

‘Conscious Thought and Cognitive Phenomenology’

Michelle Montague

thesis: accept cognitive phenomenology or deny conscious thought!

sensory phenomenology: what it’s like to see the color red, or to taste warm cornbread, or to hear perfect middle C, and so on.

cognitive phenomenology: a kind of phenomenology that is essentially something over and above sensory phenomenology and that is paradigmatically found in cases of conscious thought, but also in perception and emotion. There is something it is like to think that *formal logic is fun* or to think that *temperance is a virtue* that is irreducible to any sensory phenomenology that may be associated with these thoughts.

What is the content of a thought that p?

- It’s the propositional object of T—the proposition p (Fa).
- It’s the meaning of ‘that p’ (that Fa).
- It’s how T represents the world as being, so we sometimes speak of the *representational content* of a thought.
- It’s what is contained in the that-clause, which may be judged as true or false.

question: What is the relationship between a particular thought’s being conscious and that thought’s content?

‘conscious content’ principle or CC for short: If a thought T is a conscious thought, the content of T must be in some way consciously entertained.

What makes a conscious thought conscious?

[1] higher-order theories, according to which, a thought is conscious in virtue of an unconscious higher order mental state being directed at it;

[2] ‘access-consciousness’ views, according to which, an occurrent thought is a conscious thought in virtue of having enough of the right sort of informational relations to other mental states;

and

[3] phenomenological views, according to which, a thought is conscious in virtue of having phenomenology—*if and only if* it has phenomenology.

Given [3], my question is this: Given a particular conscious thought, what does its phenomenology have to be like for it to be the particular conscious thought that it is? And, crucially, how does its phenomenology relate to its thought-content?

sensory-phenomenological proposal: what makes a conscious thought conscious is some association with sensory phenomenology.

[4] The phenomenology that makes a particular occurrent thought a conscious thought must be explanatorily or intelligibly linked to the representational content of that thought. That is, the phenomenology that makes some essential contribution to a particular occurrent thought's being the conscious thought that *p* must be explanatorily linked to the representational content: *that p*.

[4a] Prinz: 'sentences do not merely stand in for thought, but actually constitute thoughts. When we produce sentences in silent speech, they issue forth from *unconscious representations* that correspond to what those sentences mean ... Sentences inherit their truth conditions from the unconscious ideas that generate them. So produced, these sentences aren't arbitrary marks, but rather meaningful symbols.'

[4b] the representational content causes some associated sensory phenomenology.

- If [4a] and [4b] are committed to a thought's content being non-conscious, it looks as if the claim is that the thought is really non-conscious and that there is some associated sensory phenomenology that is conscious.

- Can (4b) be restated so that it does satisfy CC? Could the causal relationship between the content and the sensory phenomenology result in the content itself being conscious?

--sensory phenomenology can't itself be the content

--sensory phenomenology can't make content conscious in virtue of resemblance

- the only plausible way to explain how a thought can be conscious, and hence how the content of a thought can be conscious, is to claim that there is cognitive phenomenology associated with, and indeed essentially constitutive of, all conscious thoughts. That is, for any representational content (and indeed any content) that is consciously occurrent, consciously entertained, there must (trivially) be some distinctively *cognitive-phenomenological* apprehension of that content.

questions: given any particular thought, how are cognitive phenomenological properties and internal representational content related, and how are cognitive phenomenological properties and external representational content related?

[5E] associated with each external representational content is some non-sensory cognitive phenomenological property or properties that is possessed by conscious thoughts with those external representational contents.

[5R] associated with each internal representational content is some non-sensory cognitive phenomenological property or properties that is possessed by conscious thoughts with those internal representational contents.

[6E] associated with each external representational content is some non-sensory cognitive phenomenological property or properties that is essentially possessed by any conscious thought that is a thought with that external representational content.

[6R] associated with each internal representational content is some non-sensory cognitive phenomenological property or properties that is essentially possessed by any conscious thought that is a thought with that internal representational content.

- [5E] is too weak (two/chair) and [6E] is too strong (morning star/evening star).

claim: there is a strong internal connection between particular concepts (and concept possession) and particular cognitive phenomenological properties.

- How to establish an internal connection? First step: there is no possibility of inverted spectrum for cognitive phenomenological properties

[7] is it possible for two thinkers to share the exact same cognitive phenomenological properties while not sharing the same concepts?

[8] is it possible for two subjects to deploy the same concepts, but not share the exact same cognitive phenomenological properties?

- I'll argue that there is a way of answering 'yes' to both of these questions that does not undermine a robust internal connection between cognitive phenomenological types and concept types.

'Yes' to [7] but no problem for [6R]. My word 'water' hooks onto H₂O; my WATER concept hooks onto H₂O. My twin's word 'water' hooks onto XYZ; her WATER concept hooks onto XYZ. Our WATER concepts are different, but our cognitive-phenomenological properties are the same, by hypothesis.

Only some aspects of a concept are relevant to a thought's cognitive phenomenology. In the case of my twin's and my respective WATER concepts this might be *the substance the subject is presented with, the watery stuff* and so on.

'Yes' to [8] but on problem for [6R]. Two thinkers may be thinking with the same concepts but have different cognitive phenomenological properties because they are hooking onto different aspects of the concept, and it is the aspects with which they are thinking that determines the cognitive phenomenology of the thought. Imagine an expert in physics thinking that an electron is a fundamental particle and my thinking that an electron is a fundamental particle.

- Am I avoiding the central question here? That is, even if concepts have aspects and we can account for a certain amount of variation among thinkers' cognitive phenomenology in terms of those aspects, can't we always ask about the cognitive phenomenology

associated with those aspects themselves and ask again if there will be variation with respect to the cognitive phenomenology associated with those aspects?

claim: there is an internal connection between cognitive phenomenological properties and basic concepts.

- If there is an internal connection between a unique cognitive phenomenological property and the concept of space, for example, we have an immediate answer to the question, 'how are you thinking about space?' You must be instantiating the unique cognitive phenomenological property internally connected to the concept of space.
- If there is a variety of cognitive phenomenological properties and the concept space we introduce brute facts and lose the immediate answer to the question 'how are you thinking about space?'.