

The Character of Cognitive Phenomenology

Uriah Kriegel

Forthcoming in T. Breyer & C. Gutland (eds.), *Phenomenology of Thinking* (Routledge)

Recent discussions of phenomenal consciousness have taken increased interest in the existence and scope of non-sensory types of phenomenology, notably so-called cognitive phenomenology. These discussions have been largely restricted, however, to the question of the *existence* of such a phenomenology. Little attention has been given to the *character* of cognitive phenomenology: what in fact *is* it like to engage in conscious cognitive activity? This paper offers an approach to this question. Focusing on the prototypical cognitive activity of *making a judgment that p*, it proposes a characterization in terms of a Ramsey sentence comprised of twenty-three phenomenological platitudes about what it is like to make a judgment.

1 Background: The Existence and Character of Cognitive Phenomenology

It is uncontroversial that visual experiences, such as seeing purple velvet in the wind, and bodily sensations, such as feeling the relaxed exhaustion following a good exercise, exhibit a phenomenal character. As long as philosophers' main concern about phenomenal consciousness revolved around the question of its reducibility to physical properties, focusing on such uncontroversial types of phenomenology was natural. But once one develops an a-reductive interest in phenomenal consciousness, one might wonder whether there might also exist subtler and more controversial types of phenomenology. In

particular, one might wonder whether there is also a phenomenal character characteristic of cognition. In the recent literature, there are two main lines of argument *in favor* of the existence of such a distinctive ‘cognitive phenomenology’.

One type of argument is from *phenomenal contrast*. Here two conscious episodes are presented, such that (i) it is intuitively clear that the overall phenomenology of the episodes is different, and (ii) it seems that the best explanation of the difference is that one of the two episodes exhibits cognitive phenomenology whereas the other does not (crucially, this is a better explanation than any that appeals solely to sensory phenomenology). Perhaps the most widely discussed instance of this argumentative strategy is what may be called the Moore-Strawson argument (Moore, 1953, pp. 58f.; Strawson, 1994, pp. 5–13). We are enjoined to contrast the conscious experiences of a French speaker and a non-French-speaker when they listen to the news in French. The claim is that there is a phenomenal difference between their overall phenomenologies, and that the difference is best accounted for in terms of an element of ‘understanding-experience’ present only in the French speaker’s stream of consciousness. This understanding-experience is one kind of cognitive phenomenology.

The second type of argument is from *first-person knowability*. Here the strategy is to argue that the knowledge we have of (some of) our cognitive states is the kind of first-person knowledge characteristic of our phenomenally conscious states. Perhaps the best-known instance of this is what may be called the Goldman-Pitt argument (Goldman, 1993; Pitt, 2004). The argument proceeds as follows: 1) It is possible to consciously, introspectively, and non-inferentially identify (i.e., to know-by-acquaintance) one’s conscious occurrent thoughts; 2) This would not be possible if conscious occurrent thoughts did not have a distinctive phenomenal character; therefore, 3) Conscious occurrent thoughts have a distinctive phenomenal character (Pitt, 2004, p. 8).

Both types of argument have found both adherents and critics (see Bayne & Montague, 2011). My concern in this paper is to explore the actual phenomenal character of conscious cognitive states, so I will take it as assumed that there *is* a distinctive cognitive

phenomenology, regardless of whether these arguments are successful in showing that. For my part, I am convinced of the existence of cognitive phenomenology by a simple observation, which may be summarized as follows: if there were no cognitive phenomenology, *life would be boring*—more boring than it actually is, at least. In particular, it would be quite irrational to engage in philosophical reflection if none of it ‘showed up’ in consciousness (surely the accompanying imagery cannot explain how interesting it is to do philosophy).¹

(It is not immediately obvious how to turn this ‘life would be boring’ observation into an *argument*. Perhaps we could start by unpacking ‘life’ and ‘boring’, to first approximations, as follows: a person’s ‘life’ (in this metaphorical sense) is the sum of all contents of her phenomenal awareness from birth (or rather: from onset of phenomenal consciousness) to death (sunset of consciousness); a thing is boring iff it is disposed to elicit differential feelings of boredom towards it in normal (boredom-capable) subjects under normal conditions, or better, iff it is *not* disposed to elicit differential feelings of *interestedness* in normal (interest-capable) subjects under normal conditions. Then the ‘life would be boring’ argument could be formulated as follows: 1) If we did not have cognitive phenomenology, the contents of our phenomenal awareness from onset to sunset of phenomenal consciousness would not be disposed to elicit differential feelings of interestedness in us; but 2) they do; so, 3) we do have cognitive phenomenology. There might be better ways to dress the ‘life would be boring’ observation as an argument, but in any case it is the observation itself that convinces me, more than anything, that there is such a thing as cognitive phenomenology.²)

There are many sources of resistance to cognitive phenomenology. One of them, arguably, is the feeling that nothing informative can be said about it. Once we have accepted that it exists, it is not clear what we are supposed to do next. No potentially fecund avenues of research open up before us. To some extent, this is an unfair accusation. According to its proponents, cognitive phenomenology is a simple, unstructured, phenomenally primitive quality instantiated by some of our conscious episodes and not

others. It is a general truth about such unstructured properties that they cannot be accounted for through decomposition into more basic constituents (compare Moore (1903) on goodness). We grasp their nature through some kind of direct acquaintance with them—however that works. At the same time, if nothing really *could* be said about cognitive phenomenology (beyond that it exists), it might not be worth debating as much as it has been in recent years. Furthermore, if nothing could be said by way of *characterizing* cognitive phenomenology, proponents and opponents can never be sure that they are talking about the same thing. I know what *I* am directly acquainted with when I grasp the nature of cognitive phenomenology, but I can never be sure that you *are* directly acquainted with the same feature.³

To address this set of worries, I propose in this paper to make first steps toward a characterization of cognitive phenomenology.⁴ In this endeavor, the first order of business is to take a brief tour through the garden of cognitive phenomena.

2 The Variety of Cognitive Phenomenology

Cognition, like other kinds of mentation, involves (i) cognitive processes, (ii) accomplishments of such processes, in the form cognitive acts, and (iii) products of such process, in the form of cognitive states.⁵ Here is a representative subset of (ii) and (iii):

- Judging that *p*
- Thinking that *p*
- Believing that *p*
- Realizing that *p*
- Remembering that *p*
- Predicting that *p*
- It occurring to one that *p*
- Being confident that *p*
- Being convinced that *p*
- Being sure (certain) that *p*
- Taking it that *p*
- Expecting that *p*
- Speculating that *p*
- Deeming that *p*

- Suspecting that p
- Surmising that p
- Conjecturing that p
- Hypothesizing that p
- Assuming that p

Several questions arise immediately in the face of this list. First, is there any feature common to all items on it (as well as to other acts/states that should intuitively belong on it)? Secondly, is there a feature *peculiar* to those items (and others belonging on the list)? Thirdly, might there be more specifically a *phenomenal* feature common to all these acts and states, and fourthly, might there be a phenomenal feature peculiar to them? If there *is* a phenomenal feature both common and peculiar to all the relevant acts/states, that feature would constitute a sort of *phenomenal signature of cognition*. We might refer to that feature as *cognitive phenomenology per se*.

The most direct way to characterize cognitive phenomenology would be to identify such a phenomenal signature of cognition and characterize it. Short of that, we might also attempt to characterize the phenomenology involved in several individual items on the list, in particular the more prototypical or paradigmatic items. I propose to make a contribution to this latter project. I will focus on one type of cognitive act that I take to be particularly paradigmatic of cognition. This is the act of *making the judgment that p* , say after considering evidence for and against p , doing some reasoning and ‘intellectual exploring’ and finally coming down on the issue of whether p . What I just described is a *process*, but one whose *accomplishment* is what I refer to as ‘making a judgment’, and it is this phenomenon, the making of a judgment, that I wish to characterize phenomenologically. If it is possible for judgments to just occur to us (as when it suddenly occurs to me that I have yet to pay this month’s phone bill), *making* a judgment should be distinguished from that.⁶ In the latter, the subject acts as an epistemic *agent*.⁷

If nothing else, a phenomenal characterization of making a judgment would provide us with a descriptive account of the phenomenology of one particularly salient type of

cognitive act. But it might also provide us with more. For even if there is no phenomenal signature of cognition—no phenomenal commonality and peculiarity of cognitive states and acts—there might still be some looser unity among cognitive acts/states. Consider the concept of furniture. It would be somewhat surprising if there was some single property common and peculiar to all pieces of furniture. Instead, it has been argued (Rosch, 1975), the concept of furniture behaves like a prototype concept: there are certain prototypes of furniture—tables and chairs, as it turns out—and other things qualify as furniture just if they sufficiently resemble these prototypes in relevant respects. One might imagine that the folk concept (or even a more refined, scientific or philosophical, concept) of cognition behaves the same way. If so, it would be natural to think that *making a judgment* is at least one prototype of cognition, so other items on the above list qualify as cognitive at least partly in virtue of resembling (sufficiently and relevantly) the act of making a judgment. Suppose now, just for the sake of argument, that making a judgment is the *only* prototype of cognition, so that other items on the list qualify *solely* in virtue of resembling it. Then a descriptive account of the phenomenology of making a judgment would in effect constitute an account of cognitive phenomenology simpliciter: to have a cognitive phenomenology would just *be* to have a phenomenology that resembles (sufficiently, relevantly) the phenomenology of making a judgment.

To my mind, it is not entirely implausible that making a judgment is indeed *the* prototype of cognition. But even if it is just *a* prototype, a characterization of its phenomenal character would be of great significance to understanding the character of cognitive phenomenology. The pressing question is *how* to characterize such a basic, elemental quality as the phenomenology of making a judgment. For a fruitful angle on this, it might be useful to consider a discussion by the nineteenth-century Bohemian mathematician and philosopher Bernard Bolzano.

3 Bolzano on Judgment

Bolzano's magnum opus, *Theory of Science*, is an early attempt at a systematic, quasi-axiomatic 'rational reconstruction' of the foundations of logic and scientific methodology (Bolzano, 1837). In this context, Bolzano frequently pauses to offer explicit and precise definitions of central terms. Rather conspicuously, although judgment (*Urteil*) is a fundamental notion in Bolzano's reconstruction, at no point does he offer a clean definition of it. Instead, he characterizes judgment only informally, by citing ten typical characteristics of it (ibid., §34). Paraphrased for modern ears, they are:

- Every judgment either does or does not conform to the truth
- Judgment is psychologically real
- Judgment exists only in the mind
- There is an essential difference between judging that p and merely representing (or entertaining) that p
- In God's infinite intellect all true propositions are judged to be so
- Human judgment depends on taking into consideration prior representations and depends only indirectly on the will
- Judgments vary with respect to a certain force—'confidence'—that depends on the considerations that preceded them
- A judgment's degree of confidence no more depends on the will than the judgment itself
- When a proposition does not seem to us more true than false or more false than true, we cannot make a judgment, instead falling into a state of doubt
- The only proper sense in which one ought to judge that p is that the considerations before one support p

After listing these characteristics, Bolzano concludes: "These propositions will probably suffice to make clear the concept I connect with the word 'Judgment'" (ibid., p. 44).⁸

Why does Bolzano offer only this informal list of characteristics, as opposed to a more rigorous proper definition, of the sort he provides for so many other notions central to his project? In this he seems to me to proceed as mathematicians working in axiomatics typically do, considering that the concepts invoked in a system's axioms are primitive and can only be grasped intuitively, primarily via appreciation of their interrelations within the set of axioms. This suggests that Bolzano takes the concept of judgment to be primitive: unlike the concept of bachelor, say, it cannot be elucidated by decomposition into conceptual constituents. It can be grasped only intuitively. Still, a list of central characteristics can be used to *aid* us in intuitively grasping the right concept. It helps zeroing in, so to speak, on that which Bolzano has in mind—it attempts to ensure that we align our acts of intuitive grasping as closely as possible.

Given the nature of the exercise, the individual characteristics in Bolzano's list are not intended to function as severally necessary and conjointly sufficient for the applicability of 'judgment'. Instead, we might think of Bolzano's list as a proto-Ramsey-sentence (see Ramsey, 1931; Lewis, 1966; 1972). A Ramsey sentence is produced by collecting a large number of 'platitudes' about that which one wishes to elucidate, stringing them into a long conjunction, replacing occurrences of the elucidandum with a free variable, and prefixing the whole thing with the existential quantifier. (Importantly, 'platitude' here need not mean an obvious or pedestrian statement; it only means a statement about *surface features* of the elucidandum's referent.) The result is a complex description which may be satisfied better or worse by different eligible referents of the elucidandum. In Bolzano's case, we might say that his informal characterization of judgment amounts to the following Ramsey sentence: 'there is an x , such that x either conforms to the truth or does not, x is real, x is mental, there is a difference between x -ing and merely entertaining, ...' and so on.

In Bolzano's case, the platitudes cited are not expressly phenomenological, even if a substantial subset of them might well admit of a phenomenological reformulation. Still, one *could* attempt to characterize what it is like to make a judgment by collecting a number of

more or less phenomenologically compelling platitudes about making a judgment. This would serve to concentrate the mind on the right phenomenal quality as we attempt to directly grasp it in introspection. And it would articulate a 'public' characterization of a 'private' phenomenon that could help align different researchers' conceptions of the phenomenon under investigation.

4 Interlude: The Flexibility of Ramsey Sentences

It might be objected that a Ramsey sentence for the phenomenology of making a judgment would be hostage to the truth of each platitude it comprises, since if only one of them is false the entire conjunction of them will be. For example, Bolzano's fifth thesis, about what God judges, may well be false, in which case nothing can satisfy Bolzano's Ramsey sentence.

This is a general problem for Ramsey sentences, and fortunately one that Lewis (1972, p. 256) raises and solves in half a sentence. Lewis suggests that instead of forming the conjunction of all our platitudes, we form a (long!) disjunction of conjunctions of *most* of them. For example, we could produce all possible lists of eight among Bolzano's ten platitudes, make a conjunction of the eight items on each list, and then form the disjunction of all of those conjunctions. The resulting Ramsey sentence would be true if at least eight of Bolzano's ten platitudes are.

In fact, a Ramsey sentence can be even more flexible than that, and involve various conjunctions of fewer or more platitudes in the overall disjunction. The more central a platitude is to the concept being elucidated, the more disjuncts in that concept's Ramsey sentence it should appear in. In fact, there may be some platitudes whose truth is non-negotiable if the relevant notion is to refer. In Bolzano's list, for example, the first and fourth are arguably non-negotiable. If so, such platitudes must appear in *every disjunct* of the correct Ramsey sentence. There may also be some platitudes so central that satisfying only them would suffice to ensure reference. Perhaps the first, third, and fourth of

Bolzano's propositions are collectively such. If so, one of the disjuncts in the correct Ramsey sentence could be comprised of only three conjuncts.

My suggestion is that a sufficiently sophisticated, sufficiently supple Ramsey sentence would provide the best characterization of the primitive phenomenology of making a judgment. This would be a Ramsey sentence consisting in a long disjunction of variously lengthy conjunctions of phenomenological platitudes about making a judgment.

I now turn to the business of articulating some of these platitudes. Note well: because in a Ramsey sentence it is not essential that all platitudes be true, I will err on the side of abundance rather than caution, seeking to articulate many different phenomenological platitudes, of varying degrees of plausibility, rather than to ensure that only the most highly plausible ones make it. The more platitudes we have in our ultimate Ramsey sentence, the more texture will the resulting conception the phenomenology of making a judgment assume.

5 The Phenomenology of Making a Judgment

5.1 Truth-Related Platitudes

Probably the most important phenomenological platitude about making a judgment is that it involves a feeling of taking a stand on the question of the truth or falsity of the content judged. This is what J.L. Cohen (1992, p. 11) calls a 'credal feeling': "All credal feelings, whether weak or strong, share the distinctive feature of constituting some kind of orientation on the "True or false?" question." We may formulate this first platitude as follows:

- 1) Making a judgment that p involves a credal feeling, that is, a feeling of committing to the truth or falsity of p .

We may refer to this as the *fundamental platitude*. For a mental act that does not embody commitment to the truth of p cannot count as an instance of judging that p . Judging by p is by its nature committal on the question of whether p , and the sense of committing to the truth of p is probably the most fundamental aspect of the experience of consciously judging that p .

How can we get a better grip on the phenomenal nature of such credal feeling? One helpful exercise is to contrast the experience of performing a mental act that exhibits this phenomenal feature with one that does not. Accordingly, the fundamental platitude is connected with another, which relates to Bolzano's fourth proposition, concerning the difference between judging and merely entertaining. Each of us has first-person acquaintance with the experiential difference between the two acts, a difference consisting precisely in the lack of any truth-commitment in mere entertaining. This is why *we can tell introspectively* whether what we are doing is judging that p or merely entertaining that p . If there were no experiential difference between the two, introspection would be at a loss to inform us which of the two we are engaged in. Thus we may say:

- 2) There is a felt difference between making the judgment that p and merely entertaining that p .

This differs from Bolzano's proposition in citing specifically a *felt* (read: phenomenal) difference.

Note that according to the second platitude, judging and merely entertaining can share the exact same content. Yet they differ in respect of truth-commitment. This suggests that truth-commitment cannot be an aspect of the *content* of judgment; it must be an aspect of the *attitude* the subject takes toward the content. One could signal the difference by distinguishing (i) presenting p -as-true and (ii) presenting-as-true p . My claim is that the credal feeling involved in making a judgment is a feeling of type (ii) rather than (i). We may put this economically as follows:

- 3) Credal feelings are attitudinal phenomenal features of making a judgment.

Consider: in the opening pages of *Father Goriot*, Balzac (1835, p. 26) asks us not to treat his book as sheer amusement, because everything he is about to tell us is true. But this is of course just part of the novel. Nothing Balzac can say *inside* his story can make it more than a story. By the same token, nothing inside the content of an act of entertaining can make it a judgment. Either a conscious act exhibits the additional attitudinal phenomenal feature of presenting-as-true or it does not, and iff it does is it a judgment.

I have been speaking of the truth-commitment as an attitudinal feature of making a judgment. But what about negative judgment? Does it involve the different attitudinal feature of falsity-commitment, or simply a truth-commitment toward a negated proposition? One might think that disbelieving that p is just believing that $\sim p$. Although there is no such word as ‘dis-judging,’ negative judgment about p could be analogously phenomenally indistinguishable from positive judgment about $\sim p$. Franz Brentano (1874), however, insisted on the opposite view. According to him, there are two attitudinal phenomenal features in this area—acceptance (*Anerkennung*) and rejection (*Verwerfung*)—that are experientially different and characterize the phenomenology of making positive and negative judgments respectively. For my part, I find myself unable to tell which one is *phenomenologically* more accurate. Accordingly, I propose to formulate two alternative platitudes:

- 4) All acts of making a judgment exhibit the phenomenal attitudinal feature of truth-commitment.
- 4*) Acts of making a judgment divide in two: those that exhibit the phenomenal attitudinal feature of truth-commitment and those that exhibit the phenomenal attitudinal feature of falsity-commitment.

In our ‘sophisticated’ Ramsey sentence, we may ensure that half of the disjuncts include Platitude 4 and half 4*.

Bolzano’s list mentioned two more truth-related platitudes. One concerned God’s infinite intellect; even if we rephrase it more neutrally as ‘Any omniscient being would

judge all true propositions to be so', it is unclear that there is anything about the *phenomenology* of making a judgment that reveals this.⁹ The second concerned doubt, and could quite reasonably be added to our own list of platitudes:

- 5) The feeling of doubting that p results from inability to make a judgment as to whether p or $\sim p$ is more plausible.

In the same vein, we may formulate further platitudes connecting judgment to other cognitive acts. For example:

- 6) The feeling of suspecting that p is the feeling of being inclined to judge that p .

Importantly, the inclination cited should be thought of not as a dispositional state but as an occurrent felt inclination. In any case, this last seems to belong to another group of platitudes than the first five. For it does not seem related to the truth (or falsity) of the proposition judged. It seems to do more with the subject's epistemic responsiveness to the evidence before her. The next section discusses further platitudes of this kind.

5.2 Epistemic Platitudes

Perhaps the most salient epistemic platitude about making a judgment is that it feels *rationally compelled*. Horgan and Timmons write that making a judgment is 'experienced as grounded in considerations that serve as sufficient reasons for the [judgment] in question' (Horgan & Timmons 2007, p. 216). This is what I call the feeling of rational compulsion:

- 7) Making the judgment that p involves a feeling of being rationally compelled to do so.

Horgan and Timmons note that what one is rationally compelled *by* is the consideration of (epistemic?) reasons for and against p ; as Dorsch (2009) puts it, our judgments phenomenally present themselves as reason-responsive. Thus we may add:

- 8) Making a judgment that p involves a feeling of reason-responsiveness.

Dorsch's view here is, of course, quite controversial: it is perfectly reasonable to deny the existence of a phenomenology of reason-responsiveness. Recall, however, that I have determined to err on the side of abundance rather than caution given the flexible structure of sophisticated Ramsey sentences. Accordingly, I add this platitude as potentially informative. (Recall also that 'platitude' here means a statement on the phenomenal surface features of a mental act, not necessarily a statement which is immediately obviously or pedestrian.)

Consideration of reasons may or may not amount to the same as consideration of the evidence and counterevidence about p . Just in case it does not, let us add:

- 9) Making a judgment that p involves the feeling that making this judgment is sufficiently supported by evidence.

Arguably, it is quite impossible to make the judgment that p without feeling that one's judgment is thus supported.

Some of these platitudes may turn out to be redundant, since there may well be a priori connections between the feelings of rational compulsion, reason-responsiveness, and evidence-supportedness. However, such potential redundancy is unproblematic in the context of Ramsey sentences: if 8 and 9 amount to the same, say, what follows is only that they could not discriminate among eligible satisfiers of the Ramsey sentence; it remains that if they do *not* amount to the same, they *could*—so there is no harm in adding both to the Ramsey sentence.¹⁰

The above three platitudes concern feelings about the epistemic credentials of the judgment being made. Arguably, making a judgment involves also a feeling about the epistemic credentials of the *judging agent*: that she has done her due diligence before making up her mind regarding p , or that she has been inferentially responsible, or something like that.¹¹ We may capture this by saying:

10) Making a judgment that p often involves the feeling that one has met one's epistemic obligations.

Note that even if meeting one's epistemic obligations just is properly weighing all the evidence (say), the *feeling* of having met one's epistemic obligations may still be different from the *feeling* of one's judgment being properly supported by the evidence. The former feeling concerns oneself, the latter concerns one's judgment.

These epistemic platitudes are reminiscent of Bolzano's sixth proposition, regarding dependence on prior consideration of representations. Interestingly, Bolzano ties this to a more general notion, namely, that judgment depends on the will only indirectly. If I consider that the evidence supports $\sim p$, I cannot make the judgment that p (though I may report that I do). If I really want to judge that p , I may decide to expose myself only to evidence for p and avoid all sources of information likely to reveal counterevidence. This is why Bolzano allows that judgment may depend on the will *indirectly*, ruling out only its *directly* depending on it. How to draw the direct/indirect distinction in a principled and extensionally adequate manner is a difficult question. But in any case judgment's merely indirect dependence on the will can show up in the phenomenology without the grounds or nature of indirect dependence showing up. I propose, then, that we capture Bolzano's ideas by saying that a mental state is 'involuntary', in that the subject cannot enter it at will:

11) Making a judgment that p involves a feeling of involuntariness.

More specific platitudes surrounding the same idea could probably be formulated as well.

I opened this section by noting that making a judgment feels rationally compelled, presumably by reasons or evidence. Arguably, sometimes making a judgment also rationally compels one to perform certain actions or form certain plans. If one has a standing desire for a hazelnut ice cream, making the judgment that the store with the best hazelnut ice cream in town is nearby tends to rationally compel one to go there. At the same time, I can also make the judgment that it would be nice to be immortal without that judgment rationally compelling me to do anything. There could be different theories of

what separates the judgments that do rationally compel action from those that do not. But we need not enter that debate to formulate something like the following platitude:

12) Making a judgment that p can sometimes involve the feeling of rationally compelling one to perform or plan certain actions (including mental actions).¹²

Although concerned with rational compulsion, this is in fact not an epistemic platitude, as the previous ones were. Our first eleven platitudes are all the truth-related and epistemic platitudes to be cited here. Arguably, they are the most important platitudes about the phenomenology of making a judgment—those that would appear in the most disjuncts of its ultimate Ramsey sentence (see section 4). In the next section, I turn to consider a separate batch of platitudes.

5.3 Confidence-Related Platitudes

Bolzano dedicates two of his ten propositions to the notion of confidence, a multigradient dimension along which judgments differ. And indeed, we can notice from the first-person perspective that some of our judgments we make with greater confidence than others. On the other hand, when we reflect on the process of weighing the evidence/reasons for p and $\sim p$ and finally coming down on the issue, the act of coming down seems to involve a certain feeling of finality and absoluteness. In going ahead and making the judgment, I am deciding to stop my ‘inquiry’—I am ruling out further mulling and pondering. Having made the judgment that p , I am at least for now *fully* committed to it being the case that p . The truth-commitment feels in some sense absolute, even as the confidence that accompanies it may vary.¹³

How can we make sense of these apparently inconsistent characteristics of judgment-making? I propose that we reject Bolzano’s conception of confidence as a modification of judgments, and construe it instead as a second-order mental state *about* judgments.¹⁴ On this view, it is misleading to say that S judges that p *confidently*. It is more accurate to say that S judges that p *with confidence*, where this means that S harbors two

mental states: a judgment with the content $\langle p \rangle$ and a confidence state with the content $\langle \text{my judgment that } p \text{ is very likely true} \rangle$. The judgment is characterized by absoluteness, the confidence by gradation.

To capture this complex picture, we must cite various platitudes, the first of which is:

13) Making the judgment that p involves a feeling of *coming down* on the question of whether p .¹⁵

Next we must capture:

14) There is a feeling of absoluteness about the coming-down aspect of making the judgment that p .

This absoluteness could be distinguished from the element of finality in the act of judgment-making.¹⁶ The element of finality has a delicate character: although making a judgment seems to involve the feeling of deciding to 'close the investigation', it does *not* seem to involve the feeling that one could never decide to 'reopen the investigation'. So we might speak here of 'provisional finality', keeping in mind that the paradoxical ring of the expression does not reflect any incoherence in the characteristic described. We may then formulate the following platitude:

15) Making the judgment that p involves a feeling of provisional finality.

All this is consistent with the following:

16) Making the judgment that p is typically accompanied by a feeling of confidence about that judgment.

17) The confidence that accompanies making a judgment comes in degrees.

Together, Platitudes 13–17 capture the picture of judgment and confidence suggested above, which contrasts with Bolzano's.

Perhaps because of his conception of confidence as a modification of judgment, Bolzano also claims (in his eighth proposition) that the confidence is just as rationally compelled as the judgment. Does this notion survive the switch to the ‘separate accompaniment’ conception of confidence? Personally, this does not strike me as *phenomenologically* perspicuous. Even if my degree of confidence in my judgment that Spain will win the next World Cup is in fact rationally compelled by the evidence, it is not clear that its being rationally compelled by the evidence shows up in the phenomenology of making that judgment.¹⁷ Still, we may wish to formulate a cautious version of this platitude, and consider it a fairly marginal one:

18) It sometimes feels as though the confidence that accompanies making a judgment is rationally compelled.

As a marginal platitude, this is to be included in relatively few disjuncts in the ultimate Ramsey sentence for the phenomenology of making a judgment. But there is no reason to suppose that something like it should not be included in *any* disjunct.

5.4 Miscellanea

In their discussion of the phenomenology of belief, Horgan and Timmons mention two other characteristics of interest. One is that belief involves the experience of categorizing or sorting items (Horgan & Timmons, 2007, p. 215)—what we might call a ‘phenomenology of predication’. One might suggest something similar about making a judgment: when I make a judgment that the table is brown, I categorize or classify the table as belonging to the brown things. In this form, the claim may be too strong, insofar as existential judgments do not fit this description very comfortably. When I make the judgment that there are no ghosts, this does not feel like categorizing or classifying ghosts with the non-existents. Rather, it feels like a rejection of a certain sort of thing—ghosts. Still, one might suggest the following platitude:

19) Making a judgment sometimes involves a phenomenology of predication.

Even this weaker claim would be rejected by some, however. Brentano (1874), for example, argued that although our canonical linguistic expression of judgments exhibits the subject-predicate structure, as far as their psychological and phenomenological reality is concerned, our judgments themselves do not. His view is that all judgment contents can be reduced to existential contents. The details of his case for this should not concern us here. What matters is that even a Brentanian could admit to something weaker and more neutral than 19, namely, that judgment involves the mobilization of a concept. When I judge that there are no ghosts, I may not predicate anything, but I do mobilize the concept of ghost.¹⁸ Let us therefore say:

20) Making a judgment always involves the feeling of mobilizing a concept.

This could give way to a more precise platitude if a phenomenological analysis of the ‘feeling of concept-mobilization’ were forthcoming.

Connected to this, and arguably more fundamental, is the fact, pointed out by Nes (2012), that the phenomenology of cognitive episodes involves a certain *thematic unity*. When I make the philosophical judgment that zombies are impossible, I undergo visual imagery of a staggering Hollywood zombie, silent-speech imagery of the words ‘zombies are impossible’, a feeling of relief from anxiety about the possibility of zombies undermining physicalism, and so on. But crucially, there must also be one more element, less sensory, in my judgment. For note that although the overall episode is multifaceted, every part or aspect of it is concerned with a single subject matter: the impossibility of zombies. Crucially, this thematic unity is itself a felt dimension of the overall episode: “the very commonality of the subject matter is a feature of the thought episode’s phenomenology” (ibid., p. 86). We may thus add:

21) Making a judgment involves a feeling of thematic unity.

As noted, this feature underlies those cited in Platitudes 19 and 20—though I will not argue for this here. Note well: for Nes, the feeling of thematic unity is not supposed to unify *all* aspects of the phenomenology of making a judgment, but only those aspects that have to do

with the theme, or content, of the judgment. Where the theme is the impossibility of zombies, for example, the various bits of zombie-related imagery will be unified; but other elements, including all those cited in the aforementioned platitudes, need not be unified with them.

Horgan and Timmons' last claim is that beliefs are 'naturally experienced as apt for' expression in declarative sentences (Horgan & Timmons, 2007, p. 216). Perhaps we can say more simply:¹⁹

22) Assertion feels like the natural way to express a judgment made.

Note that in this formulation there is no expectation that a creature capable of making a judgment be also capable of expressing the judgment made.

Finally, we may comment on the experienced *temporal* dimension of making a judgment. It is noteworthy that the process leading up to the making of a judgment may vary in duration, but that the judgment-making itself seems to lack any duration. Still, two views are possible here. One is that making a judgment feels completely duration-less—it is instantaneous. The other is that making a judgment has an extremely short duration—never longer than the so-called specious present (generally believed to last 2–3 seconds). My own sense is that making a judgment *typically* fits the former model but occasionally (perhaps *rarely*) fits the latter.²⁰ We may put this as follows:

23) At least typically, making the judgment that *p* feels instantaneous.

This formulation leaves it open whether the instantaneous feel is *merely* typical or on the contrary potentially universal to the experience of making a judgment.

There are surely other platitudes one might formulate in relation to the phenomenology of making a judgment. Recall that a platitude in the present sense is not necessarily an obvious or pedestrian claim; it is merely a claim about surface features (including more or less elusive surface features) of judgment-making. In any case, the twenty-three above platitudes already provide us with sufficient material to formulate a

Ramsey sentence that gives quite a bit of texture to the phenomenon with which we are concerned.

Conclusion: Toward a Ramsey Sentence for the Phenomenology of Making a Judgment

In constructing a Ramsey sentence out of the above platitudes, we can proceed in one of two ways: (i) letting the variable replace ‘phenomenology of making a judgment’, with the rest of each platitude usually containing no phenomenological terms; (ii) letting the variable replace ‘making a judgment’, with the rest of each platitude always containing at least one phenomenological term. We may say that (i) offers a characterization of the phenomenology of making a judgment, while (ii) offers a phenomenological characterization of making a judgment. As far as I can see, there is no substantive difference here—these are two different techniques for producing essentially the same description of the same phenomenon.

The above platitudes lend themselves more readily to (ii)-style Ramsification. The simple Ramsey sentence they suggest is: ‘There is an x , such that x involves a credal feeling of committing to truth or falsity & there is a felt difference between x and mere entertaining & the credal feeling is attitudinal phenomenal feature of x & ...’. This provides a phenomenological characterization of making a judgment, insofar as the adduced platitudes invoke exclusively phenomenal features in characterizing the act of making a judgment. A fuller Ramsey sentence of this sort could then be produced by adducing further phenomenological platitudes—twenty-three is a good start, but there are likely many more!

Recall, however, that Ramsey sentences can be more supple and sophisticated than quantified conjunctions. They can involve a great multitude of disjunctions of conjunctions of varying lengths. A sophisticated Ramsey sentence for the phenomenology of making a judgment would thus be desirable. In such a Ramsey sentence, one of the shortest disjuncts

could be the conjunction of Platitudes 1, 2, 7, 10, and 13. The idea is that any mental act involving credal feelings, a felt difference from mere entertaining, and feelings of rational compulsion, meeting one's epistemic obligations, and coming down on an issue would qualify as an experience of making a judgment. For these are probably the most central phenomenological platitudes about making a judgment. Accordingly, they are to show up in many of the disjuncts in our sophisticated Ramsey sentence. A second circle of platitudes, still important but less so, might include 3, 4/4*, 8/9, 11, 14, 15, 20, 21, and 23. These concern the feelings of truth- and falsity-commitment (and their attitudinality), reason- and evidence-responsiveness, involuntariness, absoluteness and finality of coming-down, concept-mobilization, and instantaneity. The final circle, of most marginal platitudes, includes 5, 6, 12, 16–19, and 22: relations to the phenomenology of doubting and suspecting, the occasional feel of rational compulsion of action, being accompanied by multigradient and sometimes rationally compelled feeling of confidence, and the feeling of assertibility. These would appear in the fewest disjuncts in our ultimate Ramsey sentence.

A properly structured sophisticated Ramsey sentence that included at least the above twenty-three platitudes (but perhaps many more) would, I contend, be the best publicly available characterization of the phenomenology of making a judgment. This phenomenology is likely a primitive and unanalyzable feature, one we can truly grasp only through something like direct introspective acquaintance. But if we want a theoretical account of it, a full specification of its relations to other phenomenal primitives is what is called for. Compare: if we want a theory of cells, we account for them in terms of the molecules making them up; if we then want a theory of molecules, we account for them in terms of the atoms composing them; ditto for atoms and their constituent sub-atomic particles. But when we reach the elemental particles of matter, the only way to characterize them is by specifying as exhaustively as possible their lawful interrelations. The same applies in the domain of phenomenology: we can account for complex experiences in terms of their elemental phenomenal constituents, but we can account for the latter only in terms of their interrelations. The envisaged sophisticated Ramsey sentence for making a judgment attempts to do something like that.

As noted, it is not entirely implausible that making a judgment is *the* prototype of cognitive activity, so that mental activities qualify as cognitive only if, and insofar as, they (sufficiently and relevantly) resemble making a judgment. Having cognitive phenomenology would in that case *amount to* partial satisfaction of the envisaged Ramsey sentence. But short of this, the sentence's phenomenological characterization of making a judgment constitutes at least an account of one kind of cognitive phenomenology—a central, paradigmatic, prototypical kind.

Acknowledgements

This paper came about as a result of two two-hour discussion sessions at the University of Fribourg. These discussions allowed me to see many central aspects of cognitive phenomenology that I would never have been able to appreciate by myself. Indeed, by some standards this should not be regarded as a single-authored paper, but as group collaboration with the Fribourg Philosophy Department. In any case, I am greatly indebted to the audience in these sessions, in particular Davor Bodrozic, Coralie Dorsaz, Hannes Mathiessen, Jacob Naïto, Martine Nida-Rümelin, Michael O'Leary, Graham Peebles, Gianfranco Soldati, and Samet Sulejmanoski. In addition, I would like to thank Thiemo Breyer, David Cerbone, and Christopher Gutland for valuable input on previous drafts.

References

Balzac, H. de (1835/1966). *Le Père Goriot*. Paris: Garnier-Flammarion.

Bayne, T. & Montague, M. (Eds.) (2011). *Cognitive Phenomenology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Bolzano, B. (1837/1972). *Theory of Science* (R. George, Trans.). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Brentano, F. (1874/1973). *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (A.C. Rancurello, D.B. Terrell & L.L. McAlister, Trans.). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Cohen, L.J. (1992). *An Essay on Belief and Acceptance*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Casati, R. & Varzi, A. (2014). Events. In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Dorsch, F. (2009). Judging and the scope of mental agency. In L. O'Brien & M. Soteriou (Eds.), *Mental Actions* (pp. 231–52). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Goldman, A.I. (1993). The psychology of folk psychology. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 16, 15–28.
- Horgan, T. & Timmons, M.C. (2007). Moorean moral phenomenology. In S. Nuccetelli & G. Seay (Eds.), *Themes from G.E. Moore* (pp. 203–26). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lewis, D.K. (1966). An argument for the identity theory. *Journal of Philosophy* 63, 17–25.
- Lewis, D.K. (1972). Psychophysical and theoretical identifications. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 50, 249–58.
- Moore, G.E. (1903). *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nes, A. (2012). Thematic unity and the phenomenology of thinking. *Philosophical Quarterly* 62, 84–105.
- Ramsey, F.P. (1931). Theories. In *The Foundations of Mathematics and Other Logical Essays* (R.B. Braithwaite, Ed.). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Pitt, D. (2004). The phenomenology of cognition; or *What Is It Like to Think that P?* *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 69, 1–36.

Rosch, E.H. (1975). Cognitive representations of semantic categories. *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 104, 192–233.

Strawson, G. (1994). *Mental Reality*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Notes

¹ Thanks to Angela Mendelovici for putting the observation to me in these terms (the ‘why do philosophy?’ terms).

² Already for this initial formulation of the argument, I am indebted to Hannes Mathiessen, Jacob Naïto, Graham Peebles, and Gianfranco Soldati. It could be further refined through more precise elucidations of ‘life’ and boringness, and perhaps by claiming only that our ‘life’ is *more* disposed to interest us than it would be without cognitive phenomenology (thanks to Gianfranco Soldati on this point).

³ Arguably, the danger of speaking past each other seems to be actualized in some parts of the extant literature on cognitive phenomenology.

⁴ I will do so through the only technique I know of for characterizing primitive qualities—the articulation of a Ramsey sentence, which unlike traditional definitions, does not attempt to capture the *nature* of its target phenomenon and yet manages to characterize it (more on this in section 3).

⁵ Consider the process of climbing the Everest. There is a distinction to be made between (a) having climbed the Everest and (b) being on top of the Everest. The latter is a product of the climbing process, the former is an accomplishment of it. For more on this, see Casati and Varzi 2014.

⁶ I put this hypothetically because it is possible to hold that judgments cannot just occur to us. One might hold that what occurs to us are thoughts, which become judgments only when one actively endorses them. I do not wish to take a stand on this issue here.

⁷ For making me see the importance of focusing on the act of making a judgment, as opposed to the more general notion of judging, I would like to thank Martine Nida-Rümelin and Graham Peebles.

⁸ Bolzano actually offers three different characterizations of the notion of judgment in the relevant section, but it is clear from the text that he proceeds from the least serious to the most, with the characterization via the above list appearing last.

⁹ Thanks to Gianfranco Soldati for the neutral rephrasing.

¹⁰ For help with these epistemic platitudes, I would like to thank Coralie Dorsaz and Martine Nida-Rümelin.

¹¹ I am indebted to Martine Nida-Rümelin for this point.

¹² This platitude was suggested by exchanges with Davor Bodrozic, Coralie Dorsaz, Jacob Naïto, and Martine Nida-Rümelin.

¹³ I am grateful to Davor Bodrozic and Gianfranco Soldati for making me see this crucial aspect of the phenomenology of making a judgment.

¹⁴ For articulating this more plausible alternative to Bolzano, I am grateful to Martine Nida-Rümelin, Michael O'Leary, and Gianfranco Soldati.

¹⁵ This is cited by Horgan and Timmons (2007, p. 215) as the primary phenomenal characteristic of belief.

¹⁶ Again, thanks are due to Davor Bodrozic for making me appreciate the element of finality.

¹⁷ For help on this point, I would like to thank Coralie Dorsaz, Michael O'Leary, and Graham Peebles.

¹⁸ Thanks to Gianfranco Soldati for this formulation of the platitude.

¹⁹ Thanks to Martine Nida-Rümelin for this formulation.

²⁰ I would like to thank Davor Bodrozic and Jacob Naïto for helping me see this.