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# Experiences constituted by concepts

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**Abstract**

We solve problems, wonder about things, prove theorems - we often think consciously. But there is a further question about whether thinking only causes us to undergo conscious experiences or partly constitutes those conscious experiences. Relying on this distinction, Carruthers and Veillet (2011) have argued that there is no constitutively cognitive phenomenology – that no conscious experiences are partly constituted by thinking. If their argument were to succeed, it would show that no constitutively cognitive phenomenology exists. I explore the details of Carruthers and Veillet's argument. I show that their argument fails to properly support the conclusion that no conscious experiences are constituted, at least in part, by deploying concepts.

**Keywords**: cognitive phenomenology; explanatory gap; phenomenal concepts; inverted spectra; mental constitution

## 1. Constitutively cognitive phenomenology

It seems intuitively compelling that we undergo experiences of thinking. Oftentimes, there is something it is like for us to think. We puzzle over what we think, we are

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anxious for finding a solution, relieved when we find it, immersed in the flow of problem-solving, reflective when things go wrong. We exercise intellectual modesty or, on the contrary, jump to conclusions. All these, and many more, are things that happen to us often enough and they are all things we do when we think. It should be intuitively evident that we undergo conscious experiences of thinking.

Some philosophers have recognized the obviousness of conscious cognitive life. For instance, Strawson (1994, 4) writes: "There is the experience of consciously entertained thought, of reading and understanding, of unplanned fantasy, and of directed imagining." Strawson's (1994, 18-21) "account of four seconds of thought" is a good example of how complex yet seamless our stream of conscious thinking can be. Introspection gives us a *prima facie* reason to think that conscious thinking occurs (or cognitive phenomenology exists): there is something it is like for us to think. But what exactly do we mean by this? To be sure, many of our experiences are occasioned by thinking. But that truth is banal. Is there a way to make the debate over the existence of cognitive phenomenology more precise? There is; consider the following difference.

The question of what phenomenal properties thinking has opens the possibility that conscious experiences which we would ordinarily report of as being experiences *of* thinking are, in fact, only experiences *caused by* thinking, whose phenomenal properties don't originate in thought but in current or past sensory experiences. Thoughts could cause conscious experiences without being part of them. Consider thinking about Granny, the grandmother we keep such fond memories of. We often have associated imagery, such as remembering or imagining Granny's appearance, gestures, and voice, based on our previous encounters with her. These may produce in us experiences for which our Granny-concept is one of the causes. So far, this is the banal sense of thought-involving phenomenology.

Is there thought-constituted phenomenology in thinking of Granny? The claim may be undermined in two ways. One may *deny* there is any cognitive phenomenology

delivered by our concept *Granny*. Instead, perhaps all the phenomenal aspects of our experience originate in past sensory and motor experiences of being around Granny (Tye 1996). Alternatively, one may *admit* that there is cognitive phenomenology, but add that it has a sensory basis through and through (Prinz 2011).

Or we could approach things as they seem. Your thought is about Granny. Your thought is conscious. There isn't any obvious sense – or so it seems to you – that your thought could assume the character it does, and be what it is, were it not about the particular grandmother that you had. Your experience is shaped by how you think of her, and how you remember her. Thinking of Granny partly constitutes your conscious experience. With the difference between thoughts which cause experiences and thoughts which constitute experiences, we have two ways of construing the debate over cognitive phenomenology. If what is at issue is merely thinking causing us to be in some conscious states of mind, then the issue is, indeed, trivialized.

But suppose the issue is whether thinking somehow *constitutes* the conscious experiences it accompanies. As Carruthers and Veillet (2011) point out, this is a genuine philosophical issue worth debating. How could thinking constitute experiences? The elements of thoughts are concepts. If concepts ever constituted our experiences, then the existence of cognitive phenomenology would be ensured.

Carruthers and Veillet (2011) argue instead that no concepts could ever – even in principle – constitute the phenomenal character of any experience we may undergo. If they were right, thinking and consciousness wouldn't be related constitutively, but only – at most – causally. That matters because it's likely that causal detail varies with each time thinking occurs. And so the question of how thinking and consciousness relate *in general* would be misleading, and not worth answering. In what follows, however, I show why and how Carruthers and Veillet's argument fails; asking how thinking and consciousness relate isn't futile.

## 2. Phenomenal properties, explanatory gaps, and conceptual isolation

Here is Carruthers and Veillet's main argument:

(1) A property is phenomenal only if it contributes to the hard problem of consciousness, and in particular, only if it gives rise to an explanatory ga
(2) A property gives rise to an explanatory gap only if we have a conceptually isolated phenomenal concept for it…
(3) So a property is phenomenal only if we have a conceptually isolated concept for it.
(4) We lack conceptually isolated concepts for any cognitive/conceptual properties of experience (that is to say, for experiences individuated in such a way as to include their cognitive/conceptual components).
(5) So cognitive/conceptual properties don't give rise to an explanatory ga
(6) Hence cognitive/conceptual properties aren't themselves phenomenal ones.
(Carruthers and Veillet 2011, 45)

The argument is fully general: it doesn't assume that phenomenal properties are only sensory, nor does it preclude it. Moreover, the argument is clearly valid. Its conclusion follows from the premises by a mix of basic logic rules: universal instantiation, *modus tollens*, and the transitivity of the conditional.

In fact, Carruthers and Veillet have even included an extra step for explicitness. This is because (6) can be derived in either of two ways. One way is to derive (6) from (1) and (5), derive (5) from (3) and (4), and derive (3) from (1) and (2). Another way, equivalent to the first, is to derive (6) from (3) and (4) directly, and then derive (3) from (1) and (2). Step (5) is, strictly speaking, redundant, but it is included for a maximum of explicitness. Whichever derivation of (6) we choose, the argument is valid, and the truth of the conclusion in (6) depends on the truth of the material premises (1), (2), and (4).

My strategy in approaching this argument is the following. Premises (1) and (2) specify which properties get to count as phenomenal and, respectively, which properties give rise to explanatory gaps, and how the two relate. To deny these premises would depart from Carruthers and Veillet's project from the very start, instead of exploring the details of their argumentation. I will grant these premises for the sake of

argument, and will start by briefly discussing them. Given (1) and (2), (4) stakes out a specific claim: that we lack conceptual phenomenal properties. I will question the reasons Carruthers and Veillet offer in support of (4). If (4) is false, then their argument for (6) is unsound, and the conclusion that no cognitive properties are phenomenal has not been established.

Premise (1) references *the hard problem of consciousness* (Chalmers 1996): consciousness seems unique in not being amenable to a naturalistic account in terms borrowed from current or future science. The hard problem can be motivated in several ways. To illustrate: Perhaps zombies – creatures like us in all possible respects, except they cannot be conscious – are possible. Then we would despair for finding an account of consciousness in non-phenomenal terms, because those terms would apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to zombies too (Chalmers 1996).

Another example to make the same point: Perhaps Mary, the scientist who knows all the scientific truths about colors but has always lived in a black-and-white room, comes to know something new when seeing red for the first time. We would be hard pressed to explain exactly what Mary learns new, since, by hypothesis, she knew all there was to know about color except for what it is like to experience it (Jackson 1982). It seems, again, that we could not explain phenomenal properties (like what it is like for Mary to experience what she does) in terms of non-phenomenal properties (which Mary had access to before exiting her black-and-white room).

We can realize how hard the problem of consciousness is by noting the *explanatory gap* between phenomenal and non-phenomenal properties (Levine 1983). There are no scientific descriptions of consciousness (i.e., of phenomenal properties) that are not *conceivably* false. The explanatory gap is not about actual truth or falsehood, it is about what is suited to explain what else. Suppose that a naturalistic description of consciousness did turn out to be *true*. Even so, its truth would be explanatorily *idle*. The conceivability of zombies shows that whatever description of conscious experience in non-phenomenal terms we came up with, it is conceivable that it be true of zombies as well, who lack conscious experience. So, even if a naturalistic *description* of consciousness were available, and

even if it were *true*, it would still not be able to *explain* the character of our conscious experience it purports to describe.

Presupposed here is only the *conceivability* of zombies, not their metaphysical possibility. It's plausible that functional and physical zombies are conceivable. For we have no definitive full knowledge of what functions consciousness performs. So we may conceive each such function and its physical realizers without consciousness. *Ditto* for the conceivability of Mary's black-and-white room thought-experiment, and for that of inverted-spectrum scenarios.

(1) states that a property is phenomenal only inasmuch as it gives rise to an explanatory ga *Phenomenal properties* are ways the experience is like to the subject, there and then; parts of the conscious character assumed by the experience for its subject. (1) is nothing but a roundabout way of saying that consciousness properties lead to the hard problem of consciousness. I agree the explanatory gap is real, and that it motivates the hard problem of consciousness. And I grant (1).

(2) introduces *phenomenal concepts*: concepts which rigidly designate phenomenal properties. One can readily see why this matters. The explanatory gap results from our inability to scientifically account for why our experiences assume the phenomenal characters that they do. In order for the problem to even be formulated, we must have a rigid way of designating the phenomenal properties we cannot explain.

The easiest way to achieve that is by means of mental demonstratives: our experiences are *like this*, they have *these* properties, irrespective of how inaccurately or partially we may be able to describe those properties.

As long as subjects of experience and thought have purely demonstrative concepts (*this*, *that)* they are guaranteed to have impure demonstrative concepts too (Chalmers 2004), in which *this* and *that* are applied to features of their own experiences: *this experience, this shade of red* (which I experience), and so on. Such impure demonstrative concepts, which point to properties of our conscious experience, are phenomenal concepts.

Phenomenal concepts rigidly designate phenomenal properties. For instance, the phenomenal concept “this pain”

rigidly designates pain as it is experienced. There is an explanatory gap for phenomenal pain. That is, any physicalist or functionalist analysis of pain could only a *posteriori* be learned to be true of what the phenomenal concept "this pain" is true of, namely, pain as experienced.

Premise (2) also mentions *conceptually isolated* phenomenal concepts. And:

> [T]he crucial thing about phenomenal concepts is that they should have the right sorts of conceptual isolation from physical and functional concepts, together with bearing the right sorts of immediate relations to their referents... It is this isolation from other sorts of concepts that underpins the conceivability of zombies and inverted experiences, and which means that no amount of physical information can entail *a priori* that any given phenomenal concept should be applied. (Carruthers and Veillet 2011, 45)

Conceptually isolated phenomenal concepts are such that "no amount of physical information can entail *a priori* that any given phenomenal concept should be applied." *A priori* entailment also fails from the existence of functional information to the applicability of phenomenal concepts, as a condition of their conceptual isolation.

Since Carruthers and Veillet don't offer a general characterization of conceptually isolated concepts, let's focus on phenomenal concepts. To agree with (2) that phenomenal concepts – concepts which, by (1), give rise to explanatory gaps – are conceptually isolated from functional and physical concepts in this way is to presuppose conceptions of functional and physical properties which Carruthers and Veillet don't seem to provide.

Specific views may challenge (2). Consider, for instance, views such as Tononi's (2004) "information integration theory of consciousness." On this view, there are computational-informational (hence, functional) descriptions of the circumstances in which consciousness properties will be realized. This agrees with older approaches, such as Chalmers (1996), on which, even though consciousness and functional-physical properties are logically distinct, they are related by laws of nature. It is hard to see what conceptual isolation might amount to if it were compatible with the existence of laws of

nature (or of information) relating the properties thus conceived.

Of course, one may *stipulate* a notion of *conceptual* isolation that is compatible with a lack of *nomic* isolation. But that seems to water down the meaning of the word "isolation." For instance, there is a nomic relationship between temperature and average molecular kinetic energy, but this relationship needed discovering, and does not amount to *a priori* entailments between the two concepts. This would suggest that the concept of temperature is conceptually isolated from those of kinetic theory. This result seems to over-generate conceptual isolation far beyond the target cases of phenomenal properties that Carruthers and Veillet envisage.

Specific views such as Tononi's then offer a way out from Carruthers and Veillet's argument to defenders of cognitive phenomenology. However, in what follows I will grant (2) for the sake of argument, in order to explore Carruthers and Veillet's argument and try to reconstruct it in detail. With this preamble concerning (1) and (2), I now turn to (4).

One final note before doing so concerning a feature of

Carruthers and Veillet's argument. Neither the premises nor the conclusion of the argument have existential import. So someone who *denies* that phenomenal properties exist could still counterfactually consider whether, if phenomenal properties existed, cognitive phenomenal properties could exist as well.

## 3. Concepts in experience

In support of (4), Carruthers and Veillet write:

Consider, then, the thought, "*This* experience might not have been an experience of red, or might not have had the content *red*." In order for this thought to be thinkable, it appears that the phenomenal concept that one deploys must be picking out *only* the nonconceptual content of the experience. For if that concept picked out an experience that contained the concept *red* as a constituent, in such a way as to include immediate reference to the latter, then how could the experience *not* be about red, and how could it *not* be a seeming of red? Let us grant that the experience has both a nonconceptual and a conceptual content. In which case, if both

make a constitutive contribution to the phenomenal qualities of the experience, then the phenomenal concept that one deploys must engage with both aspects. Yet if the experience that one refers to with one's phenomenal concept has the content [red$_{17}$, *red*], then how could one coherently think, of a state with that content, "This might not have been about red"? For the concept *red* will be right there in the content of the state that one's phenomenal concept picks out, and it is of the essence of that concept that it should be about red.

Does this argument presuppose externalism about conceptual content? We believe not. The thought-experiments that give rise to an explanatory gap are generally believed to be independent of any particular theory of content. It is supposed to be *content* (however characterized) that can be pulled apart in thought from *feel*. And the same is surely true here. Instead of the thought, "This experience might not have been about red" one can entertain, "This experience might not have had the content *red*", where content can be characterized internally rather than externally. But if the phenomenal concept *this experience* in such a thought were to pick out both the (narrow) conceptual and the nonconceptual content of the relevant experience, then it will entail, "The concept with the content *red* might not have had the content *red*." This is surely incoherent, on anyone's view, for concepts are individuated in terms of their content. (Carruthers and Veillet 2011, 47, footnotes omitted)

It isn't immediately obvious, from this passage, just what Carruthers and Veillet's argument for (4) is. Whether my criticism of their defense of (4) is successful depends on how I construe that defense. I will now try to reconstruct their argument, *postponing* critical remarks to the next sections.

Here is what I take their guiding thought to be, applied to the experience of seeing red. (I return later to whether this is a representative experience for cognitive phenomenology.) In the case of consciously seeing red, (4) seems to be supported by the need to back out of a seemingly inconsistent triad:

(a) *This experience* might not have had the content *red*.
(b) The concept *red* must have the content *red*.

(c) *This experience* is partly constituted by the concepts it involves.

Carruthers and Veillet claim (a)-(c) conflict. To see their line of thought, I first need to say a few words about each.

Many, Carruthers and Veillet included, are convinced spectrum inversion is conceivable: it might be that the color you see is, say, green when what it is like for you to undergo that experience is as if you were seeing red. Spectrum inversion cases support (a). I return to such cases below.

As for concepts, it seems to be a conceptual truth that "concepts are individuated in terms of their content" (see quote above). There is a whiff of triviality to (b): how could the content of a concept fail to constitute it? Again, I will come back below to whether the lack of controversy is warranted.

We get a problem once we put the points about spectrum-inversion cases and concept-individuation together and consider their bearing on the debate at issue. The debate at issue concerns whether concepts are *constitutive* to experiences. What does that mean? Experiences are conscious, so they are individuated by their phenomenal character. To say a concept is constitutive of an experience is to say that the phenomenal character of that experience necessarily involves the concept. For example, if the concept *red* is constitutive of your experience of seeing red, then the phenomenal character of your experience (what is picked out when you directly identify your experience as *this one*) cannot be conceptually specified without using the concept *red*. And that is precisely what (c) claims.

So (a)-(c) form an inconsistent triad because spectrum-inversion cases seem to provide precisely the kind of cases in which experiential content, which we expected could be specified only by invoking concepts (seeing red involves the concept *red*), turns out not to properly invoke those concepts. This is because specifying the phenomenal character of seeing red (when presented with green) is *possible,* whereas having the content *green* when the concept being applied is *red* is *impossible.* Carruthers and Veillet have identified a property of the experience of seeing red which it does have (the possibility of spectrum-inversion), but which it could not have if the concept *red* was constitutive of the phenomenal character of

that experience. Faced with this inconsistent triad, and supporting both (a) and (b), Carruthers and Veillet reject (c), claiming that the phenomenal character of this experience, that of seeing red, *can* be specified without invoking the concept *red.*

In order for this to bear upon cognitive phenomenology generally, it should be applicable to *all* concepts, not just the concept *red.* How does this line of thought generalize? Here is my reconstruction of Carruthers and Veillet's argument:

(7) For any concept *R* and any experience *E*, *E* might not have had an *R*-involving content.
(8) For any concept *R*, the concept *R* must have the conceptualized content *R*.
(9) So, for any concept *R* and any experience *E*, *E* might have occurred without applying *R*.
(10) For any concept *R* and any experience *E*, if *E* might have occurred without applying *R*, then then R doesn't even partly constitute R.
(11) So, for any concept *R*, there is no experience *E* even partly constituted by *R*.
(12) So, for any concept *R* and any experience *E*, the phenomenal concept expressed by "this experience" applied to *E* doesn't include any phenomenal concept applied to *R*.

Intuitively, here is what this argument says, with *E* instantiated as the experience of seeing red, and *R* as our concept *red.* Because spectrum inversion is conceivable, seeing red might have not had the content *red* – this is (a) above. Whereas the concept *red* couldn't have not had the content *red* – this is (b) above. So the experience of seeing red might have occurred without applying the concept *red.* And, to the extent that bears on whether seeing red (with normal vision, this time) involves the concept *red,* that concept isn't constitutive of the experience of seeing red – this denies (c), as above. Next apply the thought that phenomenal properties are the ones we can generate phenomenal concepts for, of the kind "this experience" or "this experience of redness" express. If we did so, since the concept *red* doesn't *constitute* the experience of seeing red, that conceptual property need not be referred to in an appropriate application of the phrase "this experience of redness." (Note that this concerns the phenomenal *concept* expressed, not our understanding of the *English* phrase *qua* competent speakers, since the words obviously appeal to the concept *red;* but the

experiences designated need not, and so neither need the concepts appropriately applicable to those experiences alone.)

(12) simply makes (4) a bit more explicit. Recall (4) read: "We lack conceptually isolated concepts for any cognitive/conceptual properties of experience (that is to say, for experiences individuated in such a way as to include their cognitive/conceptual components)." *Rs* are the concepts or conceptual properties putatively involved in experience not as causes but as constituents. *Es* are the experiences in question. In light of premises (7), (8) and (10), it follows that, given a phenomenal concept for an experience (say, "this experience of red"), there is no corresponding phenomenal concept picking out the putative conceptual part of that experience. Since it is phenomenal properties that are conceptually isolated by Carruthers and Veillet's lights, (4) follows. So, however concepts may relate to experience, they are not conscious constituent parts of it.

The argument for (12) is valid. (9) follows from (7) and (8) by modal reasoning and predicate logic. (11) follows from (9) and (10) by predicate logic alone. (12) follows from (11) and (2); recall (2) claimed that any phenomenal property (e.g., phenomenal redness) is available as the referent of a phenomenal concept expressed by the phrase "this experience" to pick out that specific phenomenal quality (an experience of redness).

All the premises of this argument – (7), (8), and (10) – are controversial. To think, *per* (8), that concepts are constituted by their contents, and so must have the contents they do, needs separate defense. And a proper articulation of (10) also needs to explain what mental constitution is, in metaphysical terms, as distinct from physical or functional realization, and as distinct from material constitution. However, in what follows, I grant premises (8) and (10) for the sake of argument. Instead, I'll argue against premise (7) in Section 4.

## 4. Inverted spectra

How might *inverted-spectrum* scenarios, which feature prominently in Carruthers and Veillet's discussion, support (4)?

In a nutshell, that thought-experiment goes like this. When everything goes well in perception, when one sees a red apple, one has a conscious visual experience of a red apple. Call the apple's redness "sensory redness." The redness *experienced* by the perceiver is phenomenal redness. It matters little, for our purposes here, exactly which physical-cum-functional property sensory redness is. Sensory redness could be the apple's surface reflectance properties in typical lighting environments. Or sensory redness could be the apple's being such that normal perceivers would respond to it by undergoing an experience of redness. Or it could be another, more complex, property, characterized in terms of the physical properties of the perceiver's environment, his nervous system, and his cognitive functional organization. For discussion, see Langsam (2011).

Ideally, we would expect phenomenal and sensory redness to coincide. You see the apple's redness; and the content of your perceptual experience is the very property answering to your sensory experience in the environment – be it the surface reflectance property or the corresponding response-dependent property.

But things are less than ideal, and there may be a difference between our contact with our environment and what our conscious experiences are like for us. Imagine this scenario (Shoemaker 1982): by complicated neurosurgery and subsequent successful training, someone who previously experienced red when he saw red will now experience, say, green when seeing red, and red when seeing green. This is the inverted spectrum thought-experiment.

If an inverted-spectrum scenario is possible, however remote it might be from the actual circumstances of our everyday perception, the scenario shows that the properties of sensory redness and phenomenal redness differ. This is because, in an inverted spectrum, phenomenal redness corresponds with sensory greenness, and phenomenal greenness corresponds with sensory redness.

Inverted spectra seem possible to many. But one principled reason to resist the idea that inverted spectra are possible (as opposed to merely imaginable) is reductive representationalism: the view that the phenomenal character of

our experiences is entirely fixed by the contents of those experiences and by the functional role representing those contents satisfies. If contents differ, we should expect what our experiences are like for us to differ. So, if the content of our experience changes, e.g., from seeing redness to seeing greenness, then so should we expect the phenomenal character of our experience to change. The tension between accepting that inverted spectra are possible and reductive representationalism comes only if we read the possibility as metaphysical, rather than conceptual. Carruthers and Veillet don't beg the question against representationalism. They point out ( 47) that it is enough for inverted spectra to be conceivable, rather than metaphysically possible. If so, then the modalities in (7)-(12) should be read as pertaining conceptual necessity and conceivability.

How do inverted-spectrum scenarios bear on Carruthers and Veillet's argument? Beyond gesturing towards something like the triad (a)-(c) above, Carruthers and Veillet don't clarify how inverted-spectrum scenarios pertain to supporting (4). In my reconstruction of their argument, inverted-spectrum scenarios support premise (7) when we ask whether the concept *red* partly constitutes the experience of seeing (phenomenal) redness or not. It is because inverted spectra are conceivable that it is *not* a conceptual truth that an experience of redness must involve the concept *red*. By supporting (7), inverted-spectrum scenarios support (12) by the argument in Section 3 above. And (12), I have argued, is a more explicit version of (4).

At the end of their paper, Carruthers and Veillet suggest what their strategy is in supporting (7):

> We have offered only the barest sketch of an argument against non-perceptual cognitive phenomenology, of course. But it does at least suggest that the case made out against the cognitive phenomenology of perception... is likely to generalize. The detailed demonstration that this is so must be left for another occasion. (2011, 55)

This suggests that Carruthers and Veillet's strategy has two steps. First, to argue that, if there is no "cognitive phenomenology of perception," then there is no cognitive phenomenology at all. Second, to argue that there is no "cognitive phenomenology of perception," in the sense

advertised, as concept-constituted phenomenology. So we can reconstruct their argument for (7) as follows:

(13) For any concept *R,* if for any perceptual experience *E*, *E* might not have had an *R*-involving content, then for any experience *E* whatsoever, *E* might not have had an *R*-involving content.
(14) For any concept *R* and any perceptual experience *E*, *E* might not have had an *R*-involving content.

(7) So, for any concept *R* and any experience *E*, *E* might not have had an *R*-involving content.

This argument is valid, and it clarifies how inverted-spectrum scenarios bear on (7): by supporting premise (14); for inverted-spectrum cases concern only color experiences, which are perceptual.

However, I will now argue that both premises of this argument seem to be false. Perhaps they are not; but more explanatory and argumentative work would need to be done to show that is the case. Failing that, Carruthers and Veillet's argument that no experiences are concept-constituted cannot ultimately succeed.

It seems to me that (13) meets with counterexamples. Consider someone who becomes familiar with solving geometrical problems, both in a Euclidean and a non-Euclidean setting. (The problems need not be purely geometrical. They can be applied as well. Suppose, for instance, that one is tasked with showing why geodesics are minimal distances in air traffic.) This requires reasoning, and carefully operating with distinct concepts of what a straight line is, according to whether the parallel postulate applies (in a Euclidean setting) or fails to apply (in a non-Euclidean setting). It would be hard to account for the variety and richness of our phenomenology in solving mathematical problems if we thought the concepts used in posing those problems and solving them were merely incidental to, rather than constitutive of, our attendant conscious experiences. It seems plausible that the cognitive phenomenal character of these experiences cannot be ontologically reduced to purely sensory or motor phenomenal properties, even though such sensory and motor phenomenal properties are instantiated as well (e.g., in arc and compass constructions, and in seeing what one has drawn). Contra (13), even if concepts did not

constitute any perceptual experiences, it doesn't follow that they don't constitute properly cognitive experiences such as experiences had in solving geometrical problems.

Now turn to (14), by which concepts cannot constitute *perceptual* experiences. The first thing to note is that, by appealing to inverted-spectrum scenarios, Carruthers and Veillet fail to support (14) in full generality. For inverted-spectrum scenarios properly apply only to color experiences. Perhaps we may contemplate analogous scenarios concerning our experiences of taste and other sensory modalities. But those scenarios would need to be spelled out. And it is far from clear that anything resembling inverted spectra may ever apply to our shape experiences, or to our experiences of pain. (Consider whether there might be any inversion scenarios for pain. "This experience might not have been one of pain," said of an experience of excruciating pain, hardly makes any sense. This makes vivid how difficult it is to generalize following Carruthers and Veillet even when it comes to conceptual involvement in sensory experiences.)

Inverted-spectrum scenarios don't uncontroversially support (14) even when it comes to color experiences. In describing inverted spectra, it was useful to distinguish sensory redness from phenomenal redness, even if these properties are co-instantiated in everyday color experiences. Some subjects of experience may be savvy enough to *themselves* draw the conceptual distinction between sensory and phenomenal redness. If so, they possess not one but two concepts *red*. And surely our intuitions will vary concerning the plausibility of thinking that an experience of phenomenal redness may have failed to involve concepts of sensory and, respectively, phenomenal redness. The former is clearly coherent, but the latter isn't straightforwardly so.

To think it is coherent that an experience of phenomenal redness might not have had phenomenal redness as its content – if it is coherent at all – seems to turn on the conceivability of thinking that non-conceptual phenomenal redness not only overflows our conceptual resources – here, our concept of phenomenal redness – but also exists antecedently and independently of those conceptual resources. I remain neutral

concerning this possibility, merely noting that, if it fails to obtain, it is yet another way to resist premise (14) in the argument I attribute to Carruthers and Veillet.

An experience – here, of redness – may then involve several concepts, and it isn't clear that Carruthers and Veillet's line of thought excludes all concepts from constituting phenomenal properties. I have just contrasted phenomenal redness with sensory redness in this respect. But now consider other concepts, such as the concept *one* or the concept *rose*.

Suppose that, on Valentine's Day, Jack gives Jane a present: one red rose. She sees the rose, notices it is only one flower, and thinks to herself that the carmine red looks a bit overdone, so the color might be artificial. It is far from clear why we should consider that, when Jane first sees the present, concepts like *one* and *rose* only causally contribute to Jane's having the experience she does, rather than partly constituting that experience. No obvious inversion scenarios seem plausible here, so Carruthers and Veillet's support for premise (14) is unclear, unless they fall back on alternative strategies mentioned in Section 1 (e.g., Tye 1996, Prinz 2011).

Even if one thought that the concept *rose* only causally prompts Jane to have the experience she does, the same thing cannot be said of the concept *one*. Object identification – and, implicitly, seeing the object as *one* – seems to be part and parcel of how we attend to the world, and of the fact that we experience *a world of objects* wherein the features we sense (color, fragrance, etc.) are unified into stable units. It seems that what Jane sees may fail to be in-fact red and in-fact a rose, but cannot fail to be in-fact one. If that's so, it *prima facie* supports thinking that a numerical concept – the concept *one* – is partly constitutive of any experience the content of which is segmented into objects.

In sum, it seems that, although Carruthers and Veillet's line of thought can be reconstructed as a fairly complex argument, its premises are insufficiently supported. This makes their argument against concept-constituted phenomenology questionable.

## 5. Conclusion

We solve problems, we prove theorems, we reflect on the role of art in our lives, we waffle over which carpet best fits the living room. All of these are experiences of thinking.

This commonplace (which I believe correct) has come under heavy fire: We can see the sensory basis of what our experience is like when we smell a rose, or when we see a velvet scarf. But what is the basis on which we experience thinking? What is it like to be experiencing thinking?

With these wider questions in the background, Carruthers and Veillet (2011) have provided an argument the upshot of which is to suggest that, even when thoughts cause us to undergo conscious experiences, concepts – the constituents of thoughts – don't constitute our experiences as well. I have retraced the argument Carruthers and Veillet make step by step, identified a premise I disagree with, and questioned the support they provide for it.

What is at stake in Carruthers and Veillet's (2011) argument is not something parochial to remote quarters of philosophical speculation. If their argument had succeeded, it would have undermined the very possibility of conscious experiences partly constituted by our thinking. That should disquiet the defenders of common sense. My contribution aims to reassure them.

Conscious thinking keeps its homely and central appearance in our stream of conscious experience. We don't only have conscious experiences *as of* thinking, *as if* we thought, or merely caused by our thoughts. We sometimes consciously experience thought itself.

It is worth ending with a question: what would cognitive phenomenal character be like if it did exist? I conjecture there is no fully general answer to this question. For each subject of experience, it will depend on their concepts (which, in turn, depend on their respective learning histories), how those concepts are combined in a conscious thought, and perhaps other phenomenal properties pertaining to how vivid the thought is entertained, how well one will have accessed those concepts in one's semantic memory, and so on. Not only are such descriptions relative to how one would characterize one's

experience. They are also relative to our current vocabulary for describing the cognitive operations underlying our experiences of thought. Nagel's insight that we can never fully adequately capture what our experiences are like seems to be vindicated in the case of cognitive phenomenology. However, the lack of a general answer to the question of what cognitive phenomenal character is like doesn't imply that there is nothing it is like to think.

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