

Frankish, Keith. Illusionism as a theory of consciousness

0. Hard problem v.s. illusion problem

- The hard problem of consciousness: phenomenal consciousness is real and want to explain how it comes to existence (11)
- Illusion problem: phenomenal consciousness is illusory and want to explain why it seems to exist (11)
- Aim of the paper: support illusionism as a serious theory of consciousness (12) ^[1]

1. Introducing illusionism

1.1 Three approaches to phenomenal consciousness

1.1.1 Two divisions

1.1.1.1 Division on ontology of the phenomenon

- *Realism* about a phenomenon: the phenomenon that appears to exist really exists (13)
 - Corresponding question: why does the phenomenon exist?

- *Illusionism* about a phenomenon: the phenomenon that appears to be does not exist (13)
- Corresponding question: why does the phenomenon appear to exist?

1.1.1.2 Division on the explanatory strategy of the phenomenon

- Two kinds of answers to why the phenomenon or its appearance exists (13)
- *Radical*: science (existing theoretical resources) cannot explain it [2]
- *Conservative*: science can explain it
- Ex.: why does psychokinesis exist? (12-3)
 - --> it exists because of some non-physical psychic force, or because of some unknown physical processes
- radical realism v.s. conservative realism

1.1.2 Apply the two divisions to theories of consciousness

1.1.2.1 The phenomenon of phenomenal consciousness/experience

Phenomenon: experience has introspect-able qualitative properties (13)

- Definitions: qualitative properties as *phenomenal properties*, experience with such properties as *phenomenally conscious* (13)

- Kammerer (House of Mirrors p.17): qualitative properties as something non-describable for people who don't experience them
- (experience defined functionally as the direct output of sensory system)
- (in this sense 'experience' doesn't imply phenomenal properties) [3][4] [5][6]
- Phenomenal properties are generally considered as having properties such as being irreducible to physical terms, ineffable, etc. (Something is physical iff it is either identical with or realized in microphysical properties) (13)

1.1.2.2 Three options of accounting for phenomenal consciousness

	Radical	Conservative
Realism	radical realism	conservative realism
Anti-realism	(maybe eliminative materialism?)	illusionism

- Radical realism: phenomenal consciousness is real and cannot be explained without radical theoretical innovation (13)
- Conservative realism: phenomenal consciousness is real but can be explained in physical terms (e.g., contemporary cognitive science and its modest extension) (14)

- Illusionism (conservative anti-realism): phenomenal consciousness is not real and its appearance can be explained in physical terms (14)
- Illusionists typically concede that we have introspective awareness of our sensory states...
- but deny that this awareness is accurate and involves phenomenal consciousness [7]

1.2 Illusionism strong and weak

- Weak illusionism: phenomenal consciousness exists, but some of its features are illusory (e.g., ineffable, intrinsic) (15)
- Strong illusionism (the view advocated by Frankish): phenomenal consciousness is illusory (15)
- *Quasi-phenomenal property*: non-phenomenal, physical property that introspection misrepresents as phenomenal (15)
 - e.g., redness is a physical property that triggers the introspective representation of redness
- Strong illusionists hold that all phenomenal properties are actually quasi-phenomenal, but weak illusionists cannot say this and must employ a sense of phenomenality stronger than quasi-phenomenality (15-6) [8]
- Frankish thinks that it is impossible to formulate a notion of phenomenal properties that can be accepted by weak illusionists, so will use 'illusionism' to refer to strong illusionism only (16)

1.3 Some analogies

1.3.1 Analogies: Dennett, Rey, Humphrey, Pereboom

- Dennett: consciousness as metaphorical representations of real neural events (16)
- Rey: we project properties into the world when certain regularities can be characterized as so (16-7)
 - Another analogy: we take our introspected objects to be actual in the same way as children take cartoon creatures on the screen to be real (18)
- Humphrey: phenomenal consciousness as the fiction of the impossible (17)
 - Gregundrum can create the illusion of the Penrose triangle, which cannot exist in three-dimensional space
 - Similarly, brains create an 'ipsundrum' which creates an illusion of something impossible
- Pereboom: phenomenal consciousness is like secondary qualities, which give to sensations that we take to resemble the actual objects. Yet sensations don't accurately reflect the nature of the objects. Same goes for phenomenal consciousness (18)

1.3.2 Take-aways from the analogies

These analogies all illustrate the basic illusionist claim that *introspection delivers a partial, distorted view of our*

experiences, misrepresenting complex physical features as simple phenomenal ones (18).

- These analogies also illustrate that forming the right theoretical belief that the appearances are illusory doesn't make illusions go away (18-9)
- These analogies also give some hints on how illusionist accounts might differ (19)
 - e.g., what are the basis of illusion?: The content of sensory states? Neural vehicles? Does the relational properties of the representational states contribute to phenomenality? etc.
 - e.g., what is the nature of introspection? Is it conscious (in the psychological sense of being globally available)? Is it monitoring sensory states? etc.

1.4 Outward-looking illusionism?

- Experiences are transparent: we attribute properties we have in experience to the objects of experience, not to our experience (19-20)
- Possibility: we misrepresent external objects, rather than merely our experiences, as having phenomenal properties (20)
- But outward-looking illusionism might merely be a variant of inward-looking illusionism (20)
 - outward-looking illusionism = inward-looking illusionism + projection

- One misrepresent experience as phenomenal and then project phenomenal properties to external objects

1.5 Illusionism and grand illusion

- Noë thinks that visual world is a grand illusion, in the sense that conscious visual experience is empirically proved to be a lot less stable and detailed than we take it to be (20) ^[9]
- Illusionism is a thesis about consciousness in general and its nature, and refuting Noë's thesis doesn't by itself refute illusionism: visual world can be stable and detailed while still being illusory (20) ^[10]
- The evidence for grand illusion view however can be taken as support for illusionism: if our conscious visual experience is not quite like what we take it to be, then it means that we can misrepresent other conscious experiences too (20) ^[11]

1.6 Illusionism and eliminativism

1.6.1 Metaphysical discussion of phenomenal consciousness

- Illusionists can agree with realists that consciousness exists in some sense (21)
 - Illusionists can claim that experiences characterized as having phenomenal properties exist

- Will then use 'consciousness' or 'conscious experience' in an inclusive sense: they are states that might turn out being either genuinely phenomenal or merely quasi-phenomenal ^[12]

	Realism	Illusionism
Representation of consciousness	can concede it exists	exists
consciousness	exists as phenomenal properties	exists as quasi-phenomenal properties

(YY: unclear if this makes sense. Does he define consciousness in terms of quasi-phenomenal properties or in terms of intentional objects?)

1.6.2 Scientific and everyday discussions of phenomenal consciousness

- The *scientific* talk of phenomenal properties needs not be eliminated, though one should re-conceptualize them as quasi-phenomenal properties (21)
 - ...just like the discovery of color as sensations only leads scientists to re-conceptualize color as the property that cause color sensations
 - However, Frankish does recommend one to eliminate such talk to avoid the dualist intuition sneaking into scientific conversations
- The *everyday* talk of phenomenal properties should still be considered as referring to existing properties, though

only fictional ones (22)

- e.g., Lucy's remark that King Lear's agony is heart-breaking should be taken as referring to fictional agony, since the cause of the agony (the actor's behaviors) is not heartbreaking ^[13]

1.7 Zombies and what it is like

- Objection: the claim that we don't have phenomenal consciousness commits us to the position that we are zombies (22-3)
- Zombies differ from us only in that they don't have inner life
- To have an inner life is to have experience that is like something, which consists in its having phenomenal properties ^[14]
- Reply: to have experience that is like something is to be aware of one's experience in a functional sense due to our introspective mechanism (23)
 - insofar as one can introspect/represent oneself to oneself, one has experience that is like something
 - So zombies have experience that is like something
 - if this inner life differs from our inner life, then that is due to difference in introspective mechanism
 - the inner life that we have consists in introspective self-awareness that creates the illusory phenomenal properties
- Objection to the reply: representing oneself as having phenomenal consciousness doesn't imply that one has

inner life (23)

- Reply: unclear how this works
- If we know all the quasi-phenomenal properties, their effects, and introspective mechanisms, then unclear how to imagine a creature which represents itself as having phenomenal consciousness yet doesn't have an inner life [15]

2. Motivating illusionism

Wants to show that illusionism has some attractions without giving a knock-down argument for it (24)

2.1 Against radical realism

- Principle of conservatism should be applied with special force here, because:
 - 1. the threat comes from highly-subjective reports (e.g., from introspection) (24)
 - Introspection only gives us a deceptive, partial perspective into reality
 - 2. the assumption that experiences influence us in virtue of how they feel is suspicious (24-5)
 - we acknowledge that phenomenal consciousness has high psychological significance - i.e., huge influence in other psychological states and also behavioral states

- But such psychological significance might come from other features of the experience [16]
- If we were to say phenomenal properties are intrinsic features of physical entities, then we would make all physical causation phenomenal

2.2 Against conservative realism

Conservative realism: phenomenal properties = physical properties (25)

- Central problem: phenomenal properties seem to resist functional and physical analysis (25)
- Reply: *phenomenal concept strategy*: phenomenal concepts have an "especially intimate" link to referents and lack a priori link to other physical concepts (25)
 - but for concepts to be phenomenal, they have to refer to phenomenal 'feels', which are still physically mysterious (25-6) [17]
- Reductive explanations of phenomenal consciousness often take the form of weak illusionism, but as claimed earlier, it is not clear what kind of phenomenality it would formulate (26)
- In practice, reductive explanations of phenomenal consciousness covertly take the form of strong illusionism through identifying phenomenal properties with functional properties (26) [18]
- Conservative realists might raise the charge that illusionists fail to account for the causal power of

phenomenal properties (27)

- But illusionists can reply that phenomenal concepts do track causally effective properties
- more specifically, phenomenal properties are causally potent as intentional objects [19]

2.3 For illusionism

2.3.1 Illusionism seems to offer a better explanation for phenomenal consciousness

- Argument 1: If phenomenal properties are considered as non-physical, there is no need to posit them because physical explanations can completely capture behavioral and mental phenomena (27)
- Argument 2: apparent anomalousness is evidence for illusion (27)
 - Phenomenal properties are anomalous in terms of being resistant to physical explanations and being detectable only from a first-person perspective (27-8)
 - --> one can abductively infer that phenomenal properties are illusory (28)
 - One can also explain why they are illusory by appealing to the fact that any property needs to be represented in order to have significance for the mind (which is a representational system) (28)
 - since we cannot introspect our introspective representations of phenomenal properties, we

cannot tell if the introspective representations represent anything [20]

- (and since physical sciences reveal nothing, there is a positive reason to think that the representations represent nothing) (29)

2.3.2 Illusionism has further positive implications

- Argument 3: illusionism allows us to account for both why phenomenal properties seem magical and why they are causally effective (by phrasing phenomenal properties as intentional objects) (29)
- Argument 4: illusionism opens up new possibilities for explaining the function of consciousness from the angle of evolutionary biology (29)

3. Defending illusionism

Aims to address some common objections to illusionism (29)

3.1 Denying the data

3.1.1 First gloss of the objection

- Objection: Theories of consciousness should be explaining the data (such as phenomenal consciousness) instead of simply denying its existence. This is unlike denying the existence of a theoretical entity whose existence is inferred from the data (30). [21]
[22]

- Illusionists' reply: phenomenal properties as intentional objects are the data, but deny they exist as genuine properties of the brain states (30) [23]

3.1.2 Objection elaborated: phenomenal properties as objects of acquaintance

- To maintain that phenomenal consciousness is a data, one needs to claim that we have a special epistemic relation to phenomenal consciousness - e.g., acquaintance - in such a way that one cannot be mistaken about it (30)
- However, the costs for positing an acquaintance relation with the phenomenal properties are high (30-1)
 - 1. acquaintance can have no psychological significance, because for a thing to have psychological significance it must be represented (30-1) [24]
 - but the process of representing is fallible
 - so one cannot communicate the certainty involved in acquaintance, which makes consciousness a psychologically inert datum
 2. reactions to phenomenal consciousness and associations we make of it can affect how it feels (31)
 - ...but the acquaintance theory denies it

- ...because such reactions and associations are not direct objects of acquaintance [25]
-
- 3. the acquaintance theory plausible assumes an anti-physical view of phenomenal consciousness and of the subject (31)
- how can one be acquainted with physical properties?
- and how can there be a non-psychological subject that exists priori to its representational process? [26]

3.1.3 Objection elaborated another way: subjects possess intrinsic subjectivity

- The acquaintance theory assumes that we have intrinsic subjectivity (31) [27]
- intrinsic subjectivity is a kind of subjectivity distinct from introspective subjectivity that is posited earlier - it arises simply because we are the kind of being that we are
- The acquaintance theory take phenomenal consciousness as a datum involving intrinsic subjectivity
- While the notion of intrinsic subjectivity is not itself incoherent, it is mysterious and we can imagine any being as possessing it (31-2)

3.2 No appearance-reality gap

- Objection v.1: phenomenal consciousness = the appearance of phenomenal consciousness (32) [28]
- Reply: one needs to spell out what we mean by seeming to experience phenomenal properties (32)
 - Objector: to have phenomenal green-ness, one needs to employ a mode of presentation that involves introspect-able green-ness [29]
 - Reply: the content of representations are determined by non-phenomenal properties (32-3)
 - Objector: there is a difference between representing oneself as having phenomenal properties v.s. really having phenomenal properties (33)
 - Reply: but this is the point at issue [30]
- Objection v.2: when we appear to have certain experiences, we don't say we appear to appear to have certain experiences (33)
 - Rather, there seems to be a green patch just is to have an experience of green patch - full stop
 - but just like we can be mistaken about if green patch exists in the external world, we can also be mistaken about if green patch exists in the internal world
- Conclusion: the no-gap objection is not appealing [31]

3.3 Who is the audience?

- Cartesian theater objection: illusion of phenomenality requires an inner observer, just like an audience in Cartesian theater (34)

- Illusionists are committed to the idea that there has to be some kind of introspection, but this introspection can be distributed across several unintelligent systems (34) [32]
- How does illusionists' account differ from Cartesian theater? (34-5)
 - 1. the inner display is not a phenomenal show
 - 2. it is not redundant re-representation of pre-existing information
 - 3. the detector system does not need to do anything more than representing
 - 4. the show needs not be a single integrated one

3.4 Representing phenomenality

- How to solve the illusion problem? (35)
- Some accounts:
 - Account 1: phenomenal concepts incorporate phenomenal feels (35)
 - But e.g., putting iron fillings into a representational vehicle will not make it represent iron [33] [34]
 - And there are reasons to think that the content of phenomenal concepts should not be fixed by some kind of externalism accounts (i.e., causal connection to their referents) (36)

- Account 2: phenomenal concepts as hybrid concepts that are combinations of theoretical and recognitional concepts (36)
 - We have theoretical concepts of phenomenal properties
 - And we have the capacity to recognize different sensory states in our introspection
 - Phenomenal concepts are the products of associating theoretical concepts with recognitional concepts of sensory states

4. Facing up to the illusion problem

- The illusion problem is not impossible to solve (37)
- Illusionism should not be assessed based on if it is counter-intuitive, but on if it is rationally compelling (37)

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1. unclear where the seriousness discussion comes in ↩
 2. unclear if theoretical resources include derivative sciences such as psychology ↩
 3. the thought might be something like: the output of sensory systems, defined functionally, is a mental state that is directed produced after the sensory systems interact with the object sensed and that is capable of being used for reasoning/action etc. related to the object. The output of sensory system is then defined based on the source of the mental state and the role played by the mental state in the rest of cognition. ↩
 4. Question 1: if experience is defined functionally and qualitative properties are considered as non-functional, then the word

'experience' excludes the existence of qualitative/phenomenal properties. Then how can there be experience with phenomenal properties? (One possible answer is that even though the essence of experience just is its function, having other properties is possible because they are compatible with having this function. e.g., a doorstop is defined based on its function to stop the door, but this is compatible with its having colors. So a doorstop can have colors even though it is merely defined functionally ↩)

5. Question 2: it is assumed that qualitative properties are not functional. If so, then qualitative properties don't have any consequences on other parts of the cognition and on the subject's behaviors. Why? Can't one report that one is experiencing certain qualitative properties, and can't one's experience of qualitative properties influence her behaviors? e.g., one can report that one is seeing redness, and seeing redness can have behavioral and cognitive consequences. For instance, by seeing redness in the traffic light, one knows that one needs to stop walking and, if rational, will really stop walking. ↩)
6. Question 2 continued: maybe one will reply that qualia indeed don't have any cognitive/behavioral impact, because inverted qualia is possible. For instance, one might see greenness when looking at a light generally considered as red, but will still stop because one associates that greenness qualia with the behavior of stopping in front of the traffic light. So having what qualia doesn't make a difference for one's behavior and cognition. But this does show that having some kind of mental representation of colored objects in such a way that can tell different colors apart is necessary) ↩)
7. Question: can there be an option of radical anti-realism: phenomenal consciousness doesn't exist and cannot be

explained by current science? Would the eliminativism proposed by the Churchlands count? The Churchlands think that folk psychological terms don't exist/don't refer, and presumably would think that phenomenal consciousness also doesn't exist. In other words, they reject that our cognition can be explained in terms of current sciences (i.e., our current psychological and cognitive sciences), but do think our cognition can be explained in neurological/physical terms. Does this count as a radical explanatory strategy? ↩

8. if we say phenomenal properties are actually quasi-phenomenal, then we are saying phenomenal properties - not just some of their features - don't exist. So weak illusionists cannot concede that all phenomenal properties are so, and must formulate a definition of phenomenal properties that stand in the middle of phenomenal properties in their original sense and quasi-phenomenal properties ↩
9. it is a thesis about the feature of our conscious visual experience, which Noë might take to be veridical, though not as ideal as one wants it to be ↩
10. in other words, the grand illusion view is independent from the illusionism view ↩
11. we represent our conscious visual experiences as having properties that they don't have, so too can we represent all sorts of conscious experiences as having properties that they don't have - e.g., phenomenal properties ↩
12. A distinction between the representation of experience and experience itself can be made. Here illusionists and realists are agreeing that the experience itself exists, though illusionists claim that phenomenal properties exist as the intentional objects of the representation of experience, whereas realists claim

phenomenal properties exist as the real properties of experience itself. ↩

13. so scientific talk and everyday talk will differ in how to characterize phenomenal properties in the traditional sense: scientific talk will construe them as the cause of the impression of phenomenal properties, whereas everyday talk will construe them as the intentional objects of the impression of phenomenal properties ↩
14. so the denial of us having phenomenal experiences = the denial of us having inner life = the denial of the difference between us and zombies ↩
15. might be saying that having phenomenal consciousness crucially relies on the capacity of introspecting one's own states, but introspecting one's states just is having an inner life. So one cannot have the illusion of having phenomenal consciousness yet not have an inner life. ↩
16. for instance, it might not be the case that phenomenal properties have psychological effects; rather, it is quasi-psychological properties and representations of phenomenal properties that have psychological effects ↩
17. basically, one needs to give a physical account of the referent of phenomenal concept. If one cannot do that, then appealing to the phenomenal concept strategy wouldn't succeed. ↩
18. unclear to me what he is saying here ↩
19. unclear whether this solves the problem. What does it mean for intentional objects to have causal powers? One way to see this is that the belief that there is a beer in the fridge might cause one to go to the fridge. But the beer 1) can be non-existent, or 2) only exists as a mental entity. In both cases, it is mysterious how

intentional objects are to have causal powers. Maybe 2) is not that mysterious, but to say 2) is to say beer exists as a mental representation. Then it seems to me Frankish should frame his account as that the representations of phenomenal properties are what have causal powers, but this seems to differ from what Frankish wants. ↩

20. the thought might be that one needs to be able to represent a representation in order to assess it. But can't we form a higher-order representation of an introspective representation? Or since we cannot go outside of introspection to see if introspection in general does have accurate representational power, we cannot assess an introspective representation by introspectively representing it? ↩
21. unclear to me what he is saying. Maybe an analogy can be drawn from the phenomenon of rainbow. When explaining the phenomenon of rainbow, one observes colors organized in a certain way. One cannot deny that these colors exist, and denying this amounts to denying the data. But one can indeed deny that rainbow exists, because rainbow is a theoretical entity that we infer from the data - the phenomenon of colors organized in a certain way. ↩
22. To explain something we must presuppose that the something in question exists. So the objection will be a serious one if illusionists are simply denying the existence of that something. ↩
23. unclear to me what he is saying. He later says (30) that our introspective reports are data for a science of consciousness, but here he is saying phenomenal properties as intentional objects are the data. It is unclear if these two claims amount to the same thing.

If he merely says that introspective reports are the data, then it is uncontroversial. If he says phenomenal properties as intentional objects are the data, then it is less so. This is because to be data all parties - everyone who attempts to explain the phenomenon - must acknowledge that they exist. That is, the data has to be something to be explained and to be acknowledged by all that it exists. The claim that phenomenal properties are intentional objects seems to be more like an explanation rather than the data to be explained. ↩

24. unclear what he is saying. We can have mental representations of acquainted objects. Even though our mental representations can be mistaken, the acquainted objects can still be represented and can thereby have significance. ↩
25. why? suppose we associate the feeling of redness with anger (so anger is a reaction or association we make with the phenomenal property of redness). Maybe one way anger can change the phenomenal property is to make it more distinct. For instance, it might make redness stand out more. But I don't think we need to be acquainted with anger in order for redness to be more distinct. Insofar as anger acts like a background cause to the distinctness of redness, we don't have to represent it in order to be aware of the distinctness of redness - we can directly feel it. ↩
26. Maybe he is saying something like: a subject is partially constituted by psychological processes. Yet for the phenomenal properties to be objects of acquaintance, the subject must exist prior to the acquaintance with the phenomenal properties. So, the subject exists prior to psychological processes.

But it is unclear why it is so. As long as there are other psychological processes that constitute the subject existing prior to acquaintance, then there is a subject at least partially

constituted by psychological processes existing prior to acquaintance. If framed this way, then one doesn't have to posit a non-psychological subject that exists prior to acquaintance. All one needs is to not consider acquaintance as the only possible psychological process. ↩

27. unclear why acquaintance theory has to make this assumption. Isn't it sufficient that acquaintance theory only needs to suppose some form of self-awareness, since one just has to be aware of oneself as being acquainted with the phenomenal properties? This can be spelled out as the introspective subjectivity that Frankish is talking about. ↩
28. An example might be that the appearance of redness really is redness: redness just is the red sensations. ↩
29. so this is to say the representation, in order to represent phenomenal properties, must itself have phenomenal properties
↩
30. at this point, to resist the force of illusionists' argument the objector must take back the claim that representing green-ness simply is having green-ness experience. But this is to contradict their earlier claim that there is no gap between appearance and reality. ↩
31. while Frankish doesn't say this (he still assumes that one does have an experience of green patch), one can also reply to this objection by differentiating different senses of seeming just like Kammerer does. Seeming can be psychological or phenomenal (p. 10 in Kammerer), the former refers to a phenomenon that prompts the subject to make a certain judgment. So Frankish can say that the appearance/seeming of green-ness is actually a psychological appearance that prompts the subject to judge that

there is a green patch, but is not a phenomenal appearance that the subject really experiences a green patch. ↩

32. unclear what it means, but probably needs to go back to Dennett's paper to figure it out ↩

33. don't understand the sentence that ranges from the bottom of 35 to 36 ↩

34. Additionally, it acknowledges the existence of phenomenal properties again ↩