongue to decide whether we should continue searching our memory for specific information. These epistemic feelings help us gauge our ability to recall something. Moreover, we also depend on the feeling of rationality to assess whether we should endorse a solution to a problem, or infer in a certain way. This epistemic feeling serves as a guiding force, informing us about the appropriateness of our thinking process.

Given that metacognition and epistemic feelings are important mechanisms for dealing with the uncertainty of our own mind, it is reasonable to postulate that they are directed at our first-order mental processes and states (Arango-Muñoz, 2014; Arango-Muñoz & Michaelian,

2014). As a type of epistemic feeling, phenomenal force must be similarly mind-directed. What exact contents does it possess? One possibility is that phenomenal force represents something along the lines of “This is a veridical perception,” or simply “This is true.” I would like to keep it open whether such contents are conceptual in nature. However, according to the constraint of contents on justification introduced earlier, phenomenal force, at best, gives us immediate justification for some metacognitive beliefs, but not for beliefs directly concerning the external world.¹³

Let’s return to dogmatists’ proposal regarding the justificatory role of phenomenal force, and examine the potential perceptual justification we could obtain from perceptual experiences and phenomenal force. If phenomenal force could at best only offer immediate metacognitive justification, then the kind of perceptual justification we could achieve seems, at most, mediate. Here is a possible formulation of these ideas:

Immediate metacognitive justification: Phenomenal force provides us with prima facie immediate justification to believe “This is a veridical perception/true” merely in virtue of its distinctive phenomenal character.

Mediate perceptual justification: For any experience, if it represents that P, and is accompanied with phenomenal force, then the experience together with phenomenal force provides us with prima facie mediate justification to believe that P.

I evaluate these theses in more detail in section 4. For now, I emphasize that according to such a view, phenomenal force plays a mediating role in perceptual justification that is analogous to

¹³ The potential non-conceptual nature of phenomenal force need not pose a problem, for it is possible for certain beliefs to still align more closely with some non-conceptual contents than others.

a background metacognitive belief. The proposal presents a justificatory framework that bears striking resemblance to the following thesis:

Mediate perceptual justification*: For any experience, if it represents that P, and we have some background justification to believe “This is a veridical perception/true,” then the experience together with our background belief provides us with *prima facie* mediate justification to believe that P.

The comparison between the justificatory roles played by phenomenal force and a background metacognitive belief raises significant doubts about the phenomenal thesis. Phenomenal force seems ill-equipped to account for immediate perceptual justification.

In the remaining part of this section, I delve into a potential response from dogmatists, which maintains that there is an important difference between the amalgam constituted by a perceptual experience and phenomenal force, on the one hand, and the amalgam formed by a perceptual experience and a background metacognitive belief, on the other hand. While the second complex state is incapable of conferring immediate perceptual justification, the former nonetheless holds that ability. More specifically, it is said that the epistemic role of phenomenal force is not to justify some higher-order propositions.¹⁴ But both a background metacognitive belief and phenomenal force merely possess mind-directed contents. How come phenomenal force plays a distinctive, non-mediating role in perceptual justification?

It is important to note that simply pointing out that in ordinary circumstances, the term “perception” is most accurately used to describe the amalgam that includes phenomenal force as a factor does not seem to help. To vindicate dogmatists’ different approaches to amalgams,

¹⁴ Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting such a response.

a more substantive explanation is needed. Besides, it also does not appear helpful to insist that a background metacognitive belief requires justification, and hence cannot be a regress stopper, whereas phenomenal force does not require justification as a belief does. For as demonstrated by Wright-style conservatism, which was discussed earlier in the section, even if a mental state functions as a regress stopper in virtue of possessing some default, non-evidential justification, a perceptual experience together with such a state might only provide mediate justification for beliefs about the external world. The fact that phenomenal force can be a regress stopper does not necessarily imply that a perceptual experience in conjunction with it can provide immediate perceptual justification.

At this point, one might call our attention to the fact that when a perceptual experience is accompanied with phenomenal force, there is a kind of merge between them, while there is no such phenomenal unity between a perceptual experience and a background metacognitive belief since the latter state is unconscious. One might suggest that it is because of their unified phenomenology that the perception-phenomenal force amalgam immediately justifies beliefs about the external world. However, one problem with this proposal is that simple phenomenal unity seems too weak to guarantee a sole anchor of justification. Here is Bayne and Chalmers' account of phenomenal unity:

“When A and B are phenomenally unified, there is not just something it is like to have each state individually: there is something it is like to have A and B together. And the phenomenology of being in A and B together will carry with it the phenomenology of being in A and the phenomenology of being in B.” (Bayne & Chalmers, 2003: 32)

According to their account, any set of conscious states at a time forms an encompassing state of consciousness. However, we do not think that undergoing such combined phenomenology affects the structure of justification. Consider the weather app case again. Suppose that while perceiving that the app displays 73 degrees Fahrenheit, you also bring to consciousness your background knowledge that the app is reliable. Although your perception and occurrent belief are phenomenally unified, the amalgam could not give you immediate justification to believe that the temperature is 73 degrees Fahrenheit. Similarly, it is doubtful that just having a unified phenomenology makes a perception in conjunction with phenomenal force capable of offering immediate perceptual justification.

Maybe the kind of merge dogmatists have in mind is not simple phenomenal unity. One might further suggest that the co-occurrence of a perceptual experience and phenomenal force comes with a distinctive emergent phenomenology. By having these states together, we enjoy a feeling of assurance regarding the truth of the perceptual contents, which gives us immediate justification to take them at face value. On the other hand, one might argue, even a perceptual experience and a conscious judgment “This is a veridical perception/true” could not have this emergent phenomenology.

I have two main concerns about such a proposal, of which the first is that we lack non-ad hoc reasons to hypothesize that a distinctive phenomenal state emerges from a perceptual experience and phenomenal force. Multisensory perceptions, such as the experiences of flavor, are probably among the strongest candidates that exhibit a unique emergent phenomenology over and above the individual experiences of taste, smell, and touch (O’Callaghan, 2019). One argument supporting this conclusion is that the coordination of different senses allows for the perception of certain multimodal features. It is hard to provide a comparable argument for the

co-occurrence of a perceptual experience and phenomenal force. The latter does not obviously enable us to perceive any novel features.

To further strengthen the concern about ad hoc-ness, consider that various other mental states can happen simultaneously with perceptual experiences. For example, you might crave chocolate while watching others eating it. Both your perceptual experience and desire can be phenomenally conscious. However, does the co-occurrence of these mental states come with a distinctive emergent phenomenology? Similarly, consider that you might feel dejected when reading recent figures about covid-19 infections and deaths. We do not typically postulate the presence of a distinctive emergent phenomenology in these cases. Absent compelling grounds, we must also refrain from doing so to a perceptual experience and accompanying phenomenal force.

Moreover, my second concern about the current proposal is that even if it is not ad hoc, it is unclear whether the emergent phenomenology could immediately justify beliefs about the external world. Earlier in the section, we have argued that phenomenal force is directed at the mind, and could, at best, provide immediate metacognitive justification. Both of these features might get inherited by what partly emerges from this state. Even if the perception-phenomenal force amalgam can serve as the sole anchor of justification, the chain may involve intermediate steps of justification for certain higher-order propositions, such as “My experience that P is a veridical perception/true.”¹⁵ Notice that one cannot merely resort to introspection to maintain

¹⁵ Despite not being paid much attention in the literature, some characterizations of perceptual phenomenology by dogmatists already suggest a metacognitive connotation. Consider the following statement from Pryor (2000):

“Our experience represent propositions in such a way that it ‘feels as if’ we could tell that those propositions are true—and that *we’re perceiving them to be true...*” (Pryor, 2000: 547, italics mine)

Silins (2014) contends that perceptual experiences provide us with immediate justification to believe that they are veridical perceptions, and quotes this passage as his inspiration.

that the emergent state is indeed directed at the world. Several disputes in the philosophy of perception have demonstrated that introspection alone does not suffice to settle the nature of a conscious state. Supporting arguments are needed to eliminate other alternative possibilities (O’Callaghan, 2019; Siegel, 2010).

So far, I have investigated a potential and formidable response from dogmatists that a perceptual experience together with phenomenal force could nonetheless provide immediate perceptual justification. I considered two attempts to vindicate dogmatists’ varying approaches to amalgams constituted by perceptions and metacognitive states: one appeals to the conjoined phenomenology of a perceptual experience and phenomenal force; the other suggests that the co-occurrence of these states has its own distinctive emergent phenomenology. I showed that simple phenomenal unity fails to guarantee a sole anchor of justification, whereas we also lack compelling grounds to postulate a distinctive emergent state, together with desired justificatory power.

Before ending this section, I would like to iron out one more wrinkle. Some dogmatists distinguish between sensations and seemings under broadly construed perceptual experiences. “Sensation” refers to the rich, fine-grained sensory states that are likely lacking propositional contents. “Seeming” refers to the high-level states that conceptualize the former, and possess propositional contents with phenomenal force. I call versions of dogmatism that endorse such a distinction seeming theories:

Seeming theories: If it perceptually seems to us that P, then we thereby have *prima facie* immediate justification to believe that P.¹⁶

¹⁶ Some proponents are Brogaard (2013), Huemer (2001), Pace (2017), Reiland (2015), and Tucker (2010).

Because of the fractionation of perceptual experiences, seeming theories are thought to face the question of whether it is in virtue of seemings alone, or the combinations of sensations and seemings that perceptual experiences immediately justify beliefs about the external world (Chudnoff & DiDomenico, 2015; Lyons, 2015). It is beyond the scope of the paper to provide a comprehensive summary of the extensive discussions in the literature. However, I highlight that our arguments above further suggest that both of these positions under seeming theories are dubious. Let me elaborate on their interactions.

Seemings are said to include phenomenal force as a component, which means that they are either simple amalgams constituted by first-order perceptual states and phenomenal force, or distinctive phenomenal states that emerge from them. If seemings are mere amalgams, then there could still be more than one anchors of justification. On the other hand, there lacks good reasons to hypothesize distinctive emergent states. Had seemings turned out to be such states, and serve as the sole anchor, given the representational and epistemic features of phenomenal force, seemings might lack world-directed contents necessary to provide immediate perceptual justification. As I see it, similar concerns arise for the combinations of sensations and seemings, thus also leading to an unfortunate fate for the second position.

4. REASSESSING THE ROLE OF PHENOMENAL FORCE

In this section, I examine several possibilities in which phenomenal force might still be deemed as epistemically significant. Appealing to the constraint of contents on justification, I have demonstrated that phenomenal force could at best offer immediate justification for some metacognitive beliefs, but not those directly concerning the external world. One may naturally

wonder whether phenomenal force instead explains our mediate perceptual justification. Let's contemplate the following theses again:

Immediate metacognitive justification: Phenomenal force provides us with prima facie immediate justification to believe “This is a veridical perception/true” merely in virtue of its distinctive phenomenal character.

Mediate perceptual justification: For any experience, if it represents that P, and is accompanied with phenomenal force, then the experience together with phenomenal force provides us with prima facie mediate justification to believe that P.

Below, I first raise objections to both of these theses. After that, I argue that while phenomenal force can exert an important influence on our psychological processes of belief formation, its epistemic role in everyday perceptual justification remains marginal at most.

4.1 Immediate Metacognitive Justification

Let's begin with the first thesis: immediate metacognitive justification. Notice that this thesis falls under a phenomenal approach—it takes phenomenal force's justificatory power to be explained by its distinctive phenomenal character. I explained in the introduction that some dogmatists argue that whenever a perceptual experience has phenomenal force with respect to that P, absent defeaters, the most reasonable doxastic attitude is to believe that P. For it seems to satisfy the epistemic goal of getting at the truth and avoiding the falsehood better than other alternative attitudes. Proponents of the first thesis might present a parallel argument to support their view.

However, one objection to this thesis is that there are many different epistemic feelings. If some epistemic feelings fail to offer immediate metacognitive justification, then it is doubtful that such justificatory power could be properly ascribed to phenomenal force. An illustration of this concern is the feeling of rationality. The relevant metacognitive mechanisms follow an important heuristic, which is:

Inferential fluency: Valid inferences are relatively fluent (Ackerman & Thompson, 2017; Thompson et al., 2011).

In a study by Thompson et al. (2011), subjects were instructed to assume the truth of certain conditionals, such as “If a car has run out of gas, then it will stall,” and evaluate the validity of inferences derived from these conditionals. For example, the subjects were asked to determine the rationality of statements like “The car has run out of gas; therefore, it will stall,” and “The car has stalled; therefore, it ran out of gas.” Thompson and colleagues observed a correlation between the speed at which the subjects came up with their answers and the strength of their reported sense of rationality, which indicates that inferential fluency is a potential determinant of the epistemic feeling.

In light of these findings, the following case seems psychologically plausible:

Affirming the consequent: You reasonably believe that if a car has run out of gas, then it will stall, and that your car stalled. You infer that your car has run out of gas, and simultaneously experience a feeling of rationality.

Had the feeling of rationality given you immediate justification to believe that your inference is valid, this, together with your antecedent justification for the two premises, should also give you justification to accept the conclusion. However, one might question the plausibility of an

obviously fallacious inference resulting in a justified conclusion, and consequently dismiss the idea that the feeling of rationality is capable of offering immediate metacognitive justification (Smithies, 2019).

Admittedly, such an argument would not persuade those who assert that the feeling of rationality does have such justificatory power precisely because of their distinctive phenomenal character (Huemer, 2016). Our argument, at least, makes a conditional point: if the feeling of rationality lacks the ability to provide immediate metacognitive justification, then phenomenal force should be on a par with it; any different approaches are *prima facie* unwarranted. In the introduction, I clarified that in response to the objection from odd seemings, some dogmatists may restrict the phenomenal thesis to sensory experiences only. It is much harder to rationalize a similar move in the current context. We come to appreciate that both phenomenal force and the feeling of rationality are epistemic feelings, which requires us to appraise their justificatory power in a comparable manner.

4.2 Mediate Perceptual Justification

Even if we accept the thesis of immediate metacognitive justification, there remains a further objection to the second thesis: mediate perceptual justification. Recall the distinction between propositional and doxastic justification—while the former focuses on having good reason for a belief, the latter further requires using such reason in belief formation. However, it is doubtful that we base our everyday perceptual beliefs on the metacognitive justification offered by phenomenal force. Consequently, proponents of the current thesis face difficulties in maintaining that a significant portion of our perceptual beliefs are both propositionally and doxastically justified.

I substantiate this concern with two arguments below. Before that, I draw our attention to a prevailing objection to the conventional indirect theories of perceptual justification, which claims that we do not consciously form metacognitive beliefs about our perceptual experiences in ordinary circumstances (Pollock & Cruz, 1999; Silins, 2008).¹⁷ I would like to highlight two points. First, proponents of such an objection seem to be in a less consistent position to accept the thesis of mediate perceptual justification. After all, the same objection also contradicts the current proposal.

Second, in response to this objection, proponents of the current thesis could argue that even if we do not intentionally form metacognitive beliefs about our perceptual experiences, we automatically accept such beliefs when our experiences are accompanied with phenomenal force. One supporting piece of evidence for this claim is that people often acknowledge, when appropriately questioned, that they believe in the veridical nature/truth of their own perceptual experiences.

This response, however, does not fully address our worry. On the one hand, the thesis still seems to over-intellectualize perceptual justification. For the metacognitive justification to be available, subjects need to obtain concepts such as “representation” and “truth.” Otherwise, how could the relevant justification serve as the basis for their beliefs? Yet, young children are typically considered as capable of having doxastically justified beliefs through perception, even in the absence of such concepts (Block, 2009; Gopnik & Graf, 1988; Esbensen et al., 1997; cf. Scott & Baillargeon, 2017).

¹⁷ Both classical foundationalism and Wright-style conservatism fall under indirect theories.

A more sophisticated form of this argument asks whether phenomenal force possesses conceptual contents. One horn proposes that if concepts such as “representation” and “truth” are necessary, then young children might not experience phenomenal force, and consequently lack the relevant metacognitive justification. The other horn suggests that if such concepts are not necessary, then young children might be able to experience phenomenal force. However, they might lack conceptual recourses to employ the justification offered by phenomenal force in forming beliefs about the external world. In either of these scenarios, it is something other than metacognitive justification that accounts for the doxastic justification of their perceptual beliefs.

Even if we set aside the concern about over-intellectualization, there is also an additional reason against taking our ordinary perceptual justification as being based on the metacognitive justification offered by phenomenal force. Once again, let’s examine the feeling of rationality, which is also experienced alongside many valid inferences:

Modus ponens: You reasonably believe that if a car has run out of gas, then it will stall, and that your car has run out of gas. You therefore infer that your car will stall, and simultaneously experience a feeling of rationality.

Even if the feeling of rationality provides you with justification to believe that your inference is valid, it does not serve as the epistemic basis for your conclusion. According to the standard analysis, in such a scenario, your conclusion is epistemically based on the two premises of your inference. If we treat epistemic feelings alike, then we should recognize a similar relationship between phenomenal force and perceptual justification. This gives us a further rationale for

rejecting that we largely base our perceptual beliefs on the metacognitive justification provided by phenomenal force.

So far, I have investigated whether phenomenal force is constitutive of the explanation of our mediate perceptual justification. Such a proposal is comprised of two theses: immediate metacognitive justification and mediate perceptual justification. I first pointed out that if other epistemic feelings are incapable of offering immediate metacognitive justification in virtue of their distinctive phenomenology, then phenomenal force should be on a par with these states. Second, even if phenomenal force has such justificatory power, it is questionable whether we primarily base our everyday perceptual beliefs on the metacognitive justification. Phenomenal force, therefore, still fails to explain why a significant portion of our perceptual beliefs achieve doxastic justification.

4.3 The Role of Phenomenal Force

In this subsection, I introduce two ideas about the potential role of phenomenal force in our perceptual justification. In examining the functional role of epistemic feelings in section 3, I explained that they inform us about our own mind. Here I propose a different function of epistemic feelings—they psychologically motivate us in ways that metacognitive judgments do not. For example, the feeling of knowing and tip-of-the-tongue prompt us to keep searching memory for specific information; the feeling of rationality compels us to endorse a solution to a problem, or infer in a certain manner. This is not something that metacognitive judgments typically do. Therefore, in this respect, epistemic feelings resemble what Millikan (1995) labels

as pushmi-pullyu representations, consisting of both a descriptive component and a directive component.¹⁸

In a similar vein, I suggest that phenomenal force also plays a vital psychological role in the formation of our perceptual beliefs. It urges us to take our perceptual experiences at face value, and form beliefs about the external world based on those experiences. This by no means implies that phenomenal force is constitutive of the explanation of our perceptual justification. It is highly plausible that our perceptual experiences provide justification for beliefs about the external world in virtue of their other features. Phenomenal force enables us to efficiently use such justification, ensuring that our perceptual beliefs are not only propositionally justified but also well-founded.

Second, denying that phenomenal force explains perceptual justification does not mean that phenomenal force cannot serve as a mere necessary condition for such justification. One difference between a justifier and a mere necessary condition is that while we need to base our beliefs on a justifier to acquire doxastic justification, a mere necessary condition only needs to be present. It is important to note that even proponents of immediate perceptual justification take it as defeasible. If we learn that our experience is not a veridical perception, this piece of information could undermine our perceptual justification. Hence, to make sense of such defeat, one might argue that whenever we obtain justification for a perceptual belief, we further attain justification to believe that we undergo a veridical perception. This metacognitive justification simply serves as a necessary condition for perceptual justification.

¹⁸ A different example of pushmi-pullyu representations discussed in the current literature is pain (Martínez, 2011; cf. Klein, 2015).

Earlier in the section, we questioned the thesis of immediate metacognitive justification. If this thesis turns out to be correct, then phenomenal force can provide justification to believe that an experience is a veridical perception, which helps guarantee that the relevant necessary condition for perceptual justification is satisfied (cf. Silins, 2014; Huemer, 2011).¹⁹ If the thesis of immediate metacognitive justification is indeed false, and yet it is necessary for perceptual justification that we are further justified in believing our experience to be a veridical perception, then the source of such metacognitive justification may need to be sought elsewhere. I do not try to settle these questions here.

5. CONCLUSION

Dogmatism claims that perceptual experiences can provide immediate justification for beliefs about the external world merely in virtue of having phenomenal force. In this paper, I offered a metacognitive account, according to which phenomenal force is a type of epistemic feeling. This account opens up a new path for rejecting dogmatism, as perceptual experiences together with a distinct, metacognitive state could, at best, provide us with mediate perceptual justification. Phenomenal force is inadequate to account for immediate perceptual justification. After addressing a potential and formidable response from dogmatists, I examined a few other ways in which phenomenal force might still be considered as epistemically significant. I arrived

¹⁹ Consider the Perky effect, in which the subjects' perceptual experiences of the secretly projected pictures were devoid of phenomenal force. Did such experiences still provide the subjects with propositional justification for perceptual beliefs? According to the current proposal, the subjects probably lacked propositional justification due to the absence of a necessary condition.

at the conclusion that the epistemic contribution of phenomenal force to everyday perceptual justification is marginal, if not negligible.

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