

UNQUINING QUALIA: FROM AN AESTHETIC POINT OF VIEW

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The woods are lovely, dark and deep, But I have promises to keep, And miles to go before I sleep, And miles to go before I sleep. – Robert Frost, *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*

Introduction

What kind of things are *promises*? What about *miles*? What is the ontological status of phenomena denoted by *promises, sake, miles, woods and sleep* and other similar terms that appear in everyday life? They sure exist! People make promises, assure others that they would fulfil them, or *break* promises, cover *miles* to complete a journey, sometimes we too cross a *wood*, like Frost, on our journey, and we take rest *sleeping* for a while or longer hours. Can one give the same ontological status to miles as to roads, woods, and to sleep; or to promises and sake, as we do to cakes? Furthermore, what about one's experiences? When Frost called woods 'lovely, dark or deep,' was he referring to something objective available out there in the woods? The fact that some other individual may not find those same woods lovely or deep, tells us that such responses to a sight are subjective in nature. What causes these verbal, non-verbal, voluntary or non-voluntary instinctual responses is our experience of something out there. In other words, it is through experience that we realise and confirm whatever is given to us. This experience could be subjective, phenomenal or qualitatively different from others' experience. The poet's experience here is therefore unique and phenomenal, in comparison to someone who had possibly travelled through the woods, but never stood by its impressive darkness to share its beauty. This qualitative or phenomenal aspect of experience in technical terms of philosophy of mind is called *qualia*¹.

As qualia have been explained in the literature of Philosophy of Mind, we have the most intimate, immediate and incorrigible access to them and we may also find it hard to report exactly what they are, making them ineffable. Qualia are strictly subjective by definition, and therefore, posit the last line of defence against reductionists' theory of mind, in brief, reductive materialism. There have been different kinds of arguments put forth by different philosophers to bring out the

¹ C.I. Lewis (1929) is credited for the coinage of the word Qualia. It is defined as the plural of the word 'Quale'.

nature of qualia viz. The most important ones are Thomas Nagel (1974), Saul Kripke (1980), Frank Jackson (1982), Joseph Levine (1983) and David Chalmers (1996) among others, to show what is left out by all versions of reductive materialism. The underlying claim of the pro-qualia philosophers is that any theory of (reductive) materialism cannot claim to have explained conscious experiences unless it provides a clear and indisputable account of qualia within its framework. On the other hand, there have been philosophers like Daniel Dennett, Paul Churchland (2004) and David Lewis (2004) who have put forth arguments to show that either the way qualia are defined is self-contradictory or it is accounted for within a strict materialist framework. Daniel Dennett (1988) argues that the way the concept of Qualia has been defined and formulated is irregular and incoherent. He argues that on closer scrutiny, the defining properties of qualia vanish and do not hold grounds. Dennett undertakes the study of qualitative subjective experience in an objective manner, what he calls a heterophenomenological approach. As per the heterophenomenological approach, the qualitative experiences are not denied outrightly but only the subjective authority and therefore, they are subjected to an objective third person analytical treatment. In this schema, the subject has as much authority to describe the experience, as a novelist has on the fiction of his novel. Just like the authority of the novel cannot be said to be absolute, similarly the authority of a subject about his phenomenal experience cannot be claimed to be absolute, according to Dennett.

Metaphorically speaking, we, in this paper, take a *road less travelled by*. We take an aesthetic response approach to attempt to show that phenomenal experiences are subjective and may not be available to a third person objective study. If we take aesthetic categories to be categorically or objectively determined, we would be driving into a version of Plato's idealism. That is to say, we would have to accept some version of the objective available standard of every category, including the aesthetic categories like, beautiful, pleasant so forth and so on. And if we don't, then there is an element of subjectivity that cannot be done away with a third person explanation of aesthetic categories. The main contention of this paper therefore is discussed in five sections, excluding the conclusion. The section after introduction deals with the concept of qualia as it has been discussed in the literature with the help of some examples. The following section deals with the major arguments given by

anti-qualia philosophers to dismantle the qualia and to show its incoherency. The next section thereafter provides an exposition and analysis of the arguments provided by pro-qualia philosophers. The penultimate section of the paper presents the view taken from an aesthetic response point of view, to show how some of the arguments fail to quine qualia.

Qualia and Aesthetic Response

When Robert Frost, the poet, stopped by the woods on a snowy evening, he found woods to be *lovely* (it seemed to him that the sight in front of him was a pleasant one), just like one finds a flower lovely or a scent or a drink. It seemed to him that the woods were dark and the point from where he was observing the woods, they appeared deep to him. All these experiences were known to him *immediately* (he didn't experience this through an intermediary channel), *intrinsically* (his experience was not marred by or based upon some scientific fact) and were also *subjective* and *ineffable*. Although the poet was able to ascribe labels such as 'lovely, dark and deep' to his experiences, the raw-feels/sensations that make up the sight remained indescribable. For, one can call a sight lovely and one can also call a poem lovely, yet his experience of both may be completely different and that description does not express every aspect of what he experienced, or so is the claim of pro-qualia philosophers. These labels such as lovely, beautiful and pleasant are known as aesthetic responses. Aesthetic responses can be understood simply as reactions of an individual to an object based on certain physical characteristics of the object.

Suppose another poet named Robert *Burst* passed by those woods some other day. On the one hand, Frost had found woods to be so *lovely* that he needed to remind himself of the promises he had to keep, on the other hand, when Burst passed by those woods, he found that sight to be *grotesque, despicable and gloomy*. He also experienced all these immediately, intrinsically so on and so forth. His experience of the sight would again be constituted by the raw-feels or the sensations that are defined as qualia. Both of these experiences experienced by two different individuals are constituted of their respective qualia. In a nutshell, qualia are the raw sensations that are an elementary, atomic part of how the world or external reality seems to us, the way we experience it. It can be paraphrased to use the famous phrase of Nagel, that there is *something it is like to* experience something. What we ascribe the

aesthetic categories, like lovely or grotesque, to is more of a large-ish category as opposed to atomic raw feels. One can state that aesthetic responses, on the other hand, arise in response to a collection of raw feels that constitute an experience.

What those raw-feels are, they are, by definitive proposal, available only to the subject of that experience and therefore as a corollary, it can be claimed that there can be no objective account of it. There is no objective way in which one can claim what qualia that scene of the woods generates in two individuals. It is interesting to note that there is also *no objective way* in which one can claim how those woods would seem, aesthetically, to different individuals. Alternatively, if we try to describe what it must be like to someone who happens to walk by those woods, in terms of his qualia, and in terms of an aesthetic response; we can find a parallel. Based on their aesthetic response, we can assume that Frost may wish to visit those woods once again because of what it was like for him to look at them for the first time and Burst may never want to take that road again.

Since these subjective experiences differ from individual to individual, or there is no way possible for these to be compared and contrasted with, they may not precisely correspond to the external objective reality, and this is the reason why *an explanatory gap* is said to arise here.² The way qualia are defined, they create an ontological problem for a reductive materialist because by definition they evade objective scrutiny of any sort. For any materialist, therefore, qualia become a pertinent problem to be tackled. There are some of the ways in which an adherer of materialism can go about in treating the problem; they can either provide a satisfactory physicalist account in a way that shows that qualia are compatible with a strictly material picture, or it could be shown that there is no referent to the way qualia are characterized and defined. Qualia qualified by the distinct characteristics of innateness, infallibility and ineffability carry an intuitive appeal in their favour. However, as we would discuss in the next section, Dennett maintains that these distinctive characteristics are not distinct, and instead, they have muddied the water for what could be the basic theory of subjective experience. We would also look at

² The explanatory gap is between the scientific(objective) and the manifest image (phenomenal) of the world. This distinction was first pointed out by Sellers (1963).

some of the positions that show the irreducibility of the concept. In our defence of qualia, we are proposing an aesthetic basis to argue for the non-reducibility of subjective experiences.

Quining Qualia

Daniel Dennett (1988) has a problem with the way the subjective nature of experience has been treated in the literature in general. Dennett maintains that such a characterization of phenomenal experience is not valid. He proposes a method to approach the subjective phenomenal experience from a third person objective point of view, called heterophenomenology, to understand qualia. According to him, the confusion around the problem of qualia arises from the *pre-theoretical assumptions* that experiences are unique and intrinsic to consciousness. We have not scrutinized the concept properly to be able to shake off those assumptions. Dennett, as he has elsewhere (1995 and 2009) argued that what may feel intuitively right, may not be so; Darwin and Turing are the two important examples of the same. Charles Darwin (1859) advocated biological evolution as opposed to creationism. On a similar note, Alan Turing (1950) conceptualized the possibility of having artificial intelligence which would be at par with human intelligence. Dennett accepted both Darwin and Turing's theoretical positions and further in his attempt to *quine*³ qualia, he tries to show how the basic definitive properties of qualia vanish on closer scrutiny. (1988) For Dennett, qualia are not real things, not in a sense they have been defined by those who argue in favour of qualia. Dennett argues that if one gathers from Nagel (1974, 1986), Block (1978), Shoemaker (1982) and Jackson (1982), qualia are said to have the following properties:

- a) Ineffable: An individual cannot explain precisely the way he or she is experiencing things. There will always be something which is left out in the verbal explanation of one's phenomenal experience.
- b) Intrinsic: Qualia are simple, atomic, unanalysable, homogenous, un-substitutable and cannot be broken further.
- c) Private: Qualia cannot be shared and are limited to the individual whose qualia they are. Therefore, there is no possibility of any kind of interpersonal comparison between the qualia of the two individuals.

³ "Quine, V. to deny resolutely the existence or importance of something real or significant." (Dennett, 1987) the approach Dennett follows in dismantling qualia is *quining*. i.e., he is trying to show by argument that the initial assumptions of what qualia are, lose ground on closer examination.

- d) Directly or immediately comprehensible: They are directly accessible to the individual whose consciousness they are a part of.

Dennett, thus argues that if we scrutinize these descriptive properties defining phenomenal experience closely with the help of some thought experiments, these pre-theoretic intuitions will not hold ground and it can be established that the concept of qualia is as counterintuitive as *elan vital* in Biology. More importantly, he is trying to clarify that qualia as defined in terms of these properties, do not exist. However, he is not arguing that conscious experiences do not have intentional properties. Further, Dennett also maintains that most of the accounts provided by different philosophers on qualia are vastly vague, equivocal and confused. In his attempt to explain qualia, he takes into account the most liberal and the strongest version of the pro-qualia view so that it brings out the strangeness of the concept more clearly. Dennett (1988) considers a number of thought experiments (intuition pumps) for debunking these properties of qualia, and we would discuss a few important ones here:

- i) The Neurosurgical Prank: The inverted spectrum case is one of the very famous examples used by pro-qualia philosophers to show that qualia are innate and no interpersonal comparison between the qualia of two individuals is possible. The inverted spectrum case can be described with the help of the following example; suppose there is an individual Ramesh, who when sees an object that he calls yellow feels as another individual Suresh feels when he sees another object what he calls green, and vice versa. So, when both of them are standing together and see something that both of them call yellow, Ramesh is experiencing what Suresh would have if both of them were looking at what they call green. Since they use the same name for that subjective experience, there is no way that they can ever compare what they experience differently. This is called the inverted spectrum qualia case, and it shows how qualia are subjective and innate. This argument was explicitly used by Shoemaker (1982) to explain the innateness and subjectivity of qualia.

Dennett considers the following thought experiment as a response to the inverted qualia argument. Dennett elucidates with an example in which an evil scientist rewires a person X's brain in such a manner that X sees the sky as red, grass and leaves as yellow. So what X is said to be experiencing

is a case of a shift in qualia. Given the innate nature of qualia, this shift can and should be accessible only to X. Now, if X, who has been pranked by this evil scientist, tries to understand what has happened to him, Dennett argues that there are at least two ways in which X can understand and explain this shift in his experience, however, both of these explanations will lead us to two different conclusions?

- a) What that evil scientist has done to prank X is to change the neural channels in the optic nerve, and as a result, the neural events downstream are of the opposite values than their regular and normal one.
- b) Or that evil scientist has left the visual system intact as it was and has inverted memory access links and therefore the visual system of X is sending the same signals as it was doing earlier, but that does not match with what X remembers about how grass and sky looked.

Dennett argues that since the subject of this prank X can never of his/her own figure out what actually has happened to cause this perceived shift in his qualia. As it is clear that there can be more than one plausible explanation for the same, hence if the subject wants to ascertain the reason for this shift in qualia, he will have to take help from another (morally good) scientist to help him understand whether the shift is due to a) or b). In other words, no amount of introspection on part of X (from the vantage point of X's first-person subject) can help him ascertain the reason for the shift in his qualia. This, according to Dennett, shows that qualia are not private or innate and therefore refutes the properties of being privately, immediately accessible.

- ii) The Coffee Tasters: Dennett considers another thought experiment where there are two coffee tasters, let's call them P and Q, who are employed in a coffee company and their job is to ensure that the taste of the coffee remains the same throughout. So, they come in every day for work and taste the coffee from the latest batch to make sure it tastes the same as it did the day before or the day before that, going back to when they joined the company. One day when they come in for work, P says in confidence to Q that even though the taste of the coffee is the same as it has been throughout their period of work in the company, however, he (P) thinks that his tastes have

changed and as a result of that change he no longer likes the taste of the coffee. Hearing that P has confessed to him, Q says to P that he (Q) thinks that although his tastes have remained the same and also the taste of the coffee is also the same as it was when they had joined. However, there is something that has happened with his taste receptors, and therefore he (Q) finds the taste of coffee to be bad or unpleasant. At this point, if we look at this coffee tasting scenario, we know that both P and Q no longer like the taste of the coffee and they believe that the taste of the coffee has been the same as it was when they had started working for this coffee company. According to Dennett, P and Q both appeal to their memory when they claim that the taste of the coffee has remained the same. (and also, their job description on a daily basis requires them to appeal to their memory to make sure that the taste of the coffee is the same.)

Following this thought experiment, Dennett further raises a question, whether either of them can be said to be wrong in their conclusions? As per P, his preferences have changed, and hence he doesn't like the coffee anymore and as per Q, his taste receptors have some issue causing him to dislike the coffee. If the answer to the question raised above is affirmative, that is, one considers that P or Q could be wrong to draw the conclusion that they have, then that would undermine the basic conditions of qualia such as it is immediate, privileged, incorrigible and directly known. If qualia are any of these things, then P or Q could never be wrong. However, following their conversation, one would infer that either one or both of them may be wrong. Therefore, Dennett claims that the way qualia have been defined is inconsistent.

The inconsistency arises because, since P doesn't like the taste anymore and he claims that the taste of the coffee has remained the same and his preferences have changed, then one of the following things happened with him:

- a) P's analysis is actually right and his qualia have been the same as they were, but what has changed is his preferences and reactions. As a result, he doesn't like the taste of the coffee anymore despite the taste being the same as it was before.
- b) Or it is also a possibility that P is mistaken about his qualia being the same. What has happened is that his qualia have changed over a period of time at a very slow pace.
- c) Or it is also possible that P has undergone both (a) and (b)

Dennett argues that if qualia were directly known, immediate and privileged, then P could just introspect to know for sure what has happened to him. And it is clear that if P is asked to differentiate between (a) and (b), it would not be possible for him to make out the difference. Similarly, in case of Q, as he reports that his taste receptors have undergone changes, so either of the following could be the case for him:

- a) Q is right about the shift in his qualia
- b) Or it is possible that his preferences have shifted without him realizing.
- c) Or he is not able to remember correctly how coffee tasted to him earlier.
- d) Or a combination of all (a) (b) and (c).

What Dennett is trying to show here with these and some other similar thought experiments is that if qualia were to be included in our ontology, they ought to have some stable, distinguishable and identifiable properties. As philosophers in favour for qualia argue them to be ineffable, intrinsic, private, atomic and directly and immediately accessible by the individual in his phenomenal experience of them, Dennett argues that these thought experiments show that these properties are neither stable description of them nor do they make qualia distinguishable. In addition to the above viewpoint there is no such thing that fits the description provided by the philosophers who argue in favour of qualia. Hence, the materialists and reductionists accounts do not leave out anything in their explanation of mind or consciousness. In other words, there is nothing in the consciousness which is unexplainable in physical terms. With the explanation of qualia in neuropsychological or heterophenomenological terms nothing remains intrinsic to consciousness. Dennett challenges the pro-qualia thesis stating what else could be included in consciousness? He draws an analogy claiming that an astrophysicist cannot be blamed for being not able to provide a theory of *ether* because there is no such thing in the first place. So, also the notion of qualia as described by the pro-qualia theorists, for Dennett, does not exist. In corroboration with this argument, it is suggested that before the invention of modern medical sciences, the common assumption for the cause of sickness and illness was considered to be demons and magic, and now it is viruses and bacteria. In this regard, medical sciences cannot be blamed for not having to account for those pre

theoretic intuitions. Thus, internal experience or how things seem to us are not qualia in the sense it has been defined by those who argue for it, as Dennett writes,

the simple reason that one's epistemic relation to them [internal experience] is exactly the same as one's epistemic relation to such external, but readily – if fallibly – detectable properties as room temperature and weight... the idea that one should consult an outside expert, and perform elaborate behavioural tests on oneself in order to confirm what qualia one had, surely takes us too far away from our original idea of qualia as properties with which we have a particularly intimate acquaintance. (Dennett 1988, 396)

For Dennett, if qualia are to be anything, they must be a third person, public, intersubjectively verifiable phenomena. Qualia are heterophenomenological objects and scientifically observable. As it is clearly the case that tastes are subjective to external factors and are not intrinsic. In Dennett's narrative, no one would drink beer a second time if he *finds* its taste to be the same as when that person tried it for the first time. Beer still tastes the same however, the person likes it more. Same can be said about a lot of different tastes, which are also called acquired tastes, like dark chocolate, black coffee, green tea and so on and so forth. There are rare cases where anyone likes these tastes the first time, they try them. The argument basically suggests that if the qualia of an individual are same and not dependent on external factors, then every time a person tries them, he should feel the way he felt the first time and since it is not the case as we know people as an empirical fact that they start liking things after having tried it enough number of times therefore Dennett draws the conclusion that the taste of things must be dependent on the extrinsic factors. However, one could point out that if the taste was entirely dependent on extrinsic factors, then it should be the same for everyone tasting that.

Why Qualia cannot be quined?⁴

The anti-reductionists like Nagel (1974), Jackson (1982) and Chalmers (1996) maintain that there is something about consciousness that cannot be reduced to a strict physical explanation and cannot be accounted for using heterophenomenology. That *something* which evades physical explanations, according to these philosophers, is the subjective aspect, often dubbed also as the 'hard problem of consciousness'.(Chalmers 1996) Subjectivity provides an ontological ground to

⁴ The name of this section is borrowed from Pradhan (2002).

qualia. The reductionists, like Dennett, not only have charged qualia but also have nullified the ontological status of subjectivity.

Thomas Nagel has aptly brought this notion of subjectivity as an irreducible feature of reality in his seminal paper “What is it like to be a bat?” (1974). So far as human experience is concerned, the notion of what *it is like to be* an experience, for Nagel, exposes the poverty of conceptual apparatus necessary for understanding the phenomenal property of conscious experience from an objective, third person point of view. Nagel conceptualizes his thesis of irreducible subjectivity by illustrating an example of the experience of bats. A bat has its own way of experiencing the world which constitutes the lifeworld of the bat. Hence, it is hard to imagine the way a bat flies and navigates in the darkness of the night. The physical mechanism of the bat can at best give an objective functional mechanism of explaining its movement, but that is not sufficient to explain its subjective experience. Given the evolutionary history of human beings we *cannot* experience life the way bats do. So, to imagine or conceive what it is like to be a bat will be a perspective of human experience of a bat, but not identical with it. Thus, it lacks objectivity in its explanation. To use another example, we can imagine *what it would be like* if we could fly, yet we cannot imagine *what it is like* for birds to fly. A subjective experience, according to Nagel, is always about being in a state of *what it is like to be* in that state of experience.

Nagel (1986) reiterates the notion of subjectivity showing that most of human knowledge is from a certain point of view. This is often termed as first-person point of view in juxtaposition to the third person point of view that the thesis of quining qualia brings forth. The Nagelian framework highlights the first-person subjective experiences as the constitutive factor for common knowledge, but if neglected and forced by reducing it to a third person account detached from any point of view then it might lead to false reduction and forced generalization. (Nagel 1986, 18) Hence, Nagel rejects the very idea of quining qualia. Nevertheless, this thesis does not deny the notion of objectivity, rather only claims to show that even in the case of scientific objectivity there is room for subjectivity which systematically provides ground for objective knowledge. Insisting on deconstructing subjectivity in the name of objective scientific inquiry might erode the very foundation of knowledge where we may travel far from the starting point, but that may never be adequate. Nagel’s proposal could be

elucidated by following an example; it is a common knowledge among school children that the earth is spherical and its pictures that are seen in the atlas taken from outer space/artificial satellites seems to confirm that. But a student studying geography at the advanced level may immediately confirm that in reality, the shape of the earth is an irregularly shaped ellipsoid because it is flattened at the poles and bulges at the equator. This is true for almost all the celestial bodies that we study that none of them have a perfect spherical shape. This example so far simply shows the objective knowledge for different groups may vary, given their understanding of *concepts* concerning the study of the earth. It could be further emphasized that to map the places on earth on a three-dimensional globe, we shift a little bit from *what is the case*, that is, in actuality the globe does not represent the earth as it *is*. Rather the globe is an indicator but to refer to the real point we need to take into account several other factors concerning the earth which provides an objective knowledge about a place. This objective knowledge could be used while launching a missile or a satellite. When we compare this notion of objectivity concerning direction and locality determined by the migratory birds; they will have their way of measuring the direction for their safe travelling. In the case of migratory birds, the distance covered between two localities on the earth is objective from the birds' point of view. On the contrary, a map is a forcefully generalized objective representation of the earth from a human subjective point of view.

While advancing the argument of subjective knowledge, one can relate it to Frank Jackson's knowledge argument that does not completely disregard qualia as an epiphenomenon. Jackson's thought experiment is worth mentioning to illustrate the possibility of conceptualising subjective knowledge from a physicalist point of view. (1982, 130) In this thought experiment, Mary, a brilliant scientist, has been confined in a space where everything is black and white and also viewed through a black and white monitor. Since Mary specialises in neurophysiology of vision, she has all possible knowledge about colours in the physicalist terms. For instance, she knows the neurophysiological processes that she undergoes when a certain wavelength of light would enter into the retina and the signals it would send to the brain through which she determines the colour. However, Jackson postulates that Mary herself has never experienced any coloured object as most of us do in our everyday lives. The

conclusion of the thought experiment poses a question about the scenario where Mary comes out of her confined space and sees something coloured for the first time, will she have gained new knowledge? Intuitively, one feels that she would, in fact, learn something new when she gets to see the coloured object for the first time. In other words, this thought experiment can be presented as a case where a visually challenged person is being explained everything that is there about colours. She learns every scientific, objective, material fact about colours and then she gets her eyesight back, would she learn something new?

Strengthening the Negelean perspective of subjectivity and subjective experience, it could be said that Jackson's thought experiment favours that whenever Mary comes out from her closed chamber, she would experience and learn something new. On the other hand, Dennett (1988) argues that Jackson's Mary thought experiment fails to give a scientific explanation possible rather it commits a fallacy of circularity. We cannot appeal to mere intuition about something to prove what we believe because our intuition already flows from our belief. To say that objective facts can capture all the aspects of consciousness, we should be a bit careful about what may intuitively feel right. Dennett maintains that Mary will not learn anything new when she comes out of her confined space if she *really and truly* knows everything there is to know about colours. Dennett responds stating that heterophenomenology can better explain any colour sensibility or qualia and nothing new can be learnt from the perception of a coloured object. For instance, Robomary, a robot, if filled with all the material and objective knowledge about colours, and if a screen is placed in front of its light receptors; this screen makes Robomary receive only black and white light, however when that screen is lifted it would receive the light of all colours. But, that would not, in any case, increase the information that Robomary already has.

Justifying the above theoretical position concerning the absence of any new knowledge for Mary as well as Robomary, David Lewis (1988) mentions that knowledge can be looked at in two different lights, *knowledge that* and *knowledge how*. The illustration of these two viewpoints about knowledge shows that *knowledge that* is about information, whereas *knowledge how* represents a case of ability. According to Lewis, Mary would not learn any new information or acquire a new knowledge; rather she would acquire the ability to recognize the colour. So, this

thought experiment does not, according to Lewis, pose any challenge to physicalism. This is evident in Jackson's thesis that Mary *knows everything* about colour. To say that Mary knows everything about colour, what extra or new could be added! Dennett in one of his recent writings also highlights the puzzle of *knowing everything*. rather, he wonders about the very possibility of knowing everything. (2013, 348). It is needless to say that Dennett's heterophenomenological explanation will be in conformity with Lewis's ability hypothesis.

David Chalmers invokes a thought experiment of philosophical zombies against Dennett's heterophenomenology. He argues that there is a logical possibility of physical twins of human beings who do not have a phenomenal experience, yet they are indistinguishable on the basis of their physical form and activity. In this regard, Chalmer's thought experiment also responds to Lewis' ability hypothesis. For Chalmers (1996), if qualia are to be captured in a physical or material explanation, there must be another fundamental property (like space and time) that captures these or these phenomenal properties themselves could be the basic physical properties and hence not explainable in terms of other physical properties. Chalmers also invokes the inverted qualia thought experiment proposed by Shoemaker (1982) and argues that even in the case of inverted spectrum; it is not possible to draw an intersubjective comparison. Hence, reductive theories fail at capturing the hard problem of consciousness⁵.

The notion of qualia or phenomenal experience is central to the discourse of hard problems of consciousness. Chalmers believes that it is *hard* to explain the phenomenal or the subjective element of consciousness with the physical explanation. Consciousness is entirely irreducible to the neurophysiological process of the brain which is favourably explained by heterophenomenology. However, the irreducible subjective character/property of the experience remains a concern for the physicalists' theory of mind. The non-reductive account of the phenomenal consciousness shows that conscious subjective experiences are ineffable but not *private* in the

⁵ Tye (2006) holds a view that one can uphold qualia realism without having to adhere to either the inverted spectrum problem or the absent qualia argument. Absent qualia argument is propounded by Block (1978) in his attempt to show how a functionalist account may fail to account for the qualitative experience.

Wittgensteinian sense. (Pradhan, 2002). Subjective experience can still be a part of interpersonal communication and therefore, not private in terms of ineffability.⁶ The reason why reductive accounts of qualia feel intuitively incoherent comes from the aesthetic response that different people (may) have different responses for the same objectively available stimulant. To deny the subjectivity of phenomenal experience would amount to the denial of the aesthetic categories such as appreciation of beauty. A reductive theory needs to explain why a physical pattern of vibrations in the air (music) or a trail of differential reflections from a surface made of material atoms (a painting) would generate different responses in two human beings whose material brain is composed of the same proteins and tissues. Thus, the heterophenomenological explanation based on the brain function will not be adequate to explain qualia. Qualia is indubitably a subjective phenomenal experience. Being subjective is intrinsic to the person's consciousness. This intrinsic relation is not devoid of intentionality. The qualia theorists maintain the view that phenomenal experience per se is formed by the intentional feature of the consciousness, contrary to this view the physicalists like Dennett, as we have discussed, uphold those qualia as non-intentional, non-intrinsic features of consciousness. It is nothing more than the function of brain processes. Hence, the physicalists' argument to quine qualia does not accept the phenomenal content of consciousness. Dennett in this connection relies on a heterophenomenological explanation of qualia. Hence, quining qualia has been a popular slogan for the reductionists.

Un-quining Qualia

The non-reductionist philosophers of mind certainly express their strong resentment against the reductionist notion of explaining qualia from the objective third person account. Qualia being intrinsic to experiences has first person accessibility which implies *what it is like* to have an experience. (Langsam 2000, 270) The experience is about a subjective feeling and here in our discussion Robert Frost, the poet, knows *what he feels like* while passing through the woods. It is therefore obvious that Frost knows or is aware of *what it feels like* to him. The content of this experiential state of the Poet is only disclosed to us when he says that 'the woods are

⁶ There are other works like Levine (1983), Searle (1992) where one can find arguments in favour of qualitative character of experience.

lovely, dark and deep'. This lovely experience of Frost could be characterized as intentional as he finds the experience enjoyable. The intentional characterization here shows his involvement in the perceptual experience of the woods and narrating its beauty to us.

However, one might say that the 'experiential content' is different from the 'the content of thought', as maintained by Langsam (2000, 273) The content of thought is about what could be shared by the experiencer that comes out as his judgment or understanding about the given experience. For us the relationship between the act of experiencing and having a thought concerning the experience is intentional because there are no two different forms of intentionality. Rather, intentionality of consciousness has a unifying feature. While explaining the structure of experience, John Searle (1992) refers to a dozen structural features, and the feature of unity is one among them. Consciousness has a characteristic feature that unifies the experience horizontally and vertically. The horizontal unification refers to organization of experience over a period of time, whereas the vertical unification signifies experiencing multiple things simultaneously. (1992, 130) Certain experiences are gathered eventually, meaning thereby that they do not remain in the forms of bits and pieces, rather are unified so far as their association with the self is concerned. Frost's experience of the woods might have resulted from his experience of walking and his general attitude towards nature. Burst may not have that attitude at all and he might find the woods disgusting. The point here is experiences are essentially related to the self, whether it is a disgusting experience concerning the walking on a forest side, or a beautiful one as Frost describes. It only suggests in the discourse of qualia that the subjectivity of experience is something unique.

Dennett has shown in his various thought experiments that the concept of qualia is vague mainly the way it has been defined and known. He calls qualia as an *elan vital* to the philosophy of mind. (Dennett 1988) The vagueness of the explanation of qualia lies in its mode of accessing through introspection as well as the person's infallible claim about having phenomenal experience. It is often found that the person might pretend to have some experience, but assume here that Frost is not pretending, rather genuinely believing what he experiences while walking by the woods as he tells us there are miles to walk. Even if his words are taken literally, it

only justifies his pleasant experience of being there on the sight of the woods. Thus, qualia are known to us immediately and directly, and we would like to show this with the help of the following arguments.

As we have discussed two cases of poet Frost and another person named Burst, they both had different experiences when they passed by the woods. The woods out there in both the cases are one and the same. Moreover, for the sake of the argument, let us consider that both individuals, though passed the woods on different days, happened to be at the same point at the same time of the day. To put it differently, both of those individuals were at point X in front of the woods at 6:00 PM on Tuesday and Wednesday respectively. Let us further consider that the sunlight, the wind speed and other factors that affect light are exactly the same on both the days. Given these physically measurable and calculatable factors were exactly the same on both the days, so the light falling on the eyes of both the spectators should have the same effect, at least the physical effect.

However, we know this as an empirical fact that two individuals can have a different aesthetic response to the same stimulus; therefore, one can argue that there must be something subjectively different in the experience of both the individuals. John Hyman (2002) argues in similar lines in his defence about the aesthetic categories, if beauty was a result of something out there in the world, then it could be proved by a mathematical theorem. But this is not the case, as one could claim in the same breath that Frost finds the sight of woods to be lovely because of its darkness and that Burst finds woods to be grotesque because of its darkness, and it would not be self-contradictory. The reason for this lies in the fact that any such reason is not a conclusive proof. As Hyman writes, "...root of beauty lies in an individual person's sensibility, and hence that beauty is relative [subjective] to every individual." (2002, 89) A person experiences beauty and shares these experiences for making others feel *what it is like*. The fulfilment of experience not only lies in experiencing something but also in sharing it.

Going back to the coffee taster example presented by Dennett, one could argue that even if the coffee tasters are not able to figure out by introspection why they no longer like the taste, they are sure about how coffee is tasting to them, so one

could see a distinction between ‘how’ and ‘why’ of subjective experience also reiterates Searle’s treatment of the phenomenal experience. Searle (1992, 1997) argues that any attempt to understand the phenomenal experience from a strictly objective third-person point of view may at best be seen as a category mistake. This category mistake is a result of the confusion about how one understands the subjective-objective distinction⁷. According to Searle, there are two ways one can draw the subjective-objective distinction, one is *epistemic*, and the other is *ontological*. (Searle 1997, 122) What Dennett was able to show with the help of his proposed thought experiments, is that phenomenal experiences may not be subjective in the *epistemic* sense, and what we have tried to show through our analysis of aesthetic response theory is that qualia are subjective in the *ontological* sense. The ontology of qualia is associated with the ontology of experience. To deny the subjectivity of experience and more importantly the uniqueness of that subjective experience, is to strongly reject the aesthetic thoughts and experiences.

Searle explains that if a knowledge claim cannot be settled without taking a third-person point of view, then it is objective in the *epistemic* sense, and if it can be, then it is subjective. In cases where an experience or an entity needs a subject for its existence then it is subjective in the ontological sense, if the existence is not contingent upon any subject, then it is objective in the ontological sense. So, when X and Y failed to settle the fact by introspection, *why they no longer like the taste of the coffee*; it showed that this is an objective fact in the epistemic sense because in any case they need outside help to arrive at the actual reason. And at the same time, their subjective experience that *they no longer like the taste of the coffee* (or the fact that they no longer like the way the coffee tastes to them) is a subjective fact in the ontological sense.

The subjective experience, so far as accessibility conditions are concerned, signifies an epistemic relation. In other words, it is about the experience of experiential content. For Frost, this is an epistemic expression about the beauty of a snowy evening in the woods. This is not about how the world appears to a person,

⁷ The idea of category mistake was originally proposed by Gilbert Ryle (1949) as a critique of Descartes’ mind-body dualism.

instead how one *understands* or interprets the given situation. Here, the notion of understanding is about understanding the content of experience, which is necessarily *lovely* for the poet. The irreducibility thesis of qualia here not only emphasizes on the epistemic relation but also points out that it is an objective fact about human life. Searle (1992) emphatically suggests that this subjectivity is an objective fact. However, for him, the objectivity of experience is conditioned by irreducibly subjective intentionality. Since intentionality is an evolutionary feature and functionally depends on the brain processes, one might question whether such a view on the intentionality of experience is compatible with Dennett's quining qualia. There is a direct incompatibility so far as the irreducibility thesis is concerned, but when it comes to naturalist's metaphysics of qualia, then both Searle and Dennett believe in one ontology that is the ontology of the brain or the matter. This is a limitation in Searle's thesis. (Searle 1983, 1992 and Dennett 1969) However, the most important point of study in this context is how qualia remain an irreducible first-person experience.

No doubt, Searle remains an anti-reductionist while suggesting that intentional subjective experiences are qualitatively different from person to person. Similarly, Pradhan's argument against quining qualia does not confine to the naturalistic consideration, rather it goes beyond and argues in favour of metaphysics of consciousness in the line with Kant and Husserl. Consciousness, which is the basis of all kinds of experiences, is transcendental. The transcendental thesis maintains a non-causal account of experience. Since we are arguing in favour of unquining qualia, the irreducibility thesis strengthens our viewpoint and also helps in explicating the inadequacy that Pradhan's thesis encounters. Hence, we will try to expound his thesis a little further with reference to the notion of experience and understanding which has some Kantian implications.

Frost's expressions such as 'lovely woods', and 'the darkness in the woods' are expressions of qualia, so is the case with 'coffee tasters'. All experiences such as these are experiences concerning qualia. These experiences are expressed sometimes in a negative manner, for instance, the coffee taster does not like the tastes of the coffee. Rather the coffee taster gives his judgement about the quality of coffee served. Here it is a case of aesthetic judgement. The epistemic content is much more explicit

if it comes in the form of a judgement that discloses the knower's understanding explicitly. Similarly praising beauty explicitly has epistemic content. In these cases, the act of description is not fictional, rather involves descriptions that *actually* match with the reality that is experienced. It is a matter of accuracy based on expertise – that is the ability to interpret how something is the case. That is about the ability to evaluate the *purposiveness* of the object of experience. Immanuel Kant, while explaining the nature of aesthetic judgement, tries to show that aesthetic taste also has a purpose. Beauty is defined as a form of purposiveness and that is mostly judged on the basis of how it is being presented. (Korner 1955, 184) The presentation is about the given and how the given is being experienced and shared in the form of representation. The representation is about *seeing as*. There is a sense of subjectivity associated with the representation. There could be some difference between the way things are and how they are being experienced. The challenges lie in minimizing this difference so far as accuracy is concerned, because all seeing must aspire for *seeing as it is*.

However, the qualitative nature of these expressions has aesthetic significance; they are *responses to* aesthetic experience. They are not ordinary perceptual experiences. No doubt they could make qualia which are non-aesthetic. For instance, the suffering of poverty for a person of a poor background would differ from the experience of someone who has suddenly been bankrupted. The qualitative nature of experience is thus about how one undergoes an experience and feels about it. The feeling is not merely an appearance, rather it is shared in the form of an evaluative judgement. Frost's experience of beauty on a snowy evening in the woods is not only about feeling good, but it also reminds him about his commitment in life. Hence, he responds by showing the difference between what is given and how one has to look beyond the given. There is an epistemic element to aesthetic expressions that is expressed when the subject feels 'it is good or lovely'. The expression of this feeling is not to ascribe any property. Love is not a property - in naturalistic terms as beauty is not a property.

Similarly, the expression 'miles to go' shows how symbolically these expressions are used and refer to 'a way of looking' or as Ludwig Wittgenstein calls '*seeing things as something*'. To say it is symbolic, in Kantian terminology, is to refer

to ‘a mode of seeing and grasping the aesthetic content of aesthetic experience that is based on the aesthetic intention of the perceiver.’ (Roy 1991, 36) The intentionality of the experience constitutes the ‘presence of a being’ and how it is disclosed to the subject – the experiencer – in the way of living in the presence of the experiential object. Seeking an ontology for phenomenal experience may refer to the subjectivity that is very much part of one’s way ‘looking at things which is about a pre-predicative *looking as*’ (Roy 1991, 42) By saying this, it does not imply that it is non-cognitive, rather in Kantian terminology this is about aesthetic awareness that involves an interplay of imagination and understanding. When the poet expresses his experience, he is sharing it. It is because, ‘being beautiful concerns the sharable or public features of aesthetic experience.’ (Korner 1955, 184) Sharing is an important part of human subjective experience. The objectivity question follows from the notion of sharing and communication. In our day-to-day life as well, one can find instances where people can be sure about what seems pleasant, lovely or delicious to them without being able to provide a reason for why it is so. So, it is not just that the thought experiments, which describe in-principle the possibility of a situation, where the irreducibility thesis of subjective qualitative experience can be upheld; it can also be shown by theorizing the examples that are available to us, in practice.

Conclusion

To conclude, we can see how Dennett using his ingenious thought experiments tries to show that an individual who is claimed to be the authority on his or her own subjective qualitative experience fails to decipher on his or her own whether his or her qualia receptors or neural connections have been changed. This brings into question the immediacy and direct accessibility characteristics/properties of qualia. Dennett argues from this that the pre-theoretic intuitions cloud the concept of qualia, and if they are correctly scrutinised, most of them disappear. We have also seen some of the significant arguments provided by philosophers who argue for non-reducibility of the subjective qualitative experience into the strict physicalist account.

Based on the thought experiment proposed by Dennett, we added a few more scenarios. We try to show with reference to Searle, that there can be two ways to look at the subjective qualitative experience, one could be about *why* one is experiencing what he is experiencing and the other is about *how* one is experiencing, and we

concluded that the subjective aspect is more concerned with the latter. The subjectivity of experience is central to the discourse of qualia having a content that has epistemic, aesthetic and moral significance. The causal explanation of the content in terms of certain artificial or biological mechanisms will not only *explain away qualia* but also will deny the presence of self and its subjectivity. The scientific explanation of subjective tastes, likeness and dislikes, pleasure, etc. in terms of neural and other bodily functions and dispositions will indeed disclose the complex constitutive elements of human organisms. But whether it will be able to explain human subjectivity, the ability of imagination and understanding, is difficult to conclude at this point. However, Dennett's thesis tries to highlight the significance of physicalists' approach having an objective explanation of qualia. This is a method of objectification of the epistemic-aesthetic and moral content of qualia.

However, some of the important philosophical explanations of human consciousness, creativity concerning aesthetic taste and judgment shows that human consciousness transcends the realm of the given. Transcending the intentionality of consciousness shows a newer dimension of creativity that is imagined and expressed to communicate and the qualia is shared in the language of everyday life. In this context, there is a need to explain the structure of conscious experience while referring to the notion of *presentation* and *representation*. While addressing the problem of qualia, this also leads us to the question how the representationalists' thesis of experience constitutes and explains experience or phenomenal consciousness; however, this remains beyond the analytical scope of the current paper. Our central argument in conclusion is that even if the thesis of incorrigibility of qualia is disproved by Dennett, it does not weaken the thesis of qualia being strictly subjective.

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