

Introspection and Revelation

Michelle Liu

Abstract

According to some formulations of the thesis of revelation, knowledge about the essences of phenomenal properties is available through introspection. But this claim may seem doubtful given relevant limits of introspection. In a number of problematic cases, introspection is not reliable at revealing the metaphysical natures of phenomenal properties. This chapter articulates the worry about revelation arising from these problematic cases of introspective judgements and sketches responses to address it. To respond to the objection, proponents of revelation can draw on existing distinctions between different kinds of introspection which differ in their reliability – first, between thing-introspection and fact-introspection; and second, between simple introspection and complex introspection. The chapter argues that while the kinds of introspective judgements in the problematic cases involve the unreliable forms of introspection, this is not the case with respect to the introspective knowledge or judgements involved in revelation, or at least certain versions of it.

Keywords

revelation, introspective judgement, introspective limitation, cognitive phenomenology, phenomenal character of perceptual experience, thing-introspection, fact-introspection, simple introspection, complex introspection

1. Introduction

Suppose you are tasting durian. If you are partial to the fruit, like me, then you are likely to describe the taste as extremely rich and flavoursome, worthy of the name “King of Fruits” – it is sweet, creamy, overripe, not totally unlike banana, mango, jackfruit and whipped cream, with a hint of caramel and even garlic. But such words are probably inadequate at capturing your experience of the taste. Taking an inward stance on your gustatory experience and pondering on how you might describe the experience, maybe you find it so unique – unlike anything else you have experienced before – that all you want to say is that it is like “this”, pointing inwardly to the experience itself. Regardless of what words you might use, it seems intuitive to say that as you *introspect* your occurrent experience of tasting durian, you *know* full well that your experience has a certain what-it-is-likeness or phenomenal character. The thesis of revelation takes this a step further, and makes the claim that your knowledge here, which is made available through introspection, reveals the *essence* of the experience of tasting durian.

Revelation is often thought of as an *intuitive* claim such that it is built into our folk psychology (Lewis 1995; McLaughlin 2003; Braddon-Mitchell 2007; Hill 2014; Chalmers 2018; Papineau 2020; Liu 2020, 2021). For instance, I have argued that the hypothesis that revelation is part of our implicit conception of experience best explains the oddness in the following kind of sentences (Liu 2021):

- (1) #I know what an itch feels like, but I don't know what the feeling of an itch really is.
- (2) #You have all experienced toothaches, but do you know what the feeling of a toothache really is?

At the same time, revelation is a claim that is thought to be in tension with *physicalism*, hence providing an intuitive challenge against the latter (for discussions on the relationship between revelation and different versions of physicalism, see Liu 2019, 2024; see also Lewis 1995; Nida-Rümelin 2007; Goff 2015, 2017). To quote Goff's (2017, 125) pithy characterisation of the argument against identity physicalism posed by revelation:

[W]e know what pain is through feeling pain, and hence if pain were c-fibers firing, we'd know about it. But we don't, so it isn't.

Whether revelation is intuitive and whether it is incompatible with physicalism depend on how the thesis is formulated. In the literature, there have been many attempts at formulating revelation, and it is common to explicitly formulate the thesis, though it is not necessary to do so, with respect to the notion of *introspection*. The primary goal of this paper is to draw on recent discussions about the limitations of introspection to raise a worry against revelation, and in turn consider responses that a proponent of revelation might appeal to in warding off such a worry. In doing so, the plausibility of different versions of revelation will be assessed and their relations to introspection clarified.

2. Revelation

Consider David Chalmers' (2016, 190) formulation of revelation:

Revelation: The nature of consciousness is revealed to us in introspection.

Introspection is the method by which one can, in a way that no one else can, directly acquire knowledge about one's mental states, including current or very recently past conscious states. Revelation makes the claim that the *nature of consciousness* – more precisely, *knowledge* about it – is available through this distinctive first-person method. Although the notion of knowledge is not explicitly mentioned in Chalmers' formulation above, it is reasonable to think that his version of revelation commits to the idea that through introspection, one can achieve certain *knowledge* that is "revelatory" about the nature of consciousness. How these different notions – i.e. *consciousness*, *nature*, and *knowledge* – are understood requires unpacking and can give rise to different versions of revelation.

First, consider the notion of *consciousness*. The relevant sense of consciousness is understood to be *phenomenal consciousness*. This notion of consciousness can be easily

grasped by way of examples. We know what it is like to taste different fruits and see different colours. We know what a nagging itch feels like and what roasted coffee beans smell like. These are conscious states with distinctive *phenomenal properties* attached to them. Indeed, revelation is predominantly formulated explicitly as a claim about the natures of phenomenal properties (e.g. Lewis 1995; Goff 2015; Liu 2019, 2020, 2021, 2024; Majeed 2017; Trogon 2017; Papineau 2020; Roelofs 2020).

Next, consider the notion of *nature*. In the discussion on revelation, the term “nature” is used interchangeably with the term “essence”. There are different ways to unpack the notion of essence. In the canonical text on revelation, David Lewis (1995, 42) defines revelation or what he calls “the Identification Thesis”, using a modal account of essence, according to which the essence of a phenomenal property Q is such that “necessarily, Q has it and nothing else does”. There is the familiar worry that not all necessary and sufficient properties of a thing belong to the essence of that thing (Fine 1994). For instance, necessarily, Aristotle has the property of belonging to the singleton set {Aristotle} that has Aristotle as its only member and no one else has this property. But intuitively this property is not part of the essence of Aristotle. Instead of the modal account, one might opt for a real definitional account of essence, on which “the notion of definition has application to both words and objects” (Fine 1994, 2; Goff 2015), and the real definition of a thing is what makes something the thing it is, i.e. that which belongs to the thing’s most core respects (Fine 1995, 276; Dasgupta 2014, 589).

Consider also the notion of *knowledge*, which is implicit in Chalmers’ formulation of revelation above. It is important to clarify the relevant kind of knowledge at issue, since the worries raised against revelation in the next section directly relate to this component of the thesis.

One option is to construe the knowledge at issue as a kind of knowledge *de dicto* or propositional knowledge about the essences of phenomenal properties (see Lewis 1995). Seen this way, questions about what the propositional structure or content that this knowledge takes naturally arise. Consider introspecting an occurrent experience with phenomenal property Q whose essence is X. One form this propositional knowledge might take, following Lewis (1995), is “Q is X” where the predicate “X” captures – describes accurately – Q’s essence (see also Liu 2019, 2024). Note that to know *de dicto* the essence of a phenomenal property through introspection, in this case, does not require one to possess or deploy the concept ESSENCE. One might further note that it may be hard to put into words the precise essence of Q, as the phenomenal characters of conscious experiences often have a certain indescribable character and may only be captured by a demonstrative (Camp 2006; Liu 2019). Consider the experience of tasting durian again. In thinking that the experience is like “this”, the demonstrative seems to be a placeholder for the rich understanding of the phenomenal character of experience that one has but is unable to put into words. So, the proposition at issue may be “Q is *this*”, where “this” is supposed to be a placeholder for the predicate “X”. But to have this kind of propositional knowledge, one still needs to possess the specific phenomenal concept of Q. An even less demanding version is to say that in knowing the essence of Q, one deploys a generic concept FEELING or EXPERIENCE embedded

in the complex concept THE FEELING/EXPERIENCE I HAVE NOW and the relevant proposition is “The feeling/experience I have now is this”. In this case, the subject does not have to deploy the phenomenal concept Q. So, construed as propositional knowledge about the essences of phenomenal properties, there are at least three plausible candidates for the proposition at issue:

(P1) Q is X (where “X” captures the essence of Q).

(P2) Q is *this* (where “this” is a placeholder for “X”).

(P3) The feeling/experience I have now is *this* (where “this” is a placeholder for “X”).

As an illustration, consider how (P1)-(P3) might look like with respect to a current experience of tasting durian:

(P1’) The taste of durian is sweet, creamy, overripe, etc.

(P2’) The taste of durian is *this*.

(P3’) The experience I have now is *this*.

In the above, the phrase “the taste of durian” is used to pick out the phenomenal property of tasting durian.

Alternatively, one might question whether the knowledge at issue has to be propositional in form at all. One possibility is that this knowledge is a kind of *sui generis* acquaintance knowledge which is irreducible to propositional knowledge but can nevertheless give rise to the latter (Giustina 2022). On this picture, introspection affords us a special kind of knowledge *de re*, where this knowledge that is “revelatory” about the essence of Q is *nonconceptual*, as it does not require the knower to possess the relevant phenomenal concept Q, the generic concept FEELING or EXPERIENCE, or the demonstrative concept THIS.

Finally, it is worth considering the scope of the revelation claim. Chalmers’ formulation of revelation need not be understood as committing to the strong view that *necessarily*, the essence of a phenomenal property is revealed in introspection. One might treat it in a similar way to certain generic claims (e.g. “ducks lay eggs”, “tigers have stripes”) and understand it to be making the claim that *often* or *typically*, the essences of phenomenal properties are revealed through introspection.

To recap, revelation is often understood as a claim about introspection, that *knowledge* about the *essences* of *phenomenal properties* is available through introspection. The notion of essence is understood according to the definitional account, i.e. what a thing is in its most core respects. Given a phenomenal property Q whose essence is X, the relevant kind of introspective knowledge can be construed as either *propositional knowledge* about the essence of Q or *acquaintance knowledge* of Q that gives rise to the latter kind of propositional knowledge.

3. Revelation and the Limits of Introspection

Chalmers' formulation of revelation above does not presuppose a specific theory of the metaphysical structure of introspection. Indeed, one might think that revelation can in principle be compatible with different theories of introspection. Nevertheless, it fits better with some than others. Consider the inner sense theory of introspection or what Sydney Shoemaker (1994) calls "the broad perceptual model" (e.g. Armstrong 1968), on which there is a similarity between introspection and perception in the sense that the relationship between introspective states and what is introspected can be thought of as *causal* and *independent*, just like the relationship between perceptual states and what is perceived. Insofar as the natures of perceived external objects and their properties are not generally thought to be revealed through perception, where perception is understood in causal, representational terms, one would expect, on this picture of introspection and given the relevant similarity to perception, that the natures of introspected conscious states are not revealed through introspection.

Revelation fits well with the acquaintance theory of introspection, the main alternative to the inner sense theory. On the acquaintance theory, introspection of current conscious states is understood in terms of the notion of acquaintance rather than representation, and introspective states are not, *contra* the inner sense theory, independent from or caused by the introspected states. Instead, the former are constituted by the latter (Gertler 2001; Coleman 2019; Giustina 2021; see also Duncan, this volume). Depending on how the notion of acquaintance is understood, the acquaintance theory of introspection on its own does not entail revelation. In general, being acquainted with something does not necessarily afford one knowledge of the nature or essence of that thing. For instance, one might have knowledge by acquaintance of water without knowing the essence of water. Nevertheless, an acquaintance theorist can adopt a notion of acquaintance that is revelation-entailing, where the essence of the introspected state is revealed in the introspective state. For instance, some naïve realists about perception who think we are acquainted with colour seem to commit to the idea that the natures of colours are transparent to us (Campbell 1993, 258). One can make a similar move with respect to introspective acquaintance. Indeed, such a strong notion of introspective acquaintance – where acquaintance affords one knowledge of the nature of what it is acquainted – has been adopted by proponents of revelation (Goff 2015).

Now, regardless of which theory of introspection to adopt, proponents of revelation should agree that introspection is an information-delivering system, which has operational constraints such that under some conditions, introspective judgements are not reliable (Schwitzgebel 2008; Bayne and Spener 2011, 2015; Wu 2023a, 2023b). One might raise the worry that knowledge about the essences of phenomenal properties – posited by the thesis of revelation – falls outside such constraints. I will elaborate the concern in the rest of this section.

Concerning current or recently passed conscious states, at least two kinds of introspective reports are unreliable. The first concern judgements about the instantiations of certain phenomenal properties. Consider the perceptual experience of seeing flowers.

Introspection is reliable in generating reports about certain course-grained phenomenal properties of the experience, in the form of “I see flowers” or “I seem to see flowers”. But it does not seem reliable with respect to some fine-grained phenomenal properties of the experience (Schwitzgebel 2008). Assuming that there is a phenomenal difference between having a perceptual experience of seeing 20 flowers (E_{20}) and that of seeing 21 flowers (E_{21}), suppose E_{20} has the phenomenal property Q_{20} and E_{21} has the phenomenal property Q_{21} . In having one of the experiences, subjects are unlikely to have reliable true beliefs through introspection alone – without counting – about which phenomenal property – Q_{20} or Q_{21} – their experience has. Introspective reports can easily be inaccurate in this kind of case.¹

Introspection also seems to be limited with respect to delivering reports about certain features of phenomenal properties that pertain to their metaphysical nature. Two problematic cases in philosophy of mind are worth noting here. The first concerns whether conscious thoughts have a *sui generis* phenomenology that is irreducible to sensory phenomenology (e.g. Horgan and Tienson 2002; Wilson 2003; Bayne and Montague 2011). The second concerns whether the phenomenal character of perceptual experience is exhausted by its representational properties, i.e. properties of representing certain intentional contents (e.g. Harman 1990; Tye 1992; Levine 1995). It has been argued that philosophers involved in these two debates have directly appealed to introspection in their arguments and they disagree at the level of introspection (Bayne and Spener 2011; Bayne and Montague 2011; Spener 2011). Such introspective disagreements should motivate scepticism towards the trustworthiness of introspection in these cases (Bayne and Spener 2010). Indeed, knowledge concerning the metaphysical nature of conscious experience, e.g. whether the phenomenal properties of conscious thinking are *sui generis*, whether the phenomenal properties of perceptual experiences have aspects that are non-representational, is likely to fall outside the proper functioning of introspection. If introspection revealed the metaphysical natures of these phenomenal properties, then we would expect theorists who are equally competent introspectors to converge on default, starting positions in these debates, but this is not the case.

The first type of introspective limitation does not amount to a serious concern for proponents of revelation. If the knowledge at issue takes the propositional form “Q is X” (where the predicate “X” captures the essence of Q) or “Q is this” (where “this” is a placeholder for “X”), then in order to possess such knowledge, one needs first to identify Q or form the belief that Q is instantiated. But given the first type of introspective limitation, introspection does not reveal the instantiations of certain phenomenal properties. So, revelation cannot be held as a universal claim with respect to *all* phenomenal properties. Indeed, this is something that proponents of revelation need to commit to, as we already saw towards the end of section 2. They can concede to the first kind of introspective limitation and opt for a weaker claim that *there are at least some (perhaps many) cases* in which such knowledge about the essences of phenomenal properties is available through

¹ One can also extend the worry to peripheral phenomenal properties of experience that are not within the focus of attention (Schwitzgebel 2011).

introspection. These are cases where subjects have correctly identified the relevant phenomenal properties. Indeed, to motivate the thesis of revelation, proponents of revelation usually appeal to clear cases where there is no doubt with respect to the subject's knowledge concerning the instantiation of the phenomenal property at issue, e.g. the feeling of pain (Goff 2015), the experience of seeing a cloudless blue sky (Liu 2021). A restricted version of revelation can serve just the same role as a starting point in an argument against physicalism. All the argument requires is a single instance where introspection reveals the essence of a phenomenal property, and reveals that property to be other than neurophysiological (Goff 2017, 125).

In contrast, the second type of introspective limitation presents a bigger problem for the thesis of revelation. The knowledge involved in revelation seems to resemble the two problematic cases concerning the phenomenology of conscious thought and perceptual experience. Revelation, as we saw, is not the claim that one is in a position to know that a certain phenomenal property Q is *instantiated* through introspection. Rather, it is the claim that one is in a position to know the *essence* of Q through introspection, at least in many good cases. But if introspection does not reveal the metaphysical natures of the phenomenal properties of having conscious thoughts or having perceptual experiences, why think it can reveal the essence of any phenomenal property? If the former cases fall outside the proper functioning of introspection, then one might argue that there is no good reason to think that the latter case falls within it.

The objection here is that the alleged knowledge involved in revelation, as in the aforementioned problematic cases, concerns the fundamental characters of phenomenal properties, i.e. their metaphysics. But since introspection falls short in the problematic cases, it seems doubtful that it is proficient in delivering reliable verdicts or indeed knowledge about the metaphysics of phenomenal properties in general, including what a phenomenal property is in its most core respects as the thesis of revelation claims. The burden is on proponents of revelation to provide any independent reason for thinking that introspection is reliable with respect to the essence of a phenomenal property.

The objection thus can be formulated in the following way:

- (1) Introspection is not reliable in a number of cases at revealing the metaphysical natures of phenomenal properties.
- (2) Introspection is not reliable at revealing the metaphysical natures of phenomenal properties.
- (3) Revelation claims that introspection reveals the metaphysical natures of phenomenal properties, i.e. their essences.
- (4) Revelation is likely to be false.

Although this objection, to my knowledge, has not been explicitly formulated in the literature, it has an intuitive force. (1) is supported by aforementioned problematic cases concerning the phenomenology of conscious thought and that of perceptual experience. (2) follows from (1) as an inductive inference. (3) seems intuitive. After all, revelation claims

that introspection reveals the essences of phenomenal properties. Given (2) and (3), one would naturally conclude (4). In the next section, I will explore ways in which proponents of revelation can respond to this objection.

4. Two Distinctions on Introspection

In this section, I shall draw on two existing distinctions pertaining to introspection in the literature: (a) thing-introspection versus fact-introspection (Giustina and Kriegel 2017); and (b) simple introspection versus complex introspection (Wu 2023a). In each case, while one type of introspection is reliable, the other can generate unreliable introspective reports. I shall argue that while the kind of introspective judgements in the problematic cases involve the unreliable kinds of introspection, this is not the case with respect to introspective knowledge or judgements involved in revelation, or at least certain versions of it. Such considerations will provide a positive response to the above argument and for thinking that the worry raised with respect to introspective reliability in the problematic cases need not extend to the alleged knowledge presupposed by the thesis of revelation.

4.1. THING-INTROSPECTION VS. FACT-INTROSPECTION

Drawing on Fred Dretske's (1993) distinction in the case of perception between thing-awareness (e.g. "You see beautiful flowers") and fact-awareness (e.g. "You see that the flowers are beautiful"), Anna Giustina and Uriah Kriegel (2017) make a similar distinction between thing-introspection and fact-introspection. Consider the following two introspective reports (Giustina and Kriegel 2017, 148):

- (1) You introspect your hunger.
- (2) You introspect that you are hungry.

(1) is naturally understood as a report of thing-introspection. (2) is naturally understood as a report of fact-introspection. The two kinds of introspection are distinguished along three dimensions. First, fact-introspection is a propositional attitude, which consists of a relation between the introspector and a proposition (e.g. that you are hungry); whereas thing-introspection is an objectual attitude, which consists of a relation between the introspector and an experience (e.g. hunger). Second and perhaps most importantly, while fact-introspection requires the deployment of discriminating concepts, thing-introspection does not. One can thing-introspect one's hunger without possessing the specific concept HUNGER or having the indexical thought that "I am hungry".² Third, while fact-introspection is

² In other places, Giustina and Kriegel (2022; Giustina 2021) also draw a distinction between primitive introspection and reflective introspection. In contrast to reflective introspection, primitive introspection is nonconceptual – it "does not involve recognizing and classifying the introspected phenomenal state as an instance of any experience type" (Giustina 2021: 426). One might worry, as Giustina and Kriegel (2017: 150) themselves are aware, that thing-introspection involves at least the application of some generic concept, e.g. THIS FEELING. But even in this case, Giustina and Kriegel (2017: 150) maintain that a broadly construed thing-introspection versus fact-

expressible in public language, thing-introspection may not be. The latter is only expressible when relevant concepts are deployed and suitable fact-introspection is made available.

Using the distinction between thing-introspection and fact-introspection, Giustina and Kriegel contend that considerations against the reliability of introspection apply only to cases of fact-introspection rather than thing-introspection. Fact-introspection, as we saw, involves the deployment of discriminating concepts, and hence classification or categorisation in the deployment of such concepts. Regarding errors or uncertainty in introspective judgements, Giustina and Kriegel argue that such failures in introspection are traceable to the applications of concepts, which are involved in fact-introspection and are beyond what is immediately given in introspection in the case of thing-introspection. Taking Giustina and Kriegel's proposal further, one might conjecture that failures in concept application can have multiple sources, including a lack of competency in relevant concept mastery, and influences in one's background beliefs and expectations (see Bayne and Spener 2011; Wu 2023a, 2023b). Such factors can lead to errors or uncertainty in classification. So, on Giustina and Kriegel's proposal, while fact-introspection may go awry, there is no good reason to think thing-introspection is unreliable. Indeed, they (2017, 153-4) challenge their opponents to come up with a single counterexample to their proposed explanation that casts doubt on the reliability of thing-introspection.³

Given the distinction between thing-introspection and fact-introspection and their respective reliability, let's turn to our worry against revelation. In particular, we will ask: Which kind of introspection is involved in the problematic cases where introspection falls short, and which kind is involved in the alleged knowledge in the thesis of revelation?

It is clear that introspective judgements in the aforementioned problematic cases involve fact-introspection and the application of concepts. Consider a conscious state of thinking that "Melbourne has the best food in the world". Suppose that the conscious thought has the phenomenal property C. The introspective judgement, say, "C is sensory", involves, crucially, the deployment of the concept SENSORY. Forming such an introspective judgement is demanding. It requires one to categorise and locate a particular phenomenal property using a particular taxonomy that distinguishes sensory phenomenology from non-sensory phenomenology, to master the taxonomic system at issue, to know how various categories of phenomenal property differ from one another, and so on. Errors and uncertainty can easily occur in the process of determining whether C is in fact sensory. For

introspection distinction can still be drawn between the kind of introspection "that involves *only* the application of such maximally generic concepts", and the kind "that also involves the application of more refined, more discriminating concepts".

³ Giustina and Kriegel (2017) further argue that thing-introspection is not only highly reliable but even infallible given a certain version of the self-representational framework of phenomenal consciousness.

instance, how one applies the concept might be influenced by one's prior expectations (see Bayne and Spener 2011; more on this in section 4.2).

Similar considerations apply to introspective judgements concerning the metaphysical structure of the phenomenal character of perceptual experience. To form an introspective judgement about whether such phenomenal character is purely representational, one needs to at least master and deploy the technical concept PURELY REPRESENTATIONAL, and introspectively examine a vast number of token perceptual experiences. Again, such a process is prone to error and bias, resulting in the inaccuracy of the introspective judgement itself. So, given Giustina and Kriegel's distinction between fact-introspection and thing-introspection and their diagnosis of introspective unreliability, it is not surprising that introspection, that is, fact-introspection, may not reveal whether the phenomenology of conscious thoughts is sensory, whether the phenomenology of perceptual experiences is purely representational, and other related features of the phenomenology.

Now consider revelation, according to which knowledge about the essence of a phenomenal property Q is often available through the act of introspecting Q. As we saw in section 2, there can be different versions of revelation depending on how this knowledge is understood. One might construe the knowledge at issue as a kind of *sui generis* non-conceptual acquaintance knowledge that is distinct from propositional knowledge. If so, then revelation is a thesis about thing-introspection, not fact-introspection. Introspective limitation in the problematic cases then does not extend to the case of revelation thus construed. Recall the argument against revelation from introspective unreliability:

- (1) Introspection is not reliable in a number of cases at revealing the metaphysical natures of phenomenal properties.
- (2) Introspection is not reliable at revealing the metaphysical natures of phenomenal properties.
- (3) Revelation claims that introspection reveals the metaphysical natures of phenomenal properties, i.e. their essences.
- (4) Revelation is likely to be false.

Given the above clarification, "introspection" is understood to mean "fact-introspection" in (1) and (2). In contrast, "introspection" is understood to mean "thing-introspection" in (3). The argument thus does not succeed because it involves an equivocation.

Alternatively, one might take the knowledge involved in revelation to be propositional and reject the inference of (2) from (1) where "introspection" is understood to mean "fact-introspection". In section 1, we saw three different ways to spell out the proposition at issue:

- (P1) Q is X (where "X" captures the essence of Q).
- (P2) Q is *this* (where "this" is a placeholder for "X").
- (P3) The feeling/experience I have now is *this* (where "this" is a placeholder for "X").

Although the three kinds of introspective judgements above involve the applications of discriminating concepts and thus fact-introspection, one might contend that apart from (P1), the other two introspective judgements, i.e. (P2) and (P3), do not face the kind of introspective errors in the problematic cases. This is because having the relevant propositional knowledge does not require one to deploy tricky, specific or technical concepts, provided that one is in a good context where one has already correctly deployed the phenomenal concept Q in the case of (P2), or the concept THE FEELING I HAVE NOW in the case of (P3). In such cases, having propositional knowledge about the essence of Q only requires one to apply the demonstrative concept THIS, which refers to the what-it-is-likeness of Q that may be difficult or impossible to unpack in further words.⁴ No further concepts are needed. Crucially, revelation does not entail that in knowing the essence of a phenomenal property through introspection, one forms an explicit belief or judgement about what the property's *essence* is. The latter would require the introspector to apply the concept ESSENCE, and a proponent of revelation need not commit to that. Knowing (P2) and (P3) is thus much less demanding, and hence significantly less prone to errors or bias, than knowing, say, whether a phenomenal property belongs to the category of sensory phenomenology or whether it has aspects that are non-representational. (One can nevertheless maintain that what one knows in knowing the essence of phenomenal property Q by introspecting Q, provides the resources to achieve the latter types of knowledge. But this goes beyond thing-introspection of Q, applying the concept of Q, and the demonstrative concept that refers to the what-it-is-likeness of Q.) So, introspective limitations in these problematic cases then do not extend to the case of revelation if formulated as involving propositional knowledge of the form (P2) or (P3). Premise (2) can be blocked even if "introspection" is understood to mean "fact-introspection". Indeed, while some instances of fact-introspection are unreliable, others are not. To that end, we will turn to another distinction regarding introspection.

4.2. SIMPLE INTROSPECTION VS. COMPLEX INTROSPECTION

In addition to the distinction between thing-introspection and fact-introspection, in this subsection we will see another useful distinction on introspection – i.e. between simple introspection and complex introspection (Wu 2023a) – that can help address the worry against revelation from the limits of introspection. The distinction here turns on different psychological mechanisms underpinning introspective judgements or reports. So, the distinction here only concerns what Giustina and Kriegel call "fact-introspection". The strategy is similar to before: while introspective judgements in the problematic cases pertain to the kind of introspection that can be unreliable (i.e. complex introspection), introspective knowledge or judgements in the case of revelation pertain to the kind of introspection that is more likely to be reliable (i.e. simple introspection).

⁴ In contrast, propositional knowledge (P1) requires deploying relevant concepts needed to spell out "X". As a result, misapplications of concepts can arise.

Consider cases of intentional introspection, where the subject forms an introspective judgement about their experience upon an intention to introspect it (Wu 2023a, 212). In such cases, it is natural to draw a close connection between *introspection* and *attention*, where introspection necessarily involves attention (e.g. Gertler 2012; Giustina 2021; Wu 2023a). In introspecting a conscious experience, one *eo ipso* attends to the experience, and subsequently gains knowledge about one's occurrent or recently past conscious states. Drawing on insights from Gareth Evans (1982), Wayne Wu (2023a, 214) proposes to understand *introspective attention* as *perceptual attention* such that "the same form of attention can guide both perceptual and introspective report". Evans's proposal is that in introspecting one's perceptual experiences, one deploys the same capacities utilised in forming perceptual judgements about the world, including perceptual attention; in addition, one deploys the operator "It seems to me as though..." to form the corresponding introspective judgement (Evans 198, 227-8). In the perceptual case, perceptual attention selects perceptual feature T (e.g. a tree) that informs the application of corresponding recognitional concept T to generate the perceptual report "There is T". Focusing on the introspective report "I see T", Wu contends that in introspecting the perceptual experience of T, the agent redeploys the same capacities deployed in the case of the perceptual judgement, and in addition, deploys the concept SEE.

Given this way of understanding the mechanisms underlying mundane introspective reports of perceptual experiences, one can see that the reliability of such introspective judgements depends on the reliability of the capacities deployed in the corresponding perceptual judgements, crucially the function of perceptual attention.⁵ In other words, if the agent is in a context where the perceptual judgement "There is T" is accurate, then the introspective judgement "I see T" is also likely to be accurate in that context (Wu 2023a, 216). Wu (2023a, 215) calls this mundane, perception-focused type of introspection *simple introspection*, "where the perceptual experience to be introspectively assessed is the sole source of information for the judgment".

Simple introspection is contrasted with complex introspection. Unlike simple introspection, complex introspection draws on resources beyond perceptual attention, including cognitive resources, to generate corresponding introspective reports. Detection of foveal blur, as Wu explains (2023a), provides a good example of complex introspection. In an optometric setting, subjects are asked to compare two lenses placed sequentially in front of the subjects' eyes and judge which lens is clear and, correlatively, which lens is blurry. Introspective judgements in such a case are relational, comparing one perceptual experience with another (e.g. "This lens is *blurrier than* the last"). In forming such a judgement, as Wu (see 2023b, 229-30) explains, one engages two channels: perceptual attention to the object of a current visual experience under one lens (hence engaging with simple introspection), and cognitive attention to the memory representation of a recently past visual experience of the object under a different lens. Given that such introspective

⁵ This way of thinking about introspective reports does not presuppose that introspective reports in cases of hallucinations are reliable. For more discussion on this, see Wu 2023a.

reports are informed by different sources, the underlying introspection is not simple but complex. The reliability of introspective judgements in this case depends on the functions of both perceptual and cognitive attention, as well as the subject's capacity in applying the relevant concepts (e.g. BLURRY).

While introspective reports of foveal blur in clinical settings are usually reliable, introspective reports based on complex introspection can easily be inaccurate in other contexts (e.g. peripheral blur) (see Wu 2023a). This is because such reports are informed by multiple resources, where errors and biases are likely to creep in. Factors affecting the accuracy of such introspective reports may be tied to perceptual attention, cognitive attention, and conceptual capacity (Wu 2023a, 223; more on this below). Since complex introspection is subject to multiple sources of influences, it is likely to be less reliable than simple introspection which draws only on perceptual resources to inform introspective judgements.

Given the distinction between simple introspection and complex introspection and their respective reliability, let's turn to the worry against revelation. Again, we will be asking: Which kind of introspection is involved in the problematic cases where introspection falls short, and which kind is involved in the thesis of revelation?

Introspective judgements in the problematic cases seem to involve complex introspection rather than simple introspection. Consider cognitive phenomenology again. Suppose you are having the conscious thought that durians are yucky. A moment later, you are wondering whether the thought you just had has sensory phenomenology. Suppose you arrive at the judgement that it does. Such an introspective judgement is prone to noise and bias from multiple factors. In forming the judgement, you deploy cognitive attention to a recently past experience. Your judgement may be influenced by the capacity of your working memory, how you represent the thought, whether you are distracted, your prior beliefs about the nature of thinking, and so on. In addition, your judgement depends on your learning history of the concept SENSORY, what samples were focused on, how you usually apply the concept, whether you consistently apply the concept, and so on. All of these factors can affect the accuracy of your introspective judgement about whether the thought you just had has sensory or *sui generis* phenomenology. Similarly, an introspective judgement such as "The phenomenal character of perceptual experience is purely representational" is subject to various factors that can affect the accuracy of the judgement. Crucially, it depends on the variation of the type of perceptual experiences attended to in delivering the judgement, one's prior beliefs or expectations, including theoretical commitments, and one's conceptual capacity for applying the relevant concepts. Again, it would not be surprising that such introspection judgements turn out to be inaccurate.

Now consider revelation. Proponents of revelation usually construe the thesis as a claim about introspecting a current experience, e.g. by having an experience with phenomenal property Q, the knowledge about the essence of Q is often made available (Liu 2019, 2021, 2024; see also Goff 2017). They can then argue that if revelation involves introspective judgements and hence requires the applications of concepts, these judgements only draw on perceptual resources, hence involving only simple introspection.

Consider the introspective experience of eating durian once again. In forming the introspective judgement about what the tasting experience is like, one solely attends to the gustatory experience itself. Consider again the three different ways of spelling out the proposition involved in the thesis of revelation:

(P1) Q is X (where “X” captures the essence of Q).

(P2) Q is *this* (where “this” is a placeholder for “X”).

(P3) The feeling/experience I have now is *this* (where “this” is a placeholder for “X”).

While judgement (P1) depends on relevant conceptual capacities in spelling out “X” (e.g. CREAMY, OVERRIPE, SIMILAR TO, and so on) and potentially cognitive attention in attending to samples of other experiences, judgements (P2) and (P3) only draw on perceptual attention to inform the applications of mundane concepts. Consider (P2) with respect to the experience of tasting durian. Let’s say that the relevant essence-revealing judgment takes the form “The taste of durian is this” where “this” is a placeholder for a predicate that accurately captures the essence of the phenomenal character of the gustatory experience picked out by the concept THE TASTE OF DURIAN. Drawing on Wu’s model of simple introspection, such a judgement is arrived in the following steps:

Step One: The subject attends to the gustatory experience, deploying the same capacities deployed in perceptually attending to the durian in the modality of taste. This aligns with Evans-inspired way of thinking about introspective attention.

Step Two: The subject deploys the recognitional concept DURIAN and the concept TASTE to arrive at the introspective judgement “I taste durian”. Only simple introspection is involved in this step, since the applications of the concepts in forming the judgement are informed by perceptual attention only.

Step Three: The subject attends to the gustatory experience again. This time, the subject shifts perspective and applies the concept THE TASTE OF DURIAN as well as the demonstrative concept THIS to arrive at the introspective judgement “The taste of durian is this”. Again, only simple introspection is involved in this step, since the applications of the concepts in forming the judgement are informed by perceptual attention only.

Similar steps are taken to arrive at judgement (P3). Step One is the same. In Step Two, one deploys the generic concepts EXPERIENCE and SOMETHING, to form the introspective judgement “I experience something”. In Step Three, the subject deploys the perceptual-attention channel again. This time, they deploy the concept THE EXPERIENCE I HAVE NOW and the demonstrative concept THIS to arrive at the introspective judgement “The experience I have now is this”. In both steps, only simple introspection is involved. So, the kind of introspective judgements involved in revelation in the forms of (P2) and (P3) are relatively easy to make. Given that they only involve simple introspection where the relevant concepts

applied are mundane concepts, it is reasonable to think that such introspective judgements are much less likely to be unreliable. So, introspective limitations in these problematic cases do not extend to the case of revelation, if the latter is formulated as involving propositional knowledge of the form (P2) or (P3). Recall the argument against revelation from introspective unreliability:

- (1) Introspection is not reliable in a number of cases at revealing the metaphysical natures of phenomenal properties.
- (2) Introspection is not reliable at revealing the metaphysical natures of phenomenal properties.
- (3) Revelation claims that introspection reveals the metaphysical natures of phenomenal properties, i.e. their essences.
- (4) Revelation is likely to be false.

Given the above clarification, “introspection” is best understood to mean “complex introspection” in (1) and (2). In contrast, “introspection” is best understood to mean “simple introspection” in (3). The argument thus does not succeed because it involves an equivocation.

5. Conclusion

Revelation makes the claim that knowledge about the essences of phenomenal properties is often available through introspection. In this paper, I raised a worry about the thesis of revelation from the limits of introspection. We saw that there are responses that proponents of revelation can make in addressing this worry. Crucially, one can draw a distinction between a kind of introspection that is likely to be reliable and a kind that is likely to be prone to error. In that respect, we saw the distinction between thing-introspection versus fact-introspection on the one hand, and simple introspection versus complex introspection on the other. One can then argue that the kinds of introspection involved in certain versions of revelation are reliable; whereas the kinds of introspection in the problematic cases that demonstrate introspection’s limitations are prone to error. It is also worth noting that the plausibility of revelation and whether it faces the challenge from the limits of introspection depends on how we formulate the thesis. In particular, if the relevant kind of essence-revealing knowledge is propositional, then the kind of introspective judgement that is likely to be accurate is demonstrative-like and unlikely to involve the applications of tricky concepts or multiple channels of cognitive resources. According to revelation, while such judgements are not particularly demanding to make, they nevertheless capture one’s understanding of the essence of the relevant phenomenal property, that is, what the property is in its most core respects. Insofar as revelation is an intuitive thesis that reflects our pre-theoretical commitment as many have noted in the literature, such knowledge then provides an intuitive objection against physicalism.

Acknowledgements

A version of this paper was presented at the *Introspection, Acquaintance and Self-Knowledge* workshop in Valencia in June 2024. I am grateful for the feedback from the audience. Thanks in particular to Anna Giustina for written comments which helped improve the paper.

References

- Armstrong, D. M. 1968. *A Materialist Theory of the Mind*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Balog, Katalin. 2012. "Acquaintance and the Mind-Body Problem." In *New Perspectives on Type Identity: The Mental and the Physical*, edited by Simone Gozzano and Christopher S. Hill, 16–42. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bayne, Tim, and Michelle Montague. 2011. "Cognitive Phenomenology: An Introduction." In *Cognitive Phenomenology*, edited by Tim Bayne and Michelle Montague, 1–34. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bayne, Tim, and Maja Spener. 2010. "Introspective Humility." *Philosophical Studies* 20 (1): 1–22.
- Braddon-Mitchell, David. 2007. "Against Ontologically Emergent Consciousness." In *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Mind*, edited by Brian McLaughlin and Jonathan Cohen, 287–99. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Camp, Elisabeth. 2006. "Metaphor and That Certain 'Je Ne Sais Quoi.'" *Philosophical Studies* 129: 1–25.
- Campbell, John. 1993. "A Simple View of Colour." In *Reality, Representation and Projection*, edited by J. J. Haldane and Crispin Wright, 257–68. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chalmers, David. 2016. "The Combination Problem for Panpsychism." In *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Godehard Brüntrup and Ludwig Jaskolla, 179–214. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2018. "The Meta-Problem of Consciousness." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 25 (9–10): 6–61.
- Coleman, Sam. 2019. "Natural Acquaintance." In *Acquaintance: New Essays*, edited by J. Knowles and T. Raleigh, 49–74. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dasgupta, Shamik. 2014. "The Possibility of Physicalism." *Journal of Philosophy* 111 (9–10): 557–92.
- Dretske, Fred I. 1993. "Conscious Experience." *Mind* 102: 263–83.
- Evans, Gareth. 1982. *The Varieties of Reference*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fine, Kit. 1994. "Essence and Modality." *Philosophical Perspectives* 8: 1–16.
- . 1995. "Senses of Essence." In *Modality, Morality and Belief: Essays in Honor of Ruth Barcan Marcus*, edited by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, Diana Raffman, and Nicholas Asher, 53–73. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gertler, Brie. 2001. "Introspecting Phenomenal States." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 63 (2): 305–28.

- . 2012. "Renewed Acquaintance." In *Introspection and Consciousness*, edited by Declan Smithies and Daniel Stoljar, 89–123. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Giustina, Anna. 2021. "Introspection without Judgment." *Erkenntnis* 86: 407–27.
- . 2022. "Introspective Knowledge by Acquaintance." *Synthese* 200 (2): 1–23.
- Giustina, Anna, and Uriah Kriegel. 2017. "Fact-Introspection, Thing-Introspection, and Inner Awareness." *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 8: 143–64.
- . 2022. "Two Kinds of Introspection." In *Qualitative Consciousness: Themes from the Philosophy of David Rosenthal*, edited by Jonathan Weisberg. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goff, Philip. 2015. "Real Acquaintance and Physicalism." In *Phenomenal Qualities: Sense, Perception, and Consciousness*, edited by Peter Coates and Sam Coleman, 121–43. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2017. *Consciousness and Fundamental Reality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harman, Gilbert. 1990. "The Intrinsic Quality of Experience." *Philosophical Perspectives* 4: 31–52.
- Hill, Christopher. 2014. *Meaning, Mind, and Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Horgan, Terence, and John Tienson. 2002. "The Intentionality of Phenomenology and the Phenomenology of Intentionality." In *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, edited by David Chalmers, 520–33. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kim, Jaegwon. 1966. "On the Psycho-Physical Identity Theory." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 3 (3): 227–35.
- Levine, Joseph. 1995. "Qualia: Intrinsic, Relational or What?" In *Conscious Experience*, edited by Thomas Metzinger, 277–92. Paderborn: Schöningh.
- Lewis, David. 1995. "Should a Materialist Believe in Qualia?" *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1): 140–44.
- Liu, Michelle. 2019. "Phenomenal Experience and the Thesis of Revelation." In *Perception, Cognition and Aesthetics*, edited by D. Shottenkirk, M. Curado, and S. Gouveia, 227–51. London: Routledge.
- . 2020. "Explaining the Intuition of Revelation." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 27 (5–6): 99–107.
- . 2021. "Revelation and the Intuition of Dualism." *Synthese* 199: 11491–11515.
- . 2024. "Revelation and the Appearance/Reality Distinction." *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Mind* 4.
- Majeed, Raamy. 2017. "Ramsey Humility: The Response from Revelation and Panpsychism." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 47 (1): 75–96.
- McLaughlin, Brian. 2003. "Color, Consciousness, and Color Consciousness." In *Consciousness: New Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by Quentin Smith and Aleksandar Jokic, 97–154. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nida-Rümelin, Martine. 2007. "Grasping Phenomenal Properties." In *Phenomenal Concepts and Phenomenal Knowledge: New Essays on Consciousness and Physicalism*, edited by Torin Alter and Sven Walter, 307–36. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Papineau, David. 2007. "Phenomenal and Perceptual Concepts." In *Phenomenal Concepts and Phenomenal Knowledge: New Essays on Consciousness and Physicalism*, edited by Torin Alter and Sven Walter, 111–44. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2020. "The Problem of Consciousness." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Consciousness*, edited by Uriah Kriegel. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Roelofs, Luke. 2020. "Consciousness, Revelation, and Confusion: Are Constitutive Panpsychists Hoist by Their Own Petard?" *Dialectica* 74 (1): 59–90.
- Schwitzgebel, Eric. 2008. "The Unreliability of Naïve Introspection." *Philosophical Review* 117 (2): 245–73.
- . 2011. *Perplexities of Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Shoemaker, Sydney. 1994. "Self-Knowledge and Inner Sense." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54: 249–314.
- Spener, Maja. 2011. "Disagreement about Cognitive Phenomenology." In *Cognitive Phenomenology*, edited by Tim Bayne and Michelle Montague, 268–84. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stoljar, Daniel. 2009. "The Argument from Revelation." In *Conceptual Analysis and Philosophical Naturalism*, edited by David Braddon-Mitchell and Robert Nola, 113–38. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Trogon, Kelly. 2017. "Revelation and Physicalism." *Synthese* 194: 2345–66.
- Tye, Michael. 1992. "Visual Qualia and Visual Content." In *The Contents of Experience*, edited by Tim Crane, 158–76. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wilson, Robert. 2003. "Intentionality and Phenomenology." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 84 (4): 413–31.
- Wu, Wayne. 2023a. *Movements of the Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2023b. "On Possible and Actual Human Introspection." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 30 (9–10): 223–34.