

The Problem of Phenomenal Consciousness: A Descriptive and Categorical Analysis †

[Fenomenal Bilinç Problemi: Betimleyici ve Kategorik Bir Analiz]

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Abstract: The chief purpose of this paper is to give a descriptive and categorical analysis of the problem of phenomenal consciousness. To achieve this goal, the paper first attempts to explain why phenomenal consciousness is a puzzle for the current scientific conception of the world. This requires defining, and if it is not possible, determining the essential characters of phenomenal consciousness. Accordingly, based on the inevitable assumption that phenomenal consciousness cannot be given a satisfactory, non-circular, non-theory-based definition, the paper ventures to describe and lay out the two essential characters of phenomenal consciousness: "subjectivity" and "qualitativity." Keeping in mind that these two characters are interrelated, the paper centralize the subjective character and points out that three features of subjective character are the major obstacles for the incorporation of phenomenal consciousness to the scientific conception of the world. These are that (i) phenomenal consciousness is not a publicly observable phenomenon, that (ii) one could not observe one's own phenomenally conscious states from a third-person perspective, and that (iii) a particular phenomenally conscious state could not be experienced by more than one subject. After characterizing these three decisive features of subjectivity, the paper surveys the wide range of philosophical approaches to the problem of phenomenal consciousness such as supernaturalism, idealism, naturalistic dualism, cartesian

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dualism, non-standard scientific monism, cognitive limitationism/agnostic mysterianism and materialism/physicalism. The paper finally attempts to explain the difference between the usage of the term “materialism” and “physicalism” in the literature and points out that materialism or physicalism is the most commonly defended naturalistic thesis to explain the nature of phenomenal consciousness and to incorporate it to the scientific conception of the world by explaining its essential characters only in terms of ontologically fundamental entities of current physical and biological sciences.

Keywords: mind, consciousness, phenomenal consciousness, self-consciousness, subjectivity, qualitativity, naturalism, materialism, physicalism.

1. Why Is Phenomenal Consciousness A Puzzle?

For millennia, philosophers have been asking numerous perplexing questions about the nature of the world and of the human being. Some have been solved, at least within the current conceptions of what counts as a solution to philosophical problems, but some have been continuing to confuse minds. It is true that philosophers have made a lot of progress in understanding the material world. This was not achieved by mere philosophical thinking, of course. Modern physicists and chemists have revealed many aspects of the nature of the material world. Modern biologists, too, have discovered quite many physical features of living organisms. What we see around us including our physical bodies as well as the realms of animals and plants, mountains, oceans, celestial objects, etc. are now much less mysterious to us than they were to those who lived a couple of centuries ago. Not only these material objects but also phenomena resulting from the interactions between material objects, such as electricity, radiation, electromagnetism, gravitation, etc. are now less puzzling than before. As a result, philosophers and scientists developed a rightful self-confidence in their belief that physical and biological sciences can in principle explain all the phenomena there are in the world.

There are, however, some recalcitrant phenomena that damage this self-confidence—phenomena that have not been adequately explained for thousands of years. Phenomenal consciousness¹ (among other mental phenomena) is specifically one of them. It appears to be one of the most mysterious phenomena in the world. How can a mere material substance like a

¹ When used as an adjective attached to ‘consciousness,’ the term ‘phenomenal’ expresses an intrinsic quality of conscious mental states, which will be explained in more detail shortly. The term is being used in different senses in a variety of philosophical contexts, however. The readers should not be confused by other usages of the term throughout this thesis, and only keep in mind its specific use in the given context.

slushy brain possess such an astonishing and mysterious feature? Suppose you know little about human biology and have never seen an image of the human brain or any part of it. And someone shows you a close-up image of neuronal activity in the brain on a screen. There is no way for you to figure out why such brain activities would be accompanied by such an amazing phenomenon like consciousness, and why, cell activities, say, in plants would not. What is more is that there seems to be no way to figure out why a given human brain is accompanied by *this* particular phenomenal consciousness but not *that* one. On the other hand, someone with appropriate knowledge about the behavior of H₂O molecules might predict many of the surface features of water like liquidity and transparency.

The comparison between phenomenal consciousness and other natural phenomena shows that phenomenal consciousness is more mysterious than any other enigmatic phenomena around us. This paper does not aim to offer a satisfying explanation to this so-far-unexplained phenomenon, but instead aims to give a descriptive and categorical analysis of the problem. One might rightly question the benefit of such an analysis. It is neither an unnecessary endeavor nor a useless attempt since in order to understand the nature of phenomenal consciousness, one needs to locate the problem properly first and posit it among the others correctly. One also needs to determine how to approach to the problem in order to anticipate the possible solutions. Let us first focus on the very concept of phenomenal consciousness then.

2. What is Phenomenal Consciousness?

What kind of phenomenon is phenomenal consciousness then? It is really hard to give a satisfactory definition of phenomenal consciousness. For one thing, any such definition will require one or other non-agreed-upon theory of consciousness. For another thing, the term 'consciousness' itself² is used with many different meanings. But we can begin with some of these different meanings, and then get a grip on the phenomenal consciousness of a creature. The term 'consciousness' can mean, for example, "wakefulness" as in the sentence "The patient regained her consciousness," or mean "awareness" as in the sentences "I am conscious of the situation we are in," and "You should be

² I assume no difference between the adjective form 'conscious' and the noun form 'consciousness' in terms of ontological commitments. The noun form is just an abstraction of the property attributed by the adjective form.

more conscious environmentally." 'Consciousness' can also mean "sentience" as in the sentence "This alien creature is a conscious being; it can sense the stimuli." And finally, the term can indicate "self-awareness," meaning "the awareness of one's own awareness," as in the sentence "Infants and most animals are not self-conscious."

In one sense, the variety of usages for 'consciousness' does not help us understand phenomenal consciousness in a better way unfortunately. It might complicate the issue. In another sense, however, the various employments of the term 'consciousness' present a rich set of tools to comprehend different aspects of consciousness. All in all, the employment of the term in quite different contexts does not mean we cannot speak of the nature of phenomenal consciousness. We can at least describe or characterize crucial aspects of its nature. This may involve using synonyms or metaphors or giving examples. Nowadays, philosophers use several terms to characterize the whole or some part of the nature of phenomenal consciousness, such as "experiential character," "subjective feel," "raw (sensory) feel," and Thomas Nagel's famous term "what-it-is-likeness" (Nagel 1974) of having a mind and mental states. These terms are basically aimed to distinguish phenomenally conscious beings from other types of being. I am phenomenally conscious, for example, but the computer I am using now to type these lines is not, because I *experience* several (visual, auditory, tactile, etc.) aspects of the writing activity at this moment; I can be in various emotional states (like joy, sadness, fear, anger, etc.) having *qualitative characters*; I sometimes desire things (wanting a cup of Turkish coffee, longing for a person, hoping to see a movie, etc.) and my desires involve *subjective feels*; and *there is something it is like* to be me in general. Nevertheless, my computer lacks all these features. It is not capable of experiencing anything. It is not phenomenally conscious. In fact, it does not have any type of consciousness at all; neither do any other non-living objects around me like tables, chairs, bookshelves, etc.

The notion of "experience" is usually taken to be definitive of phenomenal consciousness. But here we should carefully note that some phenomena such as blindsight³ motivate philosophers to interpret the nature of an "experience" in

³ Blindsight patients suffer from a complete blindness in *some area* of their visual field because of some damage on their retina or in a certain part of their brain. On specifically designed experiments, they nevertheless surprisingly guess with a high degree of correctness what is happening visually on the area to which they are blind to, though they insist that they do not see anything at all. This is taken by many to imply that these

two fundamentally different directions. In one direction, some interpret an experience as essentially involving a *subjective feel*, which is what exactly constitutes the phenomenality of consciousness. So, on this construal phenomenal consciousness can be equated with experience. In another direction, on the other hand, some construe experience as involving merely a *distinctive feel*, a purely qualitative character that nevertheless lacks subjectivity. On this construal, therefore, an experience can be *non-conscious*, and thus cannot be equated with the phenomenality of consciousness. We may call the former construal of experience “subjective construal” and the latter one “qualitative construal.” Accordingly, if you are inclined towards the subjective construal, cases that involve qualitativity but lack subjectivity (or awareness of a subject) do not exhibit an experience for you. If you adopt the qualitative construal, on the other hand, you hold that the same cases present experiences that are non-conscious. It seems that the subjective construal of experience is more intuitively appealing. When asked, ordinary people would say “I would not call ‘experience’ those mental states that occur without a full-blooded awareness.” I will use the term ‘experience’ and ‘experiential’ in this more intuitive sense based on the subjective construal in the rest of the paper.

There is another way to interpret those special cases that involve qualitativity but lack a subject’s awareness. Adopting the qualitative construal, one may here think that subjects of those cases have phenomenal consciousness but lack a kind of non-phenomenal consciousness that Ned Block calls “access consciousness” (1995). According to Block, a mental state is access conscious if, in virtue of having that state, a subject can use its content for rational inference, deliberate control of behavior, and verbal report. Accordingly, blindsight patients are not access conscious of the blind areas in their visual fields since they do not satisfy any of the above three conditions, though they are phenomenally conscious (when qualitatively construed) of the same areas since they are able to correctly guess what is happening visually there albeit being unaware of it.

So far, we have been speaking of phenomenal consciousness as a feature of creatures; i.e. as a creature’s being phenomenally conscious. It is clear that if a creature is a phenomenally conscious being, then some relevant components involved in the conscious domain of that creature will also be said to be

patients are non-conscious of their visual experiences on those areas, which means they have *non-conscious experience*. But, I believe, there are two different conceptions of “experience” in play here.

phenomenally conscious. If I am phenomenally conscious at the moment, then the current relevant *mental states* of mine can be said to be phenomenally conscious as well. The same goes for the properties of those mental states, and for the processes and events occurring in my mind when I am phenomenally conscious. They are phenomenally conscious *mental states, processes, events and properties* too.

Are there *conscious* mental states that do not involve an experiential character or any phenomenology? It seems that there are. Our brain, for example, processes a lot of information when we are asleep or even when we are awake without our phenomenal awareness. They may not have any *subjective feel*. So, we are not *phenomenally* conscious of those processes though we may be capable of cognitively employing the information processed. We may control our behaviors based on that information; and we may even give a verbal report of the information being processed without phenomenally experiencing any *subjective* and *qualitative* features involved. These and some other similar mental processes that David Chalmers calls the “easy problem” of mentality (Chalmers 1996 and 2003) do not pose a serious threat to the scientific conception of the world as phenomenal consciousness does.

3. Why Does Phenomenal Consciousness Resist to the Scientific Conception of the World?

Returning to our original problem, phenomenal consciousness described above as having experiential (subjective and qualitative) character resists to the scientific conception of the world in two ways: metaphysical and epistemological. Metaphysically speaking, most contemporary scientists and philosophers believe that whatever is involved in any observable phenomena of the world is included on the list of ontologically fundamental entities of physical and biological sciences—the list that only comprises material/physical entities. In other words, there exists nothing beyond the fundamental entities studied by physics and biology. Is phenomenal consciousness included on that list too? Is it something material/physical (or functional, realized by material/physical entities)? You might think it must be, in accordance with your scientific conception of the world. But most people have intuitions that phenomenal consciousness presents qualities that can hardly be included on the list of ontologically fundamental entities of physics and biology. These

qualities are the ones that are related to the subjective and qualitative aspects of phenomenal consciousness.

The situation is not better when you think of the issue epistemologically. There are tools (like observation and experimentation) that are legitimate to use in science to acquire knowledge of nature. If phenomenal consciousness is material/physical, then we must be able to acquire knowledge also of phenomenal consciousness using those tools. But how are we going to do that while we are having trouble in understanding even its most basic qualities and do not know the proper way of understanding its nature? Using scientific tools to comprehend the nature of phenomenal consciousness seems to give no philosophical insight into it at all. This is why we need philosophical tools over and above the scientific ones to understand it.

To illustrate the metaphysical and epistemological predicament we face in the case of phenomenal consciousness, suppose that I am having a perceptual experience with a subjective and qualitative character: I am looking at and touching the red leather case of my camera on the table at this very moment. Clearly a lot of physical/chemical, neurological and cognitive processes are occurring in my brain during this experience of mine. But these processes supposedly involve only material entities that can be perfectly analyzed in depth by physicists/chemists, neurologists and cognitive scientists. Nevertheless, my experiencing the perception of the red leather case has subjective and qualitative features too. My experience is distinctively subjective since no one else can have *the one and the same* experience: I have the strong feeling that it is only *my* experience, and no one else can be subjected to this experience as *my experience*. Someone else can, perhaps, have an experience qualitatively identical to mine, but that would be a numerically different experience than mine, which is very unique and private to my mental life.

Furthermore, the experience I am having of the perception of red leather case presents certain distinctive qualities—called “qualia” in the literature—such as the redness and softness that I enjoy in the domain of my consciousness. These distinctive qualities do not seem to be features of the thing I perceive—the red leather case of my camera. For when I close my eyes and visualize the same object I perceived a moment ago, I am still presented the same qualitative features. Even in the absence of the object of my perception, my experience of visualizing the red leather case has the same kind of visual qualities: redness,

opaqueness, softness of texture, etc. It is these qualities and subjectivity that scientists have to explain in material/physical terms, but so far could not.

There is one further issue concerning phenomenal consciousness, which is fundamentally relevant to the subjective character of phenomenal consciousness: the problem of the “sense of self.”⁴ We might deny that there is a “self-like entity” within our existence, adopting a nominalist stance or Humean position embracing his bundle theory of mind, but we must admit that there is at least an undeniable “sense of self” that we feel when we turn into our inner mental lives. This sense of self might be an illusion corresponding to nothing, ontologically speaking, as the Humean position claims, but we cannot deny the existence of the “sense” itself. And there must be a reason for its existence. We must at least investigate why there is a sense like that. I believe an adequate answer would be quite relevant to, and even be definitive of the nature of subjectivity and qualitative features of mind. Most philosophers of mind usually prefer not to deal with this problem when they examine subjectivity and qualitativity. It is because of the Humean position they adopt and their belief that the sense of self we feel should ultimately be dissolved when the true nature of subjectivity and qualia is completely revealed. Nevertheless, this is mistaken since the sense of self might not be a product of but may directly or indirectly be a constitutive element of phenomenal consciousness. Besides, the sense of self being experienced by a conscious subject could also be treated as evidence for the *substantial existence of a phenomenal subject*, which supposedly inheres in that conscious subject. So, it deserves an equal attention in any research and study concerning phenomenal consciousness as subjectivity and qualia receive.

Having clarified the essential features of phenomenal consciousness this way, there are several reasons for the resistance of phenomenal consciousness to the incorporation to the scientific conception of the world. Two methodological ones, which I call epistemological barriers, are the following. First, phenomenal consciousness is not a publicly observable phenomenon. Whatever we see around us, including every part of our material bodies, can be examined publicly by more than one observer at the same time. We can check whether what we suppose exists or is happening at a given time is the same as what others observe exists or is happening at the same time. We can at least

⁴ I have described the notion of “the sense of self” as “the sense of I-ness” and attempted to investigate its ontological status thoroughly in a previous paper written in Turkish. See Arıcı (2015).

intelligibly assume that we and others are in the same epistemological position with respect to a material being or an event involving material entities. I can quite rationally assume that the red leather case of my camera on my desk can be equally observed and examined by other people with an equal epistemological status. The same goes for the events occurring around me. I can compare what I am observing to be happening at a certain time, say raining outside of my house, with what others observe to be happening at the same time in the same location, and find out if the features of the event of raining are presented to me and the others in the same way. Phenomenal consciousness, on the other hand, cannot be observed publicly—whether it is considered to be a thing or event. The phenomenon of consciousness literally belongs to a subjective and very private domain, which prevents it to be examined from a third-person perspective. We can open up someone's skull and observe the neurobiological processes happening in the brain and examine the relevant material elements, but we cannot observe and examine (from the third-person or public perspective) phenomenal events (which have subjective and qualitative features) supposedly occurring in the same location.

Second, investigating the nature of phenomenal consciousness is a reflexive or self-investigative action. I cannot observe and examine someone else's phenomenal experiences from the public perspective. But can I not observe and examine my own phenomenal experiences from the public perspective as I myself can surely observe and examine the neurobiological events of my own brain, say with the help of mirrors or cameras and monitors? No. Examining our own phenomenal consciousness is a self-investigative effort that can be done only from our very own first-person perspective, which also makes the investigation itself epistemologically subjective and closed to third parties—other epistemic agents. It is clear that investigating phenomenally conscious events is fundamentally epistemologically different from all other investigations of natural phenomena in the world.

In addition to these two methodological reasons, the core idea and fact of subjectivity as explained above, which is that a particular phenomenally conscious state could not be experienced by more than one subject, also presents an obstacle for the incorporation of phenomenal consciousness to the scientific conception of the world. To illustrate this predicament, suppose you are currently experiencing a particular type of headache resulting from sitting in front of a computer for a long duration. This particular headache of you is

obviously quite private to you. Now consider the possibility of someone else's experiencing the one and the same token of headache you are just experiencing. You immediately realize that whenever you try to do this, you somehow begin to lose the sense of differentiation between you and other phenomenally conscious subjects.

Consequently, these epistemological barriers do not allow the scientific method to treat the conscious phenomena in the same way it does other natural phenomena. Phenomenal consciousness with its fundamentally different character explained so far damages the self-confidence scientists and philosophers achieved for the last couple of centuries. This even causes some to believe that physical and biological sciences cannot even in principle reveal the real nature of phenomenal consciousness since its purportedly non-physical qualities are beyond the scope of these sciences (Chalmers 1996 and 2003; Strawson 2000; and Stoljar 2001). It is because of this reason that we will investigate whether a naturalist explanation of phenomenal consciousness can be given within a completely materialist framework.

4. What Are the Possible Naturalistic and Non-Naturalistic Approaches to Phenomenal Consciousness?

The problem of phenomenal consciousness as presented above is a problem from two standpoints: naturalistic and scientific. Though it has no precise meaning in philosophy, naturalism in contemporary philosophy basically stimulates the ontological principle that nature (as substances, properties, relations, etc.) is all that there is. There is nothing "supernatural" (Kim 2003). And epistemologically speaking, the doctrine simply urges the idea that in investigating reality, philosophy should always be in close contact with the scientific method. Considered as such, we may think of these two standpoints as a single one, and call it the "standpoint of *empirical philosophy*," which emphasizes several metaphysical and epistemological assumptions common to Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophy and modern science. We have to ask, on the other hand, whether phenomenal consciousness presents itself as a problem from other standpoints. The answer is clearly "yes." But the character of the problem, and thus the central questions raised around the issue, changes depending on the standpoint one adopts. If one's philosophical stance, for example, embraces supernatural entities, one will still want to explain things within the nature of phenomenal consciousness, but integrating phenomenal

consciousness into our scientific conception of the world will be neither a central nor a subordinate issue that has to be dealt with.

What makes phenomenal consciousness a puzzle for the naturalist and scientific conception of the world then? Is it because of its metaphysical character or because of our epistemic access (or lack of access) to its nature? It is certainly because of both. In fact, the metaphysical character determines the conditions of our epistemic access to it. And the conditions of our epistemic access to it determine how much we can know about its metaphysical character. But the question of its metaphysical character has become a more central issue among philosophers of mind because of the popularity of naturalism. For many, naturalizing mind (the project of integrating our conception of mind into our scientific conception of the world, i.e. explaining mind in terms that refer only to natural properties) will also provide answers to metaphysical issues regarding phenomenal consciousness. It is the materialistic view which is the background ideology behind the project of naturalizing mind. On the metaphysical level, the materialistic view claims that everything that exists is material; there is nothing above and beyond material entities. On the epistemological level, the view basically adopts the scientific approach and defends the claim that every truth is a scientific (or physical) truth and that to know about nature we need only employ standard empirical methods guided by relevant rational tools.

Let us now briefly look at several possible approaches to the problem of phenomenal consciousness. We can then go into further details of the materialistic approach. We have already said a few things about the naturalist project. What we should additionally distinguish under this project is between (i) the standard scientific view and (ii) the non-standard scientific view. Under (i), we should cite (1) the materialist approach, which will be our chief concern in the rest of the paper. Under (ii), we can cite three approaches: (2) naturalistic dualism, (3) non-standard scientific monism, and (4) cognitive limitationism. There can of course be a non-naturalist approach to the problem of phenomenal consciousness as well. Under this approach, we should cite (5) supernaturalism and (6) idealism. What follows are brief descriptions of these six approaches.

4.1. Non-Naturalistic Approaches

(i) *Supernaturalism*: One approach to the problem is to think that phenomenal consciousness is not part of nature. It is wholly or partially *supernatural*. Thus,

we cannot acquire knowledge of phenomenal consciousness by standard philosophical/scientific (or rational/empirical) methods. In order to know about its nature, we have to have access into its *supernatural nature*. Human cognitive capacity might include this access, or it might not, we do not know. That is another issue. The crucial thing here is that if phenomenal consciousness is wholly or partially supernatural, standard rational/empirical methods will not suffice to acquire knowledge about its nature. We will need non-standard methods to investigate it.

(ii) *Idealism*: Another approach to phenomenal consciousness within non-naturalism is to see the whole reality as consisting merely of consciousness, but not matter. Consciousness is what there is and is the ground of everything that exists. This is a monistic view, but completely the opposite of materialistic monism. According to this approach, what we can know about the world is obviously not about something material, but rather is only the content of our own phenomenal consciousness. So, epistemological methods designed to know about the material world will not work in knowing about phenomenal consciousness. To know about phenomenal consciousness, we need epistemological methods compatible with the metaphysical world view of idealism.

4.2. Naturalistic Approaches

(i) *Naturalistic Dualism*: Under naturalistic approaches, the naturalistic dualism considers the reality as consisting of two fundamental elements: mind and matter. As opposed to common treatment, this view should be still considered naturalistic because mind and matter are still considered to be the basic metaphysical components of nature. If the reality consists of the facts of these two distinct substances, however, methods of acquiring knowledge of these facts will clearly differ. Ways to know about matter will not be the same as ways to know about mind. And since phenomenal consciousness is the most crucial characteristic of mind, to know about phenomenal consciousness, we will need different epistemological apparatuses than those we might be using in knowing about matter, such as empirical and rational tools. Here we should keep in mind that unlike the naturalistic dualism we are evaluating here, Cartesian dualism could be regarded as non-naturalistic if it is in fact essentially claims that mental entities are rooted in some spiritual realm.

(ii) *Cognitive Limitationism*: Another naturalistic option is to reject any supernatural theory and hold that phenomenal consciousness is part of nature. Within this approach, however, one may still believe that we cannot acquire knowledge of phenomenal consciousness either by standard rational/empirical methods or by non-standard ones. It is because of the epistemic barriers we encounter when we try to penetrate into the relevant domain epistemologically. These epistemic barriers might result from limited human cognitive capacities (such as limited conceptual abilities), or from limited biological capacities (such as limited neurobiological abilities), or from nature itself (such as the special character of conscious phenomena not allowing scientific investigation). I would like to call this approach “cognitive limitationism” or “agnostic mysterianism” It is possible to adopt such a view and claim that phenomenal consciousness is entirely closed to human cognition as Colin McGinn (1989 and 1994) and some others do.

(iii) *Non-Standard Scientific Monism*: Another option is to remain a naturalist while still rejecting that we can know about the nature of phenomenal consciousness by the standard scientific/empirical methods. According to this view, non-standard scientific tools and methods are required to know about the nature of phenomenal consciousness. The motivation for such an approach usually results from the ambiguity of our conception of the “material.” How one defines ‘material’ seems to depend on current scientific theories. But science is not static. Its dynamic and developing character at least occasionally forces one to add either new ontological categories or new properties to the categories already available on its list of ontologically fundamental entities. One may thus think that future science might comprise mental entities (including phenomenally conscious ones) or add mental properties to the existent categories on its list of ontologically fundamental entities. If this is to happen one day, it is not going to happen, the approach we are considering suggests, within the boundaries of standard scientific methods. It is because the current science studies only the *structure* and *function* of material entities (Chalmers 1996 and 2003). Its methods have been formulated in such a way that only the structural and functional properties of entities that are completely *non-mental* can be examined. Its current methods do not allow scientists to examine the properties of phenomenal consciousness, since the properties of phenomenal consciousness cannot be conceptualized under the standard scientific notions of “structure” and “function.” One may call this approach “non-standard scientific monism” or “flexible materialism” since the definition of ‘material’

depends on the dynamics of the current science. Nagel's view (1974) that in order to understand phenomenal consciousness we need a more developed conceptual system and richer set of concepts than human beings currently possess may also be subsumed under this approach.

(iv) Materialism: Within the naturalistic approach, the most orthodox approach is to hold that phenomenal consciousness is part of nature, and that we can certainly understand and know about it by standard rational/empirical methods. Indeed, no methods that involve reference to non-natural entities—methods other than the standard philosophical/scientific ones—should be used to investigate phenomenal consciousness according to this approach. This is the canonical naturalist/materialist view, which is sometimes dubbed as “scientific naturalism.” When “materialism” is defended by philosophers regarding phenomenal consciousness, their background epistemological view is something like this version of naturalism.

In addition to the term ‘materialism,’ philosophers of mind use interchangeably another term, ‘physicalism,’ though these two terms have different histories. For our purposes, we do not need to lay out their background histories, but we need to know the central assumptions behind the usage of the term ‘physicalism.’ Unlike materialism, physicalism emphasizes two additional background assumptions:

- (1) All physical sciences (physics, chemistry, astronomy, and Earth sciences) and biological sciences (including anatomy-physiology, zoology, botany, agriculture, and so on.) can ultimately be reduced to physics: All existent entities can ultimately be reduced to physical entities.
- (2) Instead of “matter,” the central notion of materialism should be “physical entity.” A physical entity is what physics tells us it is: it is defined by physical theories generated by physicists within the science of physics. Hence, not only paradigmatic material things around us are physical, but also space, time, processes, states, energy, forces like gravity, etc. are physical too.

It would not be misleading to use the terms ‘materialism’ and ‘physicalism’ interchangeably to refer to the one and the same thesis as most contemporary philosophers of mind do in the literature. Those who use ‘materialism’ only, might prefer to attract attention to the standard materialist thesis, which,

ontologically speaking, basically claims that everything that exists is material. There is nothing non-material on this thesis, where “matter” is thought to encompass the kinds of entities having standard physical properties, such as having mass, volume, momentum, energy, etc.⁵ Those who employ ‘physicalism’ only, often have in mind a notion of “physical entity” and, by using this notion, wish to emphasize *the above two assumptions*. Regardless of this distinction, however, we may think of both materialism and physicalism as aiming at the same metaphysical doctrine that everything, including whatever is involved in any mental phenomena, is material/physical, which is the only substance of the world.

It is also possible to define ‘physicalism’ based on the notion of “truth”—every truth is a physical truth—instead of defining it based on what kinds of things there are. Flanagan (1992, p. 98) calls the former “linguistic physicalism” and the latter “metaphysical physicalism,” and claims that linguistic physicalism is stronger than metaphysical physicalism and is less plausible. When criticizing Jackson’s way of defining physicalism in terms of “physical information” or “knowledge” (1982), Lycan states that linguistic physicalism is hardly entailed by materialism about mind (2003). For Lycan, what materialism about mind asserts is simply that “human beings are made entirely of physical matter and that their properties, and facts about them, consist in arrangements of that matter” (p. 385). This, however, does not entail that every proposition about a human being must express something about physical matter. The assertion allows that there may be truths about human beings, such as conceptual truths, which are not about physical matter, e.g., human beings employ concepts when thinking. It seems that Lycan is right at this point and this treatment of materialism about mind is true in general. But one should also keep in mind that in some particular cases, treatment of some anti-physical arguments such as knowledge argument requires referring to concepts such as “the complete physical truth” where one is supposed to take the core thesis of physicalism as “every truth is a physical truth.”

5. Conclusion

As I clearly indicated at the outset, this paper aimed to give a descriptive and categorical analysis of the problem of phenomenal consciousness. In order to

⁵ Historically speaking, George Berkeley, to give an example, defines matter as “an inert, senseless substance, in which extension, figure, and motion do actually subsist” (Berkeley 1710, pt. 9).

achieve this goal, I first attempted to explain why phenomenal consciousness is a puzzle. It is a puzzle because, unlike other natural phenomena that science has succeeded to explain so far, it still resists to our scientific conception of the world and we still don't know why our brain exhibits such an amazing phenomenon and why it delivers this particular phenomenon of consciousness but not another one.

Secondly, I tried to explain what phenomenal consciousness is in its essence. Though we cannot give a satisfactory, non-circular and non-theory-based definition of phenomenal consciousness, I have stated that we can at least describe it by pointing out its two essential features: subjectivity and qualitativity which make phenomenal consciousness quite extraordinary. Having a subjective character means no one else can be subjected to the one and the same experience that I am subjected to at a certain time as my experience. Having a qualitative character means my experiences, say my perception of a red rose presents certain distinctive qualities, called "qualia," such as the redness and opaqueness, which are still presented even in the absence of the red rose when I close my eyes and visualize the same red rose.

Thirdly, these two essential features of phenomenal consciousness also give us the fundamental reasons why we cannot incorporate it to the scientific conception of the world. Metaphysically speaking, phenomenal consciousness does not seem to be on the list of ontologically fundamental entities of physical and biological sciences. Since the list in question only contains material/physical entities, the subjective and qualitative characters prevent phenomenal consciousness from being included on that list. Epistemologically speaking, on the other side, the predicament is worsened. It is because we cannot use standard scientific tools such as observation and experimentation to comprehend the nature of phenomenal consciousness. It is for three reasons: (i) Phenomenal consciousness is not a publicly observable phenomenon. We cannot observe someone else's phenomenally conscious states from a third-person perspective. (ii) Unlike physical brain states, one cannot observe one's own phenomenally conscious state from a third-person perspective either. (iii) A particular phenomenally conscious state could never be experienced by more than one subject.

Finally, I concluded implicitly that currently we have neither a commonly accepted theory of phenomenal consciousness nor do we have a promising

philosophical theory that is likely to solve this recalcitrant problem in the future. Nevertheless, we have a wide range of naturalistic and non-naturalistic theories of mind and phenomenal consciousness, which present opportunities to approach to the problem of phenomenal consciousness from quite varying perspectives. Among them, we can count supernaturalism, idealism, naturalistic dualism, cartesian dualism, cognitive limitationism/agnostic mysterianism, non-standard scientific monism and materialism/physicalism. The last one, which is the most defended one among analytic philosophers in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, is the central thesis and naturalistic project that tries to incorporate phenomenal consciousness into our scientific conception of the world without giving any way to despair.

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Öz: Bu makalenin merkezi amacı fenomenal bilinç probleminin betimleyici ve kategorik bir analizini sunmak şeklindedir. Bu hedefi gerçekleştirmek için makale, ilk olarak fenomenal bilincin, çağdaş bilimsel paradigma için neden bir problem oluşturduğunu açıklamaya teşebbüs etmektedir. Doğal olarak bu görev, öncelikle fenomenal bilincin bir tanımını vermeyi, eğer bu mümkün değilse de fenomenal bilincin karakteristik niteliklerini belirlemeyi gerektirmektedir. Bu minvalde makale, fenomenal bilincin tatmin edici, döngüsel olmayan ve doğruluğu henüz gösterilememiş bir teoriye dayanmayan bir tanımının verilemeyeceği varsayımından hareketle fenomenal bilincin iki karakteristik niteliğini, “öznelik” ve “niteliksellik” niteliklerini betimleme ve detaylarını analiz etme girişiminde bulunmaktadır. Bu iki karakteristik niteliğin birbirleriyle kökten ilişkili olduğu fikrinden hareket eden makale, öznelik niteliğini merkeze almakta ve öznelik niteliğini belirleyen üç özelliğin, fenomenal bilincin çağdaş bilimsel paradigmaya entegre edilmesinin önündeki üç ana engeli oluşturduğu tespitini yapmaktadır. Bu üç özellik sırasıyla şunlardır: (i) fenomenal bilinç üçüncü şahıs perspektifinden gözlenebilen bir fenomen değildir. (ii) Fenomenal bilince sahip bir özne, kendine ait fenomenal bilinçli durumları da yine üçüncü şahıs perspektifinden gözleme imkanına sahip değildir. Ve (iii) Fenomenal bilinçli zihinsel bir durum, birden fazla özne tarafından deneyimlenebilir değildir. Öznelik niteliğinin bu üç belirleyici özelliğini açıklama girişiminde sonra makale, fenomenal bilinç problemine yönelik literatürde var olan temel felsefi yaklaşımları ana hatlarıyla ortaya koymaktadır. Bu yaklaşımlar arasında doğaüstücülük, idealizm, natüralist düalizm, Kartezyen düalizm, standart-olmayan bilimsel natüralizm, bilişsel sınırlamacılık/agnostik gizemcilik ve materyalizm/fizikalizm bulunmaktadır. Makale son olarak literatürde “materyalizm” ve “fizikalizm” terimlerinin kullanımları arasındaki farkı açıklama girişiminde bulunmakta ve fenomenal bilincin doğasını açıklamada literatürde en yaygın şekilde savunulan tezin materyalist ya da fizikalist tez olduğuna işaret etmektedir. Ayrıca makale, fenomenal bilincin karakteristik niteliklerini sadece çağdaş fizik ve biyoloji bilimlerinin kabul ettiği temel ontik kategorilere başvurmak suretiyle açıklamaya çalışan materyalist/fizikalist tezin, fenomenal bilincin çağdaş bilimsel paradigmaya entegre edilmesinde de en sık şekilde savunulan tez olduğuna vurgu yapmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: zihin, bilinç, fenomenal bilinç, öz bilinç, öznelik, niteliksellik, materyalizm, fizikalizm.

