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Phenomenal Concepts and the Problem of Acquaintance

Abstract: *Some contemporary discussion about the explanation of consciousness substantially recapitulates a decisive debate about reference, knowledge, and justification from an earlier stage of the analytic tradition. In particular, I argue that proponents of a recently popular strategy for accounting for an explanatory gap between physical and phenomenal facts — the so-called ‘phenomenal concept strategy’ — face a problem that was originally fiercely debated by Schlick, Carnap, and Neurath. The question that is common to both the older and the contemporary discussion is that of how the presence or presentation of phenomenal experiences can play a role in justifying beliefs or judgments about them. This problem is, moreover, the same as what was classically discussed as the problem of acquaintance. Interestingly, both physicalist and non-physicalist proponents of the phenomenal concept strategy today face this problem. I consider briefly some recent attempts to solve it and conclude that, although it is prima facie very plausible that acquaintance exists, we have, as yet, no good account of it.*

My aim in this paper is to demonstrate that proponents of a recently popular physicalist strategy for explaining consciousness — what has been called the *phenomenal concept strategy* — share with certain anti-physicalist phenomenal realists a common problem, which was also a problem for Schlick, Carnap, and Neurath in the days of the Vienna Circle. Though it has implications for ontology and metaphysics, this problem is essentially one about justification: how can *judgments, claims, or beliefs about phenomenal experience be justified, at*

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least in part, by the presence or presentation of the relevant experiences themselves? In this paper, I argue on conceptual grounds that all proponents of the phenomenal concept strategy face this problem, and on historical grounds that it is indeed a general one, one that may cut deeper than the contemporary debate between physicalism and phenomenalism itself.

I

For the purposes of this paper, I take physicalism (in its contemporary form) to be an *explanatory* thesis: if physicalism is right, then all facts about consciousness are, or at least can be wholly explained in terms of, physical facts. Nevertheless, it is *prima facie* plausible that (for now at least) there is at least an *explanatory gap* between facts about consciousness and physical facts: that is, a complete description of the physical facts does not entail the facts about consciousness.¹ What has come to be called the ‘phenomenal concept strategy’ is not itself a theory of consciousness, but rather a strategy employed mostly by physicalists to account for why there should at least seem to be an explanatory gap, even if physicalism is true.² The underlying idea is that it is the special features of *concepts* of consciousness that make for at least the appearance of an explanatory gap between consciousness and the physical world. On this kind of story, the phenomenal concepts we use to think about our own experiences have distinctive features that mark them off from the physical concepts we normally use to think about brain states as such, even though both types of concepts cover what are, in fact, the same things.³ It is this difference in conceptual features, rather than any difference in the objects conceptualized, that explains why there is at least the appearance of an explanatory gap between experience and the physical world. Conceiving of our experience using phenomenal concepts (as we usually do) rather than physical ones, we are apt to miss the fact that physical concepts (e.g. concepts of physiologically or functionally described brain states) also pick out the very same individuals. Thus, we are apt to imagine that there is an ontological or metaphysical gap between phenomenal states and the physical world, although in fact (on this telling) there is no such gap.

[1] See, e.g. Jackson (1982), Chalmers (1996).

[2] In this paragraph and the next one I largely follow the summary given by Chalmers (2007, pp. 171–2).

[3] In saying that a concept ‘covers’ a particular, I mean that that particular is a particular of whichever *type* the concept picks out.

For many adherents to the phenomenal concept strategy, the most important distinctive feature of phenomenal concepts is their analogy to, or actual employment of, *indexical* linguistic terms or the concepts corresponding to them. Several philosophers have suggested that phenomenal concepts are themselves indexical concepts or have indexical characters in the sense of Kaplan (1989).⁴ That is, they pick out their referents (which are in fact neural states, processes, or properties) in the same way as (or a way closely analogous to the way in which) linguistic indexical terms like *I*, *now*, and *this* pick out their referents in discourse. On these theories, the apparent epistemic gap between phenomenal properties and physical properties is to be understood as analogous to the familiar epistemic gaps that can arise between claims made about individuals by using indexicals and claims about the very same individuals made without using indexicals.⁵

Others have argued on related grounds that phenomenal concepts are *recognitional* concepts in the sense that they can be used to pick out experiences as ‘one of *those*’, or ‘one of *that type*’, and so can subsequently be used to recognize individuals as of the same type (e.g. Loar, 1997; Levin, 2007). Here, the phenomenal concept is treated as a ‘type-demonstrative’. The idea is that it picks out a general type by demonstrating or demonstratively referring to a particular of that type. Doing so might be enough to give us the ability to recognize subsequent instances of that type which we encounter, even if we have no detailed theoretical knowledge of the distinctive features of that type. If this is right, then successful recognitional use of a phenomenal concept to pick out a type is, again, entirely consistent with failing to realize that there is a physical concept that picks out the same type. Some proponents of this version of the strategy have additionally suggested that, in forming or applying concepts of this kind, it is the *referent itself* (the phenomenal state being referred to) that serves as a ‘mode of presentation’ for that very referent (e.g. Loar, 1999).

A third variant of the phenomenal concept strategy holds that phenomenal concepts are unique in that they include, in their constitutive structure, the *very phenomenal states or properties* to which they refer. For instance, phenomenal concepts might have what Papineau (2002) has described as a *quotational* structure, something like the structure of the sentence ‘That state: —’, where the blank is to be filled with the state itself in a manner analogous to the way a word is embedded between quotation marks. If this is right, then it might

[4] Perry (2001), O’Dea (2002), Ismael (1999).

[5] For this sort of gap, see, e.g. Perry (1979).

again be possible to be in a phenomenal state, and even to conceive of it under a phenomenal concept of this form, without being able to conceive of it under the purely physical concepts that pick out the neural state that it in fact is, on the physicalist view.

A fourth version of the phenomenal concept strategy has also been employed by some *anti*-physicalists, most prominently Chalmers (2003; 2007). According to Chalmers, phenomenal states can play a role in justifying phenomenal beliefs employing phenomenal concepts in part by figuring in those very concepts as constituents. It is this capability of concepts to include the very individuals they concern as constituents that, according to Chalmers, accounts for the special relation of phenomenal experience to the concepts that we use to think about it.

For all four of these versions of the phenomenal concept strategy, it is decisively important that we can bear a certain kind of relation to our own phenomenal states, simply in virtue of *having* or *enjoying* them.⁶ That is, we stand in a special relationship to our own phenomenal states in that they are ours at all, in that they are ‘experientially present’ or ‘present to mind’, and this relationship *plays an essential role* in our forming at least some justified beliefs about them, for instance about their phenomenal character. It is this relationship that makes it possible for these states to be presented under phenomenal concepts at all, and thus for a gap to appear to open up between this presentation and their presentation under physical concepts. On the indexical versions of the strategy, for instance, it is my ability indexically to pick out a particular, occurring state of a particular (phenomenal) type that yields the justified belief that I am enjoying a state of that type right now. On the recognitional concept versions, similarly, it is my type-indexical reference to a state I am currently enjoying that allows me to know that I am enjoying a state of *that* type (even if I cannot further specify the type). On the quotational version, it is the actual occurrence of the state within a larger conceptual structure that allows me to conceive of it as being of the type that it is; and so on.⁷

But what is the nature of this relationship, which allows particular states to present themselves in such a way as to contribute essentially to producing knowledge of them, at least in their ‘phenomenal’ conception? The relation is often described as one of ‘awareness’, and it

[6] This would make phenomenal concepts obviously different from concepts like *house* and *car*. There is no sense in which I can gain a special kind of awareness of my car simply in virtue of having (i.e. owning) it.

[7] I defer discussion of how this works in Chalmers’ non-physicalist version of the phenomenal concept strategy until Section III.

is, on each of the various physicalist versions of the phenomenal concept strategy, this awareness that enables us to refer to them under *phenomenal* concepts or modes of presentation, distinct from the *objective* concepts or modes of presentation (such as neurological concepts) that they may also stand under.

The idea of such a relation of awareness is also at the core of the traditional doctrine of acquaintance. Witness, for example, Russell's classic definition:

I say that I am acquainted with an object when I have a direct cognitive relation to that object, i.e. when I am directly aware of the object itself. When I speak of a cognitive relation here, I do not mean the sort of relation which constitutes judgment, but the sort which constitutes presentation. In fact, I think the relation of subject and object which I call acquaintance is simply the converse of the relation of object and subject which constitutes presentation. That is, to say that S has acquaintance with O is essentially the same thing as to say that O is present to S. (Russell, 1910, p. 108)

According to Russell, it is, moreover, at least in part by being acquainted with certain items that we gain knowledge of them, and can relate claims involving them to claims that do not involve objects of acquaintance but instead embody what he calls 'knowledge by description'.

Since proponents of the phenomenal concept strategy generally accept the existence of a relationship that is analogous to acquaintance in the sense that it provides the possibility of knowing of a particular simply in virtue of its being 'experientially presented' or made present, it seems likely that their theories will be open to the problems to which the doctrine of acquaintance has historically been prone. In particular, they will face the problem of explaining how knowledge by acquaintance is rationally related to (judgments involving) knowledge that is not, or not only, by acquaintance (for instance what Russell calls 'knowledge by description'). At least some such judgments (and perhaps all) have the *logical form* of a proposition: that is, they *attribute* some general property or relation to a particular, independently characterized, object or set of particulars. But if acquaintance is indeed a *direct* relation to its (particular) object, it is *prima facie* unclear how an instance or item of knowledge by acquaintance can play a role in justifying an item of propositional knowledge. For, since acquaintance is a *direct* relation between a subject and an object, it does not yet have the logical form of a proposition. Nor does the particular item with which we are acquainted. Accordingly, it is unclear how either can play a role in justifying something with that logical

form. Rules of deductive inference universally connect propositions or propositional contents with other propositions or propositional contents; there are no known rules for deduction or inference from particulars *themselves* to propositionally structured judgments about them. If the acquaintance theorist is to make sense of the role of acquaintance in justifying knowledge of truths or the truth of propositionally structured claims, she must thus seemingly give an account of how such justification occurs.⁸

It might be objected that this requirement puts too high a demand on the phenomenal concept strategy itself. After all, one of its proponents might object, the point of invoking phenomenal concepts is not really (as it was, at least in part, for Russell) to give an account of the *basis* of knowledge (whether by acquaintance or description), but just to explain why it may *seem* to be the case (even though it actually is not) that phenomenal concepts and physical concepts must *refer* to ontologically distinct entities. This is, moreover, explained, at least on some versions of the strategy, by the familiar differences between indexical and non-indexical reference. It might therefore be thought that the phenomenal concept strategist has no need for an account of *justification* by acquaintance, that it is enough, in other words, simply to point to these differences in referential devices in order to explain the appearance of an explanatory gap.

To see that this is not so, consider how the phenomenal concept strategy (in its physicalist versions) is intended to work in the first place. It is supposed to explain the appearance of an explanatory gap by adverting to two different ways of presenting what are *in fact* the same entities: under physical concepts and under phenomenal ones. But if the phenomenal concept theorist is to appeal to this difference in the presentation of a specific entity, she must certainly allow that the presentation under phenomenal concepts can yield knowledge of it, or at least can contribute essentially to such knowledge; otherwise there would be no relevant sense in which that presentation *is* a presentation of the same entity at all. Given this, even if the phenomenal concept strategist's concerns are not primarily epistemological, it is reasonable to ask for an account of this knowledge. Similarly, it is very implausible that we can refer demonstratively (as is required by some

[8] I do not presuppose here that proponents of acquaintance in this sense must give an account of a type of knowledge that, like Russell's 'knowledge by acquaintance', is *entirely* justified by acquaintance or an acquaintance-like relationship. It could be that acquaintance only plays a (partial) role in justifying any actual judgment, and there is no judgment that is entirely and only based on acquaintance. Even if so, all the problems I'll raise still arise.

versions of the phenomenal concept strategy) or apply a recognitional concept (as is required by others) to an item of which we cannot have any knowledge through those routes. If the phenomenal concept strategy is to be successful, therefore, it must allow that we have ways of knowing about what is presented in experience on the (perhaps partial) basis of this presentation, and we are owed an account of this knowledge.⁹

It seems, then, that the phenomenal concept strategy must hold that the special features of phenomenal concepts allow us to bear a relation to our own phenomenal states that is, at least in some cases, necessary (if not sufficient) for *knowledge* of their occurrence, properties, or intrinsic character.¹⁰ But although it indeed seems plausible that we bear some such relation to our own phenomenal states, it is far from clear, as several recent commentators (e.g. Levine, 2007; Levin, 2007; Chalmers, 2007) have pointed out, that *physicalist* adherents to the

[9] For this specific way of putting the point, I am indebted to an anonymous referee for this journal. But there are other routes to the same point. For example, what the phenomenal concept strategy is intended to explain in the first place is that there *seems* to be an explanatory gap between the totality of the physical facts and facts about phenomenal consciousness. But the idea of such a gap is just the idea that zombies, in the sense of Chalmers (1996), are conceivable. And as Chalmers (2007) has convincingly argued, if zombies are conceivable, it is extremely plausible that whereas we are in a position to *know* that we have conscious states, they are not (since they do not have conscious states). If this strategy is to be successful, therefore, it must explain this difference in epistemic situation: it must explain why *our* beliefs formed using phenomenal concepts can count as *knowledge* (and hence as justified) whereas those of zombies cannot. Another way to the same point is the following. For the physicalist versions of the phenomenal concept strategy, the difference between phenomenal concepts and physical concepts turns on differences in modes of making reference to what are in fact the same things. These referential differences exist also in the case of external objects like my house or car; for instance, I can refer to my house demonstratively, or under an objective concept. However, there is no (even apparent) explanatory gap with respect to houses or cars. Thus, the explanatory gap in the case of phenomenal states does not result simply from the semantic or referential difference between two modes of presentation; it must have to do with differences in justification or epistemic status as well.

[10] It might also be objected here that to hold that the appeal to phenomenal concepts must explain the possibility of *knowledge* of phenomenal states (under phenomenal concepts) is to conflate issues of justification with issues of concept formation or acquisition. But as we have seen, the phenomenal concept strategist does owe us some account of how *knowledge* under phenomenal concepts is possible, and for all versions of the phenomenal concept story, the story about how phenomenal concepts are formed or acquired will play an integral role in this account. For it is, after all, the special features of phenomenal concepts that are being appealed to in order to explain how phenomenal knowledge differs from the sort of knowledge we might have of (what are said to be) the same states under physical concepts. The phenomenal concept strategist will, moreover, face this burden regardless of the nature of her specific account of justification; even if, for instance, she adopts a process reliabilist account of the justification of beliefs involving phenomenal concepts, she will still owe us an account of how the relevant process functions to yield the requisite *kind* of knowledge (i.e. under phenomenal rather than physical concepts). I would like to thank Alvin Goldman for some discussion of these issues.

phenomenal concept strategy can actually make sense of this kind of relationship at all. The problem is that the thoroughgoing physicalist, in giving a theory of phenomenal concepts, can only seemingly appeal to or make use of qualities and relationships that can ultimately be accounted for in physical terms: qualities like shape, size, and mass, and relationships like physical constitution, containment, and causation. But it is unclear how any of these properties and relations, or any combination thereof, could account for the special *experiential* relation (of presentation or its converse, acquaintance) that the phenomenal concept strategy requires. Given physical states possessing any combination of physical properties and relations, it is still evidently mysterious why *that* combination of properties and relations should add up to anything like *awareness* of the relevant states. And simply talking of the way that the presence or ‘presentation’ of the relevant states is related to the formation of their phenomenal concepts does not seem to help. For if this is not just a metaphor, then the ‘presence’ at issue must, for the physicalist, simply be physical presence, the actual occurrence of an (instance of a) neurological state within the brain. But as Levine (2007, p. 163) has pointed out, physical presence does not amount to cognitive presence. No matter how much reason I have to believe that a particular state is occurring inside of my brain, this does not by itself seem to give any reason to believe that I am *aware* of that state in the experiential, first-person sense.

More generally, the phenomenal concept strategy has to account for how we get to be in a special experiential relation to our phenomenal states, one that amounts to awareness of them under phenomenal (as distinct from physical) concepts. But to the extent that these theories actually explain this relation, they do so by appealing to what we might call *content* properties of these states or their tokens, properties such as that of having a certain phenomenal *content* or phenomenal ‘character’ or falling under a certain *phenomenal* type.¹¹ But on all versions of the phenomenal concept strategy, phenomenal concepts themselves inherit their content — their ability to group like individuals and distinguish them from unlike ones — only from the presence of, or direct indexical reference to, particular *token* individuals. The idea, on each version of this strategy, is that direct reference to a particular phenomenal state, or the actual inclusion of such a particular *in* the concept, is what gives the concept the content that it has. Clearly, though, if the phenomenal content is to ‘take up’ the content of a

[11] This kind of ‘character’ is, of course, to be distinguished from the ‘character’ of indexicals, as in Kaplan (1989).

particular occurrent phenomenal state in this way, the phenomenal state must *already have* the content that is to be taken up. But now the problem becomes clear: token individuals don't even *have* content except *as* tokens of the types they are tokens of. It makes no sense to treat a particular token of a red experience, for instance, *as* a red experience, *unless* we already know that we are entitled to treat it as being of the same type as other red experiences.

With respect to justification, therefore, the phenomenal concept strategy thus seems to face a dilemma. First, we may assume that the phenomenal particular tokens already have, as tokens, determinate content properties, for instance the property of being a token of a particular phenomenal quality type. If we do this, we *may* be able to explain how these content properties are *inherited* by subsequent conceptual judgments (at any rate, it seems we will have taken a necessary step toward this explanation). But to do this is already to assume that (some of) our conceptual judgments about these particulars (judgments, for instance, about what types they are tokens of) are justified, and hence it is to fail to give an explanation for this justification. Alternatively, we may refuse to treat them this way: we may take phenomenal particulars *not* to have content properties until they are *brought under* concepts, for instance in a basic phenomenal judgment. But then it will be impossible to appeal to the content properties of the token states themselves in explaining how the content of these judgments is indeed 'inherited' or 'taken up' (as the phenomenal concept strategy demands) from them. How does the mere presence of an item help to yield a concept of its type, or to justify a judgment about it? It seems clear that it does so only in that I am able to *recognize* it or its properties, to *bring it under* a concept or concepts. But if we are going to account for such justification, we must not beg the question of its content at the outset.

The phenomenal concept strategy, whether deployed by physicalists or anti-physicalists, thus appears to require a distinctive and problematic relation of acquaintance. Interestingly, in fact, recognition of the way that they are committed to some form of the doctrine of acquaintance has the effect of grouping proponents of the phenomenal concept strategy together (whether they are physicalists or anti-physicalists about the 'nature' of the relevant states), and opposing them to those (mostly physicalists) who deny the possibility of knowledge by acquaintance. The question whether there is, in fact, such a way of knowing, is plausibly a very deep issue underlying the debate about the role of consciousness in the objectively describable (physical) world. For if we do not believe in acquaintance, there is little reason to

think that consciousness poses any special problem for physicalistic explanation; and if we do believe in it, it may be relatively insignificant whether the particulars with which we can be acquainted in fact turn out to be ontologically ‘physical’ or ‘non-physical’.¹²

II

Beginning in the 1920s, discussion in the Vienna Circle took up the question of the relationship of first-person, direct empirical knowledge to the objective claims and theories of science. The result of this discussion was the debate over the form of ‘protocol sentences’ that ultimately divided Moritz Schlick from his Circle colleagues Rudolf Carnap and Otto Neurath and remained substantially unresolved when the Circle finally broke up in the 1930s. The crux of this debate was the right way to describe the form of sentences *directly* reporting the ultimate justificatory basis in first-person experience of the (objective and third-person) empirical claims of science. According to Schlick, protocol sentences, as reports of first-person experience, must always *also* have a first-person form. For instance, a typical protocol sentence might be ‘I am experiencing red here now’. The sentence makes ineliminable use of indexicals, and does not preserve its meaning when uttered by another individual or at another time and place. Neurath, by contrast, held that protocol sentences, as the ultimate justificatory *basis* for *third-person* scientific claims, should always from the outset have a third-person, objective form. For instance, a protocol reporting a basic observation might be ‘Otto observes that the pointer is at (x,y,z,t)’, where the sentence is completed with a specification of (objective) spatio-temporal coordinates. The sentence makes no use of indexical terms and makes reference to individuals only under third-person, objective terms such as might be used with the same meaning by anyone, on any occasion.

Although they disagreed about the form of the protocol sentences, both Schlick and Neurath shared with most of the rest of the Vienna Circle an understanding of the *logical form of objectivity* and objective scientific knowledge itself. According to the conception that they

[12] In the preceding, I have assumed that acquaintance is always a relation to particulars. Of course, some proponents of acquaintance, including Russell, have held that in addition to acquaintance with particulars, there is also acquaintance with universals or types. If we may indeed appeal to acquaintance with universals, then we may perhaps account for the application of phenomenal concepts as grounded in demonstratives or indexicals referring to those universals. However, the question of how we succeed in *making* such reference to universals, or actually using it to ground further judgments, remains unresolved. (It does not seem sufficient simply to assume that we can demonstratively refer to general types simply by referring to one or more particulars that instantiate them.)

shared, all *objective* claims can be put in the form of what Carnap called *structural definite descriptions* or *structure statements*. These statements include no indexical or first-personal terms and make no mention of any individual's own experiences. Moreover, their referring terms, including terms for basic objects, are defined purely relationally; on the structuralist conception, it is always possible to define these terms without the need to *indicate* or *demonstrate* any particular object. It was Carnap's hope, in particular, that all of the sentences of science could be put in the form of such descriptions, and in *The Logical Structure of the World* he outlined an ambitious programme for 'structuralizing' the claims of the various branches of science to bring them within the logically unified corpus of science (Carnap, 1928/1967, Section 16). Because structuralization allows scientific claims to be put in the form of claims about physical (spatial and temporal) locations and positions, this structuralist conception of knowledge and objectivity formed the basis for what Neurath initially termed *physicalism*, the doctrine that all objective claims can be translated into a single, logically unified language, which Neurath called the 'physical language'. This linguistic doctrine is the direct historical and conceptual ancestor of contemporary 'physicalism', although the contemporary doctrine is more often understood as an ontological or metaphysical, rather than a linguistic or semantic, one (Livingston, 2004, Chapters 2 and 5).

If physicalism, in Carnap and Neurath's sense, is true, then it ought to be possible to describe the *totality* of (objective) facts in structuralized propositions; by defining the ultimate logical structure of these propositions, it would be possible to define the logical structure of the world itself. But the structuralist conception of meaning and objectivity encountered, almost immediately, a deep and problematic foundational question. This is the question of the *relationship* between logical structures of relation and what they are structures *of*: the basic elements or entities whose relations of similarity and difference were to define the entirety of the logical structure of the world. It was the problem of these relations — and in particular, how the intrinsic nature of elements could play a role in *justifying* the structural claims expressed their relations of similarity or difference — that led directly to the protocol sentence debate.

In 1932, Moritz Schlick delivered three lectures under the collective title 'Form and Content: An Introduction to Philosophical Thinking' (Schlick, 1932/1979). In the lectures, he sought to describe the condition for any possibility of communicating thought linguistically. Such communication, he held, always amounts to the communication

of *structure*. In each case, however, in order for *understanding* actually to occur, it would be necessary for the ‘structure’ or ‘form’ of linguistic signs to be ‘filled in’ with ‘content’ drawn from individual experience (*ibid.*, p. 296). With respect to verification, Schlick held that it was the possibility of such direct ‘filling in’ that allows empirical propositions *ultimately* to be justified by experience. In actually verifying an empirical proposition, Schlick thought, we must in each case perform a subjective act of ‘comparing’ the proposition to reality by ‘filling in’ the content of the proposition from experience itself. This claim about verification led him to propose his theory of ‘affirmations’ or *Konstatierungen* as lying ultimately at the epistemic basis of empirical knowledge.

According to this theory, affirmations essentially contain *demonstrative* or *indexical* terms directing that a certain kind of ‘gesture’ or ‘pointing’ to reality actually occur. For instance, an affirmation such as ‘Here now blue is bounded by yellow’ necessarily contains demonstrative terms such as ‘here’ and ‘now’; and the ‘rules of use’ for such terms as they are used in an affirmation ‘stipulate that in making the statement in which they occur, an experience occurs’ and ‘attention is directed to something observed’ (Schlick, 1934/1959). Schlick’s theory of affirmations thus amounts to a theory of acquaintance.¹³ Moreover, like many contemporary versions of the phenomenal concept strategy, it expresses this theory as the requirement that ultimate justifiers have an indexical form.

The price of this solution, however, is the essential *incommunicability* of affirmations. For given that linguistic communication is always the transmission of structures, and the content attached to them can never be intersubjectively verified or assured, it is a direct consequence of Schlick’s view that affirmations are strictly incommunicable and therefore cannot be expressed or communicated by any terms or sentences of public language. This price was too steep for some. Neurath, in particular, attacked Schlick’s conception of the basis of empirical knowledge in a series of articles beginning in 1931 (Neurath, 1931/1983; 1932/1959; 1934/1983). Though Neurath put his objection in terms of his ‘physicalist’ view that all language must be structural language, beyond this linguistic thesis there is also a substantial epistemological problem that Neurath finds with Schlick’s account of verification in terms of ephemeral and inexpressible ‘affirmations’. The problem is this: if affirmations are indeed to serve as a

[13] It does not, however, amount to a theory of *knowledge by acquaintance* — Schlick explains clearly that acquaintance, although it is the *foundation* of knowledge, does not, for him, *amount* to knowledge by itself.

justificatory basis for knowledge, they must be able to play a role in justifying structural propositions. Now, in so far as these propositions are meaningful, they have meaning by describing the structural relations their objects bear to one another. But if this is right, then it seems evident that the justification of any structural proposition is *entirely* a matter of the relations it ascribes among its objects. Thus, the justification of any structural proposition ought to be expressible *entirely* in terms of other structural propositions. But this is just what Schlick's theory of affirmations denies. In so far as it holds that certain structural propositions, for instance public propositions describing my own states of mind, are justified in part by affirmations that are not structural, Schlick's theory holds that the justification of some structural propositions is not a matter of structure at all, but instead depends on the role of non-structural 'content' in filling them in. These propositions, on Schlick's view, are justified, at least in part, in a way that has nothing to do with their relation to other structural propositions. But *how* they can be so justified, then, seemingly remains mysterious and unexplained.

We might call this the problem of 'non-structural justifiers'; it underlies many of the problems about justification, acquaintance, and the possibility of 'private language' that subsequent philosophers have raised against empiricist theories.¹⁴ The problem of non-structural justifiers arises because it is plausible that structural propositions, if they *are* justified at all, are justified entirely by other structural propositions. Might we agree to this, holding that all justification of structural propositions is indeed structural, but that some structural propositions, for instance propositions about the *similarity* or *difference* of phenomenal experiences, are neither justified nor unjustified, but can nevertheless be known and thereby can serve as the (partial) justificatory basis for further structural propositions (we might call such propositions 'basic' structural ones)?¹⁵ This yields an account on which there are indeed no non-structural justifiers but which nevertheless might preserve much of Schlick's picture of non-structural contents as 'filling in' certain structural claims. The problem, however, is just that it is now difficult to see how we can account for the *correctness* of these 'basic' propositions about similarity and difference, if they are not themselves justified by other structural propositions. It is plausible that the correctness of judgments of

[14] Examples might be thought to include Sellars' (1955) attack on the 'Myth of the Given' and Wittgenstein's (1953/2001) celebrated 'private language argument'.

[15] This line of response was suggested to me by David Chalmers in correspondence.

similarity and difference is conceptually linked to the possibility of acts of comparison. If it is meaningful to say that two items are similar to or different from one another in a particular respect, it must be at least possible for them to be compared with one another in that respect; the proposition saying that they are similar or different will be correct if, and only if, such an (actual or possible) act would reveal them to be so.¹⁶ Thus, if ‘basic’ structural propositions are to be construed as correct and knowable (as it seems they must be if they are to be available to serve for further justification), it appears they must be construed as justified by other structural propositions after all. It thus appears incoherent to suppose there could be ‘basic’ structural justifiers that are not themselves justified or unjustified, but are nevertheless available for use in further justification.

Alternatively, it might be thought that a structural proposition about the similarity or difference of two particulars could be justified by *non-structural* propositions in the following way: I might judge of a particular that it is red and simultaneously judge of another that it is orange, and on this basis reach the (justified) structural judgment that the two particulars are different in colour.¹⁷ The first two judgments might be thought to be non-structural, in that they do not obviously directly involve or ascribe relations between particulars, but they might jointly be thought to justify the third, structural, judgment. There are two problems with this, however. First, it is not clear that the monadic judgments of colour are indeed non-structural in the relevant sense. For philosophers such as Schlick and Carnap, at any rate, judgments of even directly perceptible properties such as the colour of particulars are structural, since their possibility is dependent upon the complex total structural network of similarities and differences that defines the relations of colours to one another and the position of objects in the visual field and in space. But second, even if we can consider the first two judgments in themselves and independently of these constitutive structural patterns of similarities and differences, we must take care in specifying their actual content. If the two judgments are specifiable as judgments *about* recognizably distinct and nameable objects, e.g. ‘the triangle is red’ and ‘the square is orange’, then they are clearly *already* structural judgments in the relevant

[16] This is not to say that such an act of comparison must actually be carried out by the subject in order for the judgment of similarity or difference to *be* correct (or justified). It is just to say that the correctness of such a judgment of similarity or difference is *conceptually* dependent upon the *possibility* of such an act.

[17] This paragraph responds to an objection formulated by an anonymous referee for this journal.

sense. If, on the other hand, we suppose (in accordance with Schlick's theory) that the objects are picked out solely by private and incommunicable demonstratives or demonstrative-like devices, e.g. '*this*₁ is red' and '*this*₂ is orange' (or perhaps 'red here₁ now' and 'orange here₂ now'), then we must, at least, suppose that there are two distinct (token) demonstrative devices available and that the two devices indeed pick out distinct particulars. For otherwise there will be no way to use the two judgments in the justification of the subsequent judgment of difference. But the justification of this supposition is dependent upon, at minimum, that of a judgment that the *objects* of the two demonstrative devices are indeed (numerically) distinct. Either way, it is possible to hold that non-structural propositions (if any such there be) play a role in justifying structural ones, individually or jointly, only if there are also other structural propositions available to play a supplemental role; thus it appears, again, impossible for a structural proposition to be justified *wholly* by non-structural ones.

III

As noted, the phenomenal concept strategy comes in (ontologically) physicalist and non-physicalist versions, but as I have argued, phenomenal concept theorists of both types are committed to some version of justification by presence. The best and clearest contemporary account of such justification is given by Chalmers (2003; 2007), who is a non-physicalist proponent of the strategy. I turn to consideration of his account of the justification of phenomenal beliefs, with a view to locating the explanatory problems that still remain unsolved.

On Chalmers' view, a phenomenal belief, such as my belief that (as I might put it in public language) *I am having an experience of redness*, can be justified (in part, at least) by the occurrence of an experience with the relevant quality (in this case, phenomenal redness). Reference to such a quality is accomplished, first, through an act of demonstration, typically the fixation of one's attention upon the particular experience (and its phenomenal quality) one is having.¹⁸ This suffices to yield what Chalmers calls a 'demonstrative' phenomenal concept *E*, which functions together with the act of demonstration to pick out whatever quality the subject is currently (inwardly) demonstrating. Here, the analogy is to the linguistic functioning of indexical and demonstrative terms like 'I' and 'that'; the demonstrative concept

[18] There are questions to be asked about the intelligibility of such an act of 'inward demonstration', but I do not pursue them here.

functions only together with a demonstration to pick out the quality that is being demonstrated.

According to Chalmers, however, this demonstrative concept is distinct from what he terms a *pure phenomenal concept* of the same quality. Such a concept picks out the phenomenal character of an experience directly and non-relationally, ‘in terms of its intrinsic phenomenal nature’ (Chalmers, 2003, p. 4). We can understand the difference between indexical and pure phenomenal concepts by considering what Mary (in the famous thought experiment due to Jackson, 1982) learns when she leaves the black-and-white room and learns for the first time what it is like to see red. On Chalmers’ view, having formed the demonstrative concept *E* which allows her to refer to the quality she is now experiencing, she can now form the pure phenomenal concept *R*, and now learns the identity $E = R$. This new belief is analogous to other cases of beliefs identifying the objects of demonstratives under non-demonstrative concepts, for instance the beliefs (that I might put as) *I am N.N.*, *that object is tall*, or *the time is now 4:48*.

These concepts are, as Chalmers suggests, plausibly distinct from any *publicly expressible* concept of phenomenal qualities. Such concepts (for instance the concept ‘what members of the community normally refer to as red’) have their reference fixed relationally, for instance by reference to behaviour or external stimuli, whereas pure phenomenal concepts are to make *direct* reference to the phenomenal properties of their objects (Chalmers, 2003, p. 15). In the most typical case, the content of a pure phenomenal concept, and hence the justification of a belief I form with it, is *directly* determined by the quality of an experience I am currently having. Chalmers calls such pure phenomenal concepts ‘direct’ phenomenal concepts and suggests that in these cases we may, in fact, think of a ‘direct’ phenomenal concept as partially *constituted by the very quality* it refers to (*ibid.*, p. 12). Thus, for Chalmers it is possible for (token) instances of phenomenal properties themselves to *partially constitute* (perhaps along with other constituents) direct phenomenal concepts predicated of them. Moreover, it is possible to use these concepts to form *direct phenomenal beliefs* about the experiences in question.

When a direct phenomenal concept is formed, it is plausible, as Chalmers notes, that it will be ephemeral. Since it must include the very quality-instance to which it refers, it seems it will remain in existence only as long as that quality-instance does (i.e. only as long as the subject is experiencing the quality in question). However, according to Chalmers, it is also possible to form another kind of pure phenomenal concepts that are not direct, what he terms ‘standing’ phenomenal

concepts. Such phenomenal concepts, like direct ones, pick out the phenomenal qualities of experience directly. Nevertheless, they may exist and are available for use in forming beliefs even after the qualities to which they refer disappear.

Now, it is far from obvious how we should think of the partial constitution of concepts by property-instances, in Chalmers' sense. Since the sense of 'constitution' here is explicitly *not* physical or material, we seemingly must rely on the metaphor of the 'taking up' of property-instances within concepts to understand constitution, in the relevant sense. However, as Chalmers argues, it is plausible that in addition to this 'natural' relationship of partial constitution, there is a distinctively *epistemic* relationship (perhaps underlain by partial constitution) between phenomenal property-instances and the direct phenomenal concepts which characterize them. Chalmers in fact calls this relationship 'acquaintance'. On Chalmers' view, acquaintance is a relation that we bear *only* to phenomenal properties instantiated in our experience, and 'most directly' or primarily to instances of these properties (*ibid.*, pp. 21–2). And it is only in virtue of our bearing this relation to property-instances that we are able to form direct phenomenal concepts of them at all. The defining characteristic of acquaintance is that, as Chalmers puts it, 'whenever a subject has a phenomenal property, the subject is acquainted with that phenomenal property' (*ibid.*, p. 22; *cf.* Russell's definition, above).

Like all versions of the phenomenal concept story, Chalmers' account thus rests centrally on the possibility of justification in virtue of acquaintance. In particular, if Chalmers' view is to be successful, then it must be possible for my acquaintance with a phenomenal property-instance on a particular occasion to play a necessary role in *justifying* (perhaps along with other auxiliary and standing concepts) my judgment that, for instance (as I can express it in public-language terms) *I am having a red experience right now* or even *I was having a red experience two hours ago*.¹⁹ In terms of Chalmers' framework for distinguishing among types of phenomenal concepts, there are really two distinct questions here. The first question is: how does my merely *having* or *experiencing* a phenomenal property instance (and thus being acquainted with it) confer justification (or help to confer

[19] Additionally, it seems that these judgments must be expressible in public-language terms even though these terms must also refer to phenomenal properties. For if, as Chalmers sometimes suggests, the term I use to refer to a phenomenal quality is distinct from any public-language term, it is again obscure how justification of a proposition using phenomenal-quality terms can carry over into the justification of such public-language expressions.

justification) upon the judgment I make about it using a direct phenomenal concept? But another, related question is: how does a judgment formed using a *direct* (and hence, ephemeral) phenomenal concept confer justification (or help to confer justification) upon a judgment made using a *standing* phenomenal concept?

With respect to the first question, the underlying problem is again that phenomenal experiences are particular, datable occurrences; and so any acquaintance or acquaintance-like relation to one of them is a relation to a *particular*. Although Chalmers suggests that he thinks of acquaintance as, at least potentially, acquaintance with a *property*, he realizes that it must be, first and foremost, a relationship to an *instance* of a property.²⁰ The problem, then, is that it remains unclear how any sort of relationship to a *token* individual can justify (or even help to justify) a judgment involving *concepts*, which must be justified (if it is justified at all) as a *type*. For this, as we have seen, it is not sufficient simply to appeal to the possibility of demonstrative direct reference to the particular in question. For however successful this kind of reference might be, it cannot by itself ground either more general *knowledge* of the type of which the particular individual is an instance, or (*a fortiori*) subsequent judgments about what *belongs* to this type.

In introducing pure (direct) phenomenal concepts, Chalmers draws an analogy between the types of judgments we may make using them and other beliefs ‘in which the object of a demonstrative is independently characterized’. Since it is, on Chalmers’ account, only by an act of (or akin to) demonstration that we first secure reference to a phenomenal experience at all, it seems evident that the most basic judgments using a pure phenomenal concept must take the form of an identification of the object of such a concept with the object of a demonstrative term, for instance $E = R$ (where E is a demonstrative and R is a pure phenomenal concept). He says that such identities are just ‘as cognitively significant’ as other judgments that identify or attribute a property to something picked out by a demonstrative, for instance the judgment (that I might express by saying) *that object is tall* or (we may suppose) *now is 3:15*.

But actually it is far from obvious that the identity $E = R$ can take this kind of (cognitively significant) form. For in these cases of

[20] ‘Acquaintance can be regarded as a basic sort of epistemic relation between a subject and a property. Most fundamentally, it might be seen as a relation between a subject and an *instance* of a property. I am most directly acquainted with *this instance* of phenomenal greenness. This acquaintance with an instance can then be seen to confer a derivative relation to the property itself’ (Chalmers, 2003, p. 22). Needless to say, whether acquaintance with an instance indeed does suffice to give us a relation to ‘the property itself’ is just what is at issue here.

informative predication of an object picked out by demonstrative reference, it is presupposed that there are *independently available* non-demonstrative concepts (for instance *tallness*) that can be used to predicate of those objects the properties thereby ascribed to them. The ascription itself presupposes the ability to use these concepts independently, to predicate them of other objects, etc. But in the phenomenal concept case, where the concept is supposed to be formed *de novo*, it is far from obvious that we have this ability, or how we are to gain it if we do not have it. This is, again, just the same problem I have repeatedly discussed: concept possession plausibly involves the ability to identify and re-identify particulars of the same type; but *reference* to an individual by itself does nothing to account for this ability. If, however, we cannot assume that demonstrative reference to an individual suffices to yield the ability to form a non-demonstrative ‘type concept’ whose possession itself implies the ability to identify and re-identify members of the type, then there is no reason to suppose the identities we are in a position to assert after forming such a concept are indeed cognitively significant at all. Rather than allowing us to *independently characterize* the object of a demonstrative, they would then seem capable, at best, only of allowing us to characterize the object demonstratively twice over. Rather than having the form, for instance, ‘now is 3:15’ or ‘that object is tall’, they would have a form such as ‘now is the current time’ or ‘*that object* [demonstrating a particular object] is as tall as *that object* [demonstrating the same object again]’ (cf. Wittgenstein, 1953/2001, para. 279). But if this is their form, it is clear that they can play no substantial role in the justification of further, non-demonstrative judgments involving phenomenal (or any other type of) concepts.

As Chalmers in fact suggests, the general problem arises again with respect to what he terms *standing* phenomenal concepts. Since direct phenomenal concepts are ephemeral, it is unclear how the justification of their application (which, on Chalmers’ account, involves the presence of phenomenal particulars and survives only as long as they are present) can carry over to the justification of the application of standing phenomenal concepts descending from them, which are not ephemeral in this way. As Chalmers says, in order to account for this, we need an account of how a judgment using *standing* phenomenal concepts can ‘inherit’ its justification from a judgment involving only direct phenomenal concepts. Though he admits that he does not have a general account of the inheritance of justification by tokens (or ‘physical vehicles’) of phenomenal concepts (indeed, as he says, nobody does), Chalmers suggests that we might be able to solve the problem

simply by combining sameness of content with an appropriate causal relationship. More generally, he says, we need ‘a “typing” of concepts and beliefs that is more fine-grained than a mere typing by content, but less fine-grained than a typing by numerical identity of tokens’ (Chalmers, 2003, pp. 29–30).

However, if what is needed is not simply to *describe* but rather to *explain* the inheritance of content, it is clear that this will not do. For if sameness of content between two phenomenal concept-tokens, A and B, is supposed to be (so much as) *necessary* in order for B to ‘inherit’ justificatory properties from A (i.e. for a judgment involving B to inherit justificatory properties from a judgment involving A), then in order to make sense of the ‘inheritance’ relation we need an understanding of how A and B can *share* the same content. But when A is a token of a direct phenomenal concept, and B is a token of a standing phenomenal concept, it is not at all clear that we have this understanding. For the content of A is (or at least is largely constituted by) a *particular* phenomenal experience; whereas the content of B is not. In particular, it is unclear how the content of a direct phenomenal concept (which is, after all, ephemeral and can only be applied for a limited time, and hence to a limited range of objects (perhaps only one)) can be ‘the same’ as that of a standing phenomenal concept (which is enduring and can be applied to a potentially unlimited number of objects, or at least to the same object whenever it occurs). Similarly, it is puzzling how a judgment that does not employ a standing phenomenal concept (but only a direct one) can help to support a judgment that does employ a standing phenomenal concept, since it is clear there cannot be a deductive relationship between a judgment of the first type and a judgment of the second, and it is not obvious what other form such a justificatory relationship could take.²¹

IV

In this paper, I have not attempted to solve the problem of acquaintance, but have simply tried to show how it arises for both physicalist and non-physicalist proponents of the phenomenal concept strategy alike. This appears to be a deep problem, one which will probably remain with us for some time. For as I have repeatedly emphasized, it is extremely *prima facie* plausible that there is an acquaintance-like relation that we can bear to our own experiences in virtue of which we can have knowledge of (i.e. justified true beliefs about) their intrinsic

[21] I am indebted to an anonymous referee for this journal for the formulation of the precise point in this sentence.

character. But it seems there is, so far at least, no good answer to the question of how such a relation can indeed play a role in justification.

Although it is very plausible that there are non-structural justifiers, the prospects for integrating them into an otherwise structuralist account of justification in a way that is both plausible and genuinely explanatory thus seem to be quite dim. But it seems we must give, at least in large part, a structuralist account of justification, since at least *most* justification, and the only kind of justification we now understand, is structural. The issue of what it would take to give an account that satisfies all of the natural explanatory demands here runs deep. Since the underlying issue is not really one of different types of flavours or justification at all, but indeed of what justification *is*, it is not clear that we can solve it without considering more deeply such matters as the nature of generality, the relationship of individuals to whatever types they ‘fall under’, and what is involved in the predication of concepts of individuals itself. At the same time, the problem is closely connected to the problem of how it is possible for there to be a distinction between the ‘objective’ and the ‘subjective’ at all: how, in other words, certain organisms come to be able to have a perspective or a first-person point of view, how they come to be able to *use* indexical terms to refer to themselves and to their current location in space and time.²²

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