

Revelation and the Appearance/Reality Distinction

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Abstract

It is often said that there is no appearance/reality distinction with respect to consciousness. Call this claim 'NARD'. In contemporary discussions, NARD is closely connected to the thesis of revelation, the claim that the essences of phenomenal properties are revealed in experience, though the connection between the two requires clarification. This paper distinguishes different versions of NARD and homes in on a particular version that is closely connected to revelation. It shows how revelation and the related version of NARD pose a threat to physicalism. Responses from physicalism and their limitations are also considered.

Keywords: revelation, appearance/reality distinction, phenomenal properties, identity physicalism, grounding physicalism

1. Introduction

It is often said that there is no appearance/reality distinction with respect to conscious experience, that the latter's 'appearance' is just its 'reality' (Nagel 1974; Kripke 1980; Moran 2001: 14; Gertler 2012: 127; Searle 1997: 456; Horgan 2012: 406; Whiting 2017). Call this the 'no appearance/reality distinction' claim ('NARD' for short). Discussion of NARD can be found in debates on introspection (Moran 2001; Schwitzgebel 2008, 2011; Gertler 2012; Horgan 2012) and the metaphysics of conscious experience (Nagel 1974; Kripke 1980; Searle 1997; Whiting 2017). Consider the following examples:

Does it make sense, in other words, to ask what my experiences are really like, as opposed to how they appear to me? (Nagel 1974: 448)

[W]e can't make...[an] appearance/reality distinction for consciousness because consciousness consists in the appearances themselves. *Where appearance is concerned we cannot make the appearance/reality distinction because appearance is reality.* (Searle 1997: 456; italics original)

[I]n the case of phenomenal consciousness there is no gap between appearance and reality, because the appearance just is the reality: how the phenomenal character seems, to the agent, is how it is. (Horgan 2012: 406).

As it turns out, theorists mean different things by NARD. How precisely to understand NARD thus requires in-depth clarification.

This paper elucidates different versions of NARD and connects NARD to the thesis of revelation, according to which the essences of phenomenal properties are revealed in experience. Revelation is often thought of as *prima facie* plausible but incompatible with physicalism (e.g. Lewis 1995; Goff 2015, 2017; Chalmers 2016, 2018; Liu 2019, 2020, 2021; Roelofs forthcoming). A number of anti-physicalists have indeed appealed to revelation to argue against physicalism (e.g. Horgan and Tienson 2001; Nida-Rümelin 2007; Goff 2015, 2017). Elsewhere, I have argued for a particular way of understanding revelation (Liu 2019, 2020, 2021). I have also argued that revelation is an intuitive thesis and plausibly underpins the persistent intuition of dualism (Liu 2021). In this paper, I show that revelation thus understood, together with additional plausible premises, entails a certain way of understanding NARD. I shall also show how revelation and the related version of NARD pose a *prima facie* threat to physicalism, as well as consider physicalists' responses and their limitations.

The structure of the paper is as follows. §2 clarifies the thesis of revelation. §3 distinguishes different ways of understanding NARD. §4 examines the relation between revelation and NARD, and homes in on the particular version of NARD that is closely connected to revelation. §5 outlines how revelation and the related version of NARD pose a problem for physicalism. §6 considers physicalists' responses and their limitations. §7 concludes the paper.

2. What is Revelation?

The thesis of revelation, concerning phenomenal properties, is the claim that the essences of phenomenal properties are revealed in phenomenal experience. In contemporary discussions, revelation has been given different formulations. Consider:

- (i) 'phenomenal concepts reveal the nature of the phenomenal properties they refer to' (Trogon 2017: 2345)
- (ii) 'we know essential truths about our qualia on the basis of introspection' (Majeed 2017: 86)
- (iii) 'the nature of consciousness is revealed to us in introspection' (Chalmers 2016: 190)
- (iv) 'A psychologically normal subject can come to know the real nature of one of her phenomenal qualities by attending to that quality.' (Goff 2015: 214)
- (v) 'According to the thesis of revelation, having an experience puts you in a remarkable epistemic position: you know or are in a position to know the essence or nature of the experience.' (Stoljar 2009: 115)

In these passages, theorists speak of 'phenomenal properties', 'qualia', 'consciousness', 'phenomenal qualities' and 'experience', and in the literature these terms are often used interchangeably. In explaining the thesis of revelation, I shall primarily speak of 'phenomenal properties' – they are properties of subjects that constitute what it is like to

have experiences from the inside; I shall sometimes speak of ‘qualia’ or ‘phenomenal character’, while using all three terms interchangeably. In addition, I shall also frequently use the term ‘experience’. Used as a noun, it refers to mental states that are phenomenally conscious; they can be thought of as subjects’ instantiations of phenomenal properties. Experience-types are thus individuated by their phenomenal properties. Used as a verb as in ‘S experiences Q’, it just means ‘instantiate (a phenomenal property)’ – in instantiating a phenomenal property, we can say that one is conscious of that property.

Revelation is formulated with respect to *phenomenal concepts* in (i). Formulations in (ii) and (iii) appeal to the notion of *introspection*. These technical notions are nevertheless not necessary in formulating revelation, as we can see from (iv) and (v). While there have been different formulations, revelation is generally understood as a claim about the essences or natures of phenomenal properties. Elsewhere (Liu 2019, 2020, 2021), I have formulated revelation as the following (where ‘Q’ stands for a phenomenal property and ‘S’ stands for an experiencer):

[R]: By having an experience-token with phenomenal property Q, S is in a position to know that ‘Q is X’, where the predicate ‘X’ captures the essence of Q.

I shall first clarify the key notions in the above formulation, i.e. ‘in a position to know’ and what it is to know the essence of a property in general, including the notions of ‘essence’ and ‘capture’. I then consider what such an essence-capturing truth ‘Q is X’ might look like if revelation is true.

According [R], the essence-capturing truth ‘Q is X’ is not something that one automatically knows when undergoing an experience with quale Q. [R] only entails that one is *in a position to know* such a truth. For instance, it seems plausible that some animals have experiences, but it doesn’t seem plausible that they know – that is, are cognitively sophisticated enough to know – truths concerning the essences of phenomenal properties. Once the cognitive architecture is in place, actually coming to know the relevant truth ‘Q is X’ is not particularly demanding. All it takes is for one not to be distracted, to attend to the experience, and to identify that the experience has phenomenal property Q.

Now consider what it is to know the essence of a property. I here adopt a definitional account of essence and understand it in the Aristotelian/Finean sense as that which makes something the thing it is. This is also what Fine (1995a: 276) calls ‘immediate constitutive essence’, i.e. that which belongs to the thing’s *most core respects* (see also Fine 1995b; Dasgupta 2014: 589). *Constitutive* essence is contrasted with *consequential* essence (Fine 1995a: 276). If it is constitutively essential to A that B then it is consequentially essential to A that BvC. *Immediate* essence is contrasted with *mediate* essence (Fine 1995a: 281). The property of *being molecules consisting of two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen* is the immediate essence, as well as the constitutive essence, of *being water*. *Being the chemical element with atomic number 1* is the immediate constitutive essence of *being hydrogen* and is also part of the mediate essence of *being water*.

Knowing the essence (i.e. immediate constitutive essence) of a property can be intuitively understood as knowing some proposition that *defines* the property. Consider the property *being a sister*. The proposition 'Being a sister is being a female sibling' is a definition of the property *being a sister* – it describes accurately what it is to be a sister. In knowing such a proposition, one knows the essence of *being a sister* – what *being a sister* is in its most core respects. The predicate 'being a female sibling', in this case, *captures* the essence of *being a sister*.

There is a difference between a predicate's *capturing* the essence of a property and a predicate's only *referring* to the essence of a property. A simple example illustrates the relevant difference. Consider the property *triangularity* and the following sentences:

- (a) Being triangular is having a three-sided closed shape.
- (b) Being triangular is having whatever shape makes something a triangle.

(a) *defines* the property *triangularity*. The predicate 'having a three-sided closed shape' *captures* the essence of *triangularity* in the sense of describing accurately what it is to be triangular. In contrast, (b) is not a definition of *triangularity*. The predicate 'having whatever shape makes something a triangle', though it *refers* to the essence of *triangularity*, does not *capture* its essence. Knowing the essence of a phenomenal property Q, according to revelation, is then knowing some proposition 'Q is X' that defines Q, where the predicate 'X' captures, rather than merely refers to, the essence of Q.

Having clarified these key notions, let's return to the above formulation of revelation. Suppose that revelation is true, that an experience with Q puts one in a position to know the essence of Q. What then would the essence-capturing truth 'Q is X' look like? Here it is tempting to think that such a truth may be hard to put into words. Imagine staring at a calm blue sea. Your token experience has a certain phenomenal property – call it 'phenomenal blue'. It is in virtue of instantiating this property that your experience has a certain what-it-is-likeness, that there is something it is like for you – to use the Nagelian phrase – to undergo an experience of seeing something blue. As you undergo the experience and attend to its phenomenal character, it seems intuitive to say that you *know* what it is like to undergo a phenomenal blue experience. You know that 'phenomenal blue is thus-and-so', although it is hard to put this 'thus-and-so' into further words. Maybe all you are able to say is that 'phenomenal blue is *that*'. But here the word 'that' merely acts as a placeholder for the rich understanding of *phenomenal blue* you have but are unable to put into words. A proponent of revelation would say that this truth 'Phenomenal blue is *that*', though hard to put into further words, is supposed to be a truth that captures the essence of *phenomenal blue*. Here it is worth noting that the thesis of revelation, formulated as [R], does not entail, but merely allows, that the essence-capturing truth 'Q is X' is hard to put into words. The point made here is that at least with respect to some phenomenal properties, it is intuitive to think that the relevant essence-capturing truths are hard to put into words.

To sum up, according to revelation, by having an experience with quale Q, one is in a position to know a truth 'Q is X', and such a truth captures the immediate

constitutive essence of Q. Here it is worth considering how revelation thus formulated is related to the notions of *phenomenal concept* and *introspection*, which appear in other formulations as we saw in the beginning of this section.

Consider phenomenal concepts first. There is a close connection between what the subject is in a position to know by having an experience with quale Q and the phenomenal concept of quale Q that the subject possesses and deploys. It seems plausible that subjects acquire phenomenal concepts of phenomenal properties by having experiences that have those phenomenal properties. It also seems plausible that knowing what a token experience with quale Q is like from the inside is normally sufficient for possession of the phenomenal concept of Q. An advocate of revelation would say that phenomenal concepts are special in the sense that if one has a phenomenal concept C which refers to Q, the possession of the concept affords one knowledge about, or puts one in a position to know, the essence of Q.

Revelation, as formulated here, also attributes a substantive role to introspection and it is thus not surprising that some formulations of revelation explicitly appeal to the notion of introspection. Introspection is the means by which one can, in a way that no one else can, directly acquire knowledge about one's occurrent or very recently past experience simply by having the experience. Introspection is closely related to revelation since the latter makes a claim about what one knows about the essences of phenomenal properties by having experiences. Revelation thus entails that introspection can put one in a position to know the essences of phenomenal properties.

3. What is the No Appearance/Reality Distinction Thesis?

The claim that there is no appearance/reality distinction with respect to conscious experience can be understood in a variety of ways. In this section, I distinguish different ways of understanding NARD.

3.1. $NARD_1$

One way to understand NARD is to interpret it as a claim about the instantiations of phenomenal properties. Consider:

[NARD₁]: There is no distinction between what phenomenal property an experience *appears* to the subject to have and what phenomenal property the experience *really* has.

Let '*e*' be an experience, '*Q*' be a phenomenal property and '*S*' be an experiencer. NARD₁ is equivalent to the following claim:

[NARD₁*]: *e* has Q if and only if in having *e*, it appears to S that *e* has Q.

In the literature on introspection, philosophers distinguish between two versions of NARD₁ (see Schwitzgebel 2008: 263; Gertler 2012: 106-107). The distinction corresponds to two ways of understanding the notion of appearance – *phenomenal appearance* versus

epistemic appearance. Phenomenal appearances are *experiences* whereas epistemic appearances are *beliefs*. The distinction here corresponds to two uses of perceptual verbs, e.g. ‘seem’, ‘appear’, ‘look’ (see Chisholm 1957; Jackson 1977). According to the epistemic use, the proposition ‘It seems/appears/looks to S that p’ implies that S believes that p, e.g. ‘It seems/appears/looks to me that the economy is slowing down’. According to the phenomenal use, the proposition ‘It seems/appears/looks to S that p’ does not necessarily imply that S believes that p; it merely describes some aspects of S’s experience. For instance, in the case of the Müller-Lyer illusion, one might say ‘it seems/appears/looks to me that the two lines are not of the same length’, without implying that one believes that the two lines are of different lengths. In this case, in seeing the two lines, S experiences what we might call a ‘two-lines-of-unequal-lengths’ phenomenal property. Phenomenal appearances and epistemic appearances, though distinct, are intimately linked. Our beliefs are often reasonable responses to our experiences. If two lines phenomenally appear to have different lengths, then we are rationally disposed to judge that they are of different lengths unless there are good reasons not to, e.g. having done the measurement and found that they are of the same length.

Given the distinction between phenomenal appearance and epistemic appearance, we can distinguish between two versions of NARD₁*:

[PHENOMENAL-NARD₁]: *e* has Q if and only if in having *e*, it phenomenally appears to S that *e* has Q.

[EPISTEMIC-NARD₁]: *e* has Q if and only if in having *e*, it epistemically appears to S that *e* has Q.

Let us look at each in turn. Since phenomenal appearance is an *experience*, PHENOMENAL-NARD₁ can be reformulated as the following:

[PHENOMENAL-NARD₁*]: *e* has Q if and only if in having *e*, S experiences that *e* has Q.

PHENOMENAL-NARD₁ is endorsed by many (see Moran 2001: 14; Gertler 2012: 107; Horgan 2012: 406). It is sometimes described as having an ‘air of indefeasibility’ (see Schwitzgebel 2008: 263; Gertler 2012: 107). However, it is not immediately clear what it means to say that ‘S experiences that *e* has Q’. There are two readings.

The first reading draws on a direct comparison with the notion of phenomenal appearance pertaining to properties of mind-independent objects. Consider a mind-independent object *x*, and a property *P*, e.g. ‘*x*’ could stand for an apple and ‘*P*’ the property of redness. When it comes to the instantiations of mind-independent properties, we usually hold an appearance/reality distinction between the phenomenal appearance that *x* is *P* and the reality where *P* might not be instantiated in *x*. That is, it is *not* true that *x* has *P* if and only if in having an experience of *x*, S experiences that *x* has *P*. For instance, it is not true that the apple is red if and only if in having an experience of the apple, the subject experiences that the apple is red. On this way of understanding phenomenal appearance, where phenomenal appearance is an experience of an object, we have the following reading of PHENOMENAL-NARD₁*:

[PHENOMENAL-NARD₁*-_A]: *e* has Q if and only if in having *e*, S has an experience of *e* and experiences that *e* has Q.

On the second reading of PHENOMENAL-NARD₁, to say that ‘I experience that my pain experience has a such-and-such phenomenal property’ is just to say that ‘I experience or instantiate a such-and-such phenomenal property’. Consider:

[PHENOMENAL-NARD₁*-_B]: *e* has Q if and only if in having *e*, S experiences Q.

The key difference between the two readings turns on whether the phenomenal appearance of *e* as having Q is identical to *e* itself. According to PHENOMENAL-NARD₁*-_A, the two are distinct just as the phenomenal appearance of an apple as being green is distinct from its object, i.e. the apple. According to PHENOMENAL-NARD₁*-_B, the two are identical and hence there is no distinction between the phenomenal appearance of *e* as having Q and the reality of *e* as having Q.

Now insofar as PHENOMENAL-NARD₁* is supposed to enjoy an ‘air of indefeasibility’, it is plausibly PHENOMENAL-NARD₁*-_B rather than PHENOMENAL-NARD₁*-_A. It is certainly controversial to think that in having *e*, there is a separate experience which has *e* as its object and represents *e* as having Q. In contrast, PHENOMENAL-NARD₁*-_B seems indefeasible. We can think of an experience *e* as a subject S instantiating a phenomenal property Q at a time *t*, expressed as the triplet <S, Q, *t*> (Kim 1966). Given that to have *e* is just to be the subject of *e* and to experience Q is just to instantiate the phenomenal property Q, PHENOMENAL-NARD₁*-_B turns out to be true.

Turning to EPISTEMIC-NARD₁. Given epistemic appearance is understood as belief, EPISTEMIC-NARD₁ can be formulated as below:

[EPISTEMIC-NARD₁*]: *e* has Q if and only if in having *e*, S believes that *e* has Q.

EPISTEMIC-NARD₁ is contentious (see Schwitzgebel 2008, 20011). It claims that whenever a subject is having an experience with certain phenomenal properties, she forms the belief that the experience has these phenomenal properties (i.e. self-intimation), and that it is impossible for the subject of an experience to form a false belief about what phenomenal properties are instantiated by the experience (i.e. infallibility). EPISTEMIC-NARD₁, as it stands, does not allow occasional errors in introspective judgements about what phenomenal properties our experiences have. One might think that errors of introspective judgements concerning one’s conscious experiences, like introspective judgements about our beliefs and attitudes, can also arise from inattention or expectation (Hill 1991: 128). I fail to form the belief that I am feeling anxious when I am feeling anxious because I am too busy with tasks at hand. Similarly, I *believe* that I don’t feel angry when I am actually feeling angry because I also believe that I am not the type of person who can be easily angered. Regardless of what one might say about these cases, a weakened version of EPISTEMIC-NARD₁ is nevertheless plausible. It seems intuitive to say that upon having an experience in which it phenomenally appears to the subject that *e* has Q, that is, where the subject of *e* instantiates Q, the subject is rationally disposed to

judge or form the belief that '*e* has *Q*', and in normal circumstances, i.e. where the subject is attentive and free of expectations that would lead to an erroneous introspective judgement, that belief constitutes knowledge.

3.2. *NARD*₂

Another way to understand *NARD* is to interpret it as a claim about the natures or essences of phenomenal properties rather than their instantiations. This way of understanding *NARD* can be plausibly attributed to Nagel (1974).

In his seminal paper 'What is it like to be a bat?', Nagel labours the point that experience has what-it-is-likeness: 'an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something it is like to *be* that organism' (1974: 436).¹ Nagel labels this aspect of experience 'subjective character', where the latter, for the purpose of our discussion, is taken to be equivalent to 'phenomenal character' or 'phenomenal properties'. Towards the end of the paper, Nagel questions the idea that experience, which has a subjective character, can have an objective nature. He (1974: 448) writes:

Very little work has been done on the basic question (from which mention of the brain can be entirely omitted) whether any sense can be made of experiences' having an objective character at all. *Does it make sense, in other words, to ask what my experiences are really like, as opposed to how they appear to me?* (italics added)

By 'how [experiences] appear to me', it is natural to interpret Nagel to refer to the what-it-is-likeness of experiences, which we know through having experiences. Nagel doubts that there is an appearance/reality distinction with respect to experience, that there is an objective reality of an experience beyond its appearance, i.e. what it is like to undergo that experience. He (1974: 444-5) writes:

The idea of moving from appearance to reality seems to make no sense here. ... Certainly it appears unlikely that we will get closer to the real nature of human experience by leaving behind the particularity of our human point of view and striving for a description in terms accessible to beings that could not imagine what it was like to be us. *If the subjective character of experience is fully comprehensible only from one point of view, then any shift to greater objectivity – that is, less attachment to a specific viewpoint – does not take us nearer to the real nature of the phenomenon: it takes us farther away from it.* (italics added)

Although Nagel is primarily concerned with the question of whether there is an appearance/reality distinction with respect to experience, his reason for questioning the

¹ Nagel's definition concerns what it is for an organism to *have* conscious states. In contemporary discussions, it is more common to put it in terms of what it is for a mental state to *be* a conscious state: a mental state is (phenomenally) conscious if and only if there is something it is like to be in that mental state (see Stoljar 2016: 1188-1189).

latter distinction seems to build on the intuitive thought that there is no appearance/reality distinction when it comes to the nature of subjective character. Granted that experience-types are individuated by their subjective characters or phenomenal properties, Nagel seems to say that *if we fully comprehend the phenomenal properties of our experiences, including their essences, from the subjective point of view*, then experience does not have an objective nature capable of being given an objective description. Now, if all there is to the natures of phenomenal properties is given to us from the subjective point of view, then there is no appearance/reality distinction with respect to the natures of phenomenal properties, i.e. NARD₂ as stated below:

[NARD₂]: There is no distinction between what the essences of phenomenal properties *appear* to the subject to be and what they *really* are.

Let 'Q' be a phenomenal property and 'S' be an experiencer. NARD₂ can be reformulated as the following claim:

[NARD₂*]: All there is to the essence of Q is X if and only if in having an experience-token with Q, the essence of Q appears to S as X and only as X.

According to NARD₂, a phenomenal property Q *manifests* its essence to the subject when the subject has an experience with Q. Given our discussion of Nagel, it seems that the relevant notion of manifestation or appearance is *phenomenal appearance* – it concerns the way in which the subject experiences or is conscious of the essences of phenomenal properties from a subjective point of view, rather than what beliefs about the essences of phenomenal properties she might have. This phenomenal appearance of the essence of Q as X need not be thought of as a separate experience distinct from the experience with Q (more on this in §6). Consider the following reformulation of NARD₂*:

[PHENOMENAL-NARD₂]: All there is to the essence of Q is X if and only if in having an experience-token with Q, S experiences the essence of Q as X and only as X.

To say that S experiences the essence of Q as X and only as X, in this context, means something like S is conscious *of* the essence of Q as X and only as X. It does not mean that S needs to apply the concept of *essence* when experiencing Q or think about what Q *essentially* is. S's experience of the essence of Q as X and only as X is such that it affords S a conception of Q as X. For instance, I experience or am conscious of the essence of phenomenal property *phenomenal blue* as 'that' and only as 'that', where the demonstrative is naturally interpreted to refer to the what-it-is-likeness of *phenomenal blue*, and the experience of the essence of *phenomenal blue* as *that* and only as *that* affords me a conception of the former as *that*.

So far, NARD₂ is understood as PHENOMENAL-NARD₂, as a phenomenal or experiential claim about the way in which we experience the essences of phenomenal properties. As we shall see later, it is this particular version of NARD that is directly relevant to the thesis of revelation. There is nevertheless an epistemic version of this

claim in the vicinity. The phenomenal appearance of the essence of Q as X, that is, S experiencing the essence of Q as X and only as X, may ground a further belief about what belongs to the essence of Q. Based on this phenomenal appearance, S is rationally disposed to form a corresponding belief that 'Q is X'. Upon further reflection on what the essence of Q might be, which would require S to possess and exercise the concept of *essence*, S might end up forming an explicit belief about Q which has the content 'all there is to the essence of Q is X'. If PHENOMENAL-NARD₂ is true, and all there is to the essence of Q is indeed X, then S arrives at a true belief about the essence of Q. But of course, upon experiencing the essence of Q as X and only as X, S might not have any view on what the essence of Q is. Alternatively, she might not take things at face value and instead take Q to have some hidden essence in addition to X or have an essence other than what is manifested to her, i.e. X.

4. The Relationship between Revelation and NARD

So far, we have seen that NARD can be formulated in different ways. One can take it to be the claim that there is no appearance/reality distinction with respect to the *instantiations* of phenomenal properties (i.e. NARD₁), or the claim that there is no appearance/reality distinction with respect to the *essences* of phenomenal properties (i.e. NARD₂).

How are versions of NARD related to revelation? Insofar as revelation is directly relevant to NARD, the relevant versions are not versions of NARD₁. Revelation is a claim about the essences of phenomenal properties rather than their instantiations, whereas NARD₁ is about (our beliefs about) the instantiations of phenomenal properties rather than their essences. This is not to say that revelation is not related to NARD₁. Consider the key idea of revelation, that one is in a position to know an essence-capturing truth 'Q is X' in having an experience with Q. Being in a position to know such a truth would require one to experience Q. Insofar as PHENOMENAL-NARD₁ is a claim about the latter, it is indirectly related to revelation. Being in a position to know that 'Q is X' where 'X' captures the essence of Q would also require the subject to be able to identify Q or form a belief that Q is instantiated. Insofar as EPISTEMIC-NARD₁ is a claim about the latter, it is also indirectly related to revelation.

Revelation is closely connected to NARD₂, i.e. PHENOMENAL-NARD₂. Both are claims about the essences of phenomenal properties. While the former is an epistemic claim about our knowledge with respect to the essences of phenomenal properties, the latter is an experiential or phenomenal claim about what our experiences of the essences of phenomenal properties are like. Consider revelation again, which can be thought of as consisting of the following two claims:

- (i) By having an experience-token with phenomenal property Q, S is in a position to know that 'Q is X'.
- (ii) The predicate 'X' captures the essence of Q.

I shall show that revelation, i.e. (i)&(ii), entails PHENOMENAL-NARD₂ with two additional premises. Recall PHENOMENAL-NARD₂:

[PHENOMENAL-NARD₂]: All there is to the essence Q is X if and only if in having an experience-token with Q, S experiences the essence of Q as X and only as X.

Let '(iii)' be the claim 'All there is to the essence of Q is X'. Let '(iv)' be the claim 'In having an experience-token with Q, S experiences the essence of Q as X and only as X'. PHENOMENAL-NARD₂ is then reformulated as '(iii)↔(iv)'. Consider the following two principles, where one connects claim (ii) of revelation to (iii), and the other connects revelation itself, i.e. (i)&(ii), to (iv):

(ii)→(iii): If the predicate 'X' captures the essence of Q (in the truth 'Q is X'), then all there is to the essence of Q is X.

[(i)&(ii)]→(iv): If by having an experience-token with phenomenal property Q, S is in a position to know that 'Q is X' where the predicate 'X' captures the essence of Q, then in having an experience-token with Q, S experiences the essence of Q as X and only as X.

Both conditionals seem intuitive. With respect to the first conditional, i.e. (ii)→(iii), it seems plausible to say that if a predicate captures the immediate constitutive essence of something, then what the predicate refers to is just all there is to what that thing is in its most core respects. For instance, if the predicate 'having a three-sided closed shape' captures the immediate constitutive essence of the property *being triangular* in the truth 'Being triangular is having a three-sided closed shape', then *having a three-sided closed shape* is just all there is to what *being triangular* is in its most core respects.² The second conditional, i.e. [(i)&(ii)]→(iv), also seems plausible. One might think S's being in a position to *know* the essence-capturing truth 'Q is X' in virtue of having the relevant experience, i.e. revelation, requires one to first be in a position to form the *belief* that 'Q is X' where 'X' captures the essence of Q. The latter is, intuitively and naturally, grounded in S's experience of the essence of Q as X and only as X. To put it differently, if S experiences the essence of Q as X and only as X, then naturally S would form the belief 'Q is X' where 'X' captures the essence of Q. In this sense, (iv) is the precondition for the subject's knowledge about the essence of quale Q in the form of knowing the truth 'Q is X' where 'X' captures the essence of Q.

With these two additional premises above, i.e. (ii)→(iii) and [(i)&(ii)]→(iv), we can see that the thesis of revelation, i.e. (i)&(ii), entails PHENOMENAL-NARD₂, i.e. (iii)↔(iv). It is impossible for PHENOMENAL-NARD₂ to be false while revelation and the two additional premises are true. The formal proof is included in the Appendix A.

² This point will be further defended in §5 when discussing premise (3) in the argument from revelation against identity physicalism.

5. Revelation/NARD's Threat to Physicalism

It is often thought that revelation is an intuitive thesis, including by those who ultimately reject it (Lewis 1995; McLaughlin 2003; Braddon-Mitchell 2007; Hill 2014; Papineau 2020). It certainly seems plausible to say that in situations where the subject has identified Q, the subject also knows the essence of that property in the sense of knowing some truth 'Q is X' where 'X' captures the essence of phenomenal property Q.³ Similarly, the related version of NARD₂, i.e. PHENOMENAL-NARD₂, is a highly intuitive claim. After all, we identify phenomenal properties through how they 'appear' to us from the inside and it seems intuitive to assume that such 'appearances' constitute what they are essentially. In this section, I show how revelation and PHENOMENAL-NARD₂ pose a prima facie threat to physicalism. §5.1 focuses on identity physicalism, §5.2 on grounding physicalism. The arguments here are not new and have been addressed in the literature by others, albeit formulated in different ways (for arguments against physicalism from revelation, see Lewis 1995; Nida-Rümelin 2007; Goff 2011, 2015, 2017, 2019). Here I shall put forward the relevant arguments using the formulations of revelation and PHENOMENAL-NARD₂ expounded above.

5.1. Against Identity Physicalism

According to identity physicalism, every phenomenal property is identical to some physical property. The argument from revelation to the falsity of identity physicalism is nicely summarised in a passage from Lewis (1995: 142; see also Nida-Rümelin 2007; Goff 2011, 2015):

If, for instance, Q is essentially the physical property of being an event of C-firing, and if I identify the qualia of my experience in the appropriate 'demanding and literal' sense, I come to know that what is going on in me is an event of C-firing. Contrapositively: if I identify the quale of my experience in the appropriate sense, and yet know nothing of the firing of my neurons, then the quale of my experience cannot have been essentially the property of being an event of C-firing.

With the phrase 'identify the quale in the appropriate "demanding and literal" sense', Lewis refers to the thesis of revelation. Lewis' point is this: if the *painfulness of pain*, i.e. the phenomenal property of undergoing a pain experience, is the physical property of

³ Elsewhere (Liu 2021), I have put forward a linguistic argument for the intuitiveness of revelation. I considered sentences like (S):

(S) *I know what an itch feels like, but I don't know what the feeling of an itch really is.

(S) is odd. My argument is that the oddness in (S) is best explained by the hypothesis that revelation is part of our ordinary conception of experience, which we tacitly appeal to in interpreting the sentence, and that by inference to the best explanation, revelation is part of our ordinary conception of experience and can be considered an intuitive thesis for that reason.

being an event of C-firing, then, given revelation, in having a pain experience, I would know about C-firing; but I certainly don't; so, identity physicalism is false.

Given our formulation of the thesis of revelation, we can formulate the argument in the following way (see also Liu 2019, 2021):

- (1) By having an experience-token with phenomenal property Q, S is in a position to know that 'Q is X', where the predicate 'X' captures the essence of Q.
- (2) If identity physicalism is true, then all phenomenal properties have physical essences.
- (3) If all phenomenal properties have physical essences, then by having an experience-token with phenomenal property Q, S is in a position to know that 'Q is X', where 'X' is a physical predicate which captures the essence of Q.
- (4) It is not true that by having an experience-token with phenomenal property Q, S is in a position to know that 'Q is X', where 'X' is a physical predicate which captures the essence of Q.
- (5) Identity physicalism is false.

(1) is the thesis of revelation. (2) appeals to the definition of identity physicalism. (3) appeals to both (1) and (2) and lays out what the predicate 'X' would have to look like if revelation and identity physicalism were true. (4) is obvious – we do not know any physical truths concerning the essence of a phenomenal property in virtue of having an experience with that phenomenal property. (2), (3) and (4) entail (5).

The most contentious premise is (3) and is worth elaborating on. A defender of physicalism might think that while revelation, i.e. (1), is true, this does not mean that the predicate 'X' in the essence-capturing truth 'Q is X' has to be a physical predicate. Such a theorist might insist that there could be more than one truth that captures the essence of a property. While having an experience with Q affords us the essence-capturing phenomenal truth 'Q is X', there is also an essence-capturing physical truth.⁴ So, (3) follows from (1) and (2) with the following additional assumption which our objector rejects:

- (A) There are no two conceptually independent truths which equally capture the essence of a property.

Two claims are conceptually independent if and only if they are not derivable from one another. For instance, these two claims – 'Chris is a bachelor' ('p') and 'Chris is an unmarried man' ('q') – are not conceptually independent. Someone who has the relevant concepts of 'bachelor' and 'unmarried man' can see how p entails q and vice versa. There

⁴ Goff (2017) calls this position 'dual carving' and has argued against it extensively (see also Goff 2011, 2015). In the main text and fn6, I discuss two objections which are not mentioned by Goff.

are at least two readings of (A) depending on how one understands the notion of essence at issue:

- (A.i) There are no two conceptually independent truths which equally capture the immediate constitutive essence of a property.
- (A.ii) There are no two conceptually independent truths which equally capture the essence of a property where the notion of essence is broadly construed.

While (A.i) is plausible, (A.ii) is not. The former is relevant to the above argument from revelation against identity physicalism, whereas the latter is not. As we already saw in §2, the notion of essence that features in the formulation of revelation is that of immediate constitutive essence, i.e. what a thing is in its most core respects. This notion of essence is contrasted with a notion of essence broadly construed that includes the *consequential* and *mediate* essence of a thing. There can be two conceptually independent truths that capture the essence of a property if the notion of essence is broadly construed. Consider again the property of *being water*. The two claims ‘Being water is being molecules consisting of two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen’ and ‘Being water is being molecules consisting of two atoms of the chemical element with atomic number 1 and one of oxygen’ are conceptually independent. While both capture the essence of the property of *being water* if the notion of essence is broadly construed, they don’t equally capture the immediate constitutive essence of the property. The former captures the immediate constitutive essence of *being water*, whereas the latter captures part of its mediate essence, since *being the chemical element with atomic number 1* is only part of the mediate essence of *being water*. In contrast, there seem to be no good candidates for two conceptually independent claims that equally capture, i.e. accurately define, the immediate constitutive essence of a thing.⁵ So, (A) understood as (A.i) is a plausible assumption to adopt. Our objector against (3) seems to confuse (A) with (A.ii), when (A) should be understood as (A.i).⁶

⁵ One might think that scientific truths such as ‘Being light is being an electro-magnetic wave’ and ‘Being light is being made up of photons’ are conceptually independent but equally capture the immediate constitutive essence of the property at issue, i.e. *being light* in this case. I am indebted to Avery Archer for this alleged counterexample to (A.i). However, it is unclear that such scientific truths are conceptually independent. The thought here is that while they seem conceptually independent given the incompleteness of physics, they may well be derivable from one another given complete physics.

⁶ There is potentially another reason to hold (A.i). In §2 we considered what the essence-capturing truth ‘Q is X’ would look like if revelation is true. We noted that it is plausibly a truth that describes the what-it-is-likeness of a phenomenal property but may be hard to put in words. In describing what it is like to undergo an experience with a phenomenal property like *phenomenal blue*, it seems that we are only able to use a demonstrative, e.g. ‘Phenomenal blue is *that*’. One might take this to suggest that phenomenal properties like *phenomenal blue* have no internal structure (see Lewis 1995). In contrast, if *phenomenal blue* turns out to be a neurophysiological property as according to identity physicalism, then it would presumably be a complex property

Overall, the burden is on those who reject (A.i) to show how there could be two conceptually independent definitions capturing the immediate constitutive essence of a property. In the absence of such a proposal, we can endorse (A), understood as (A.i), and the related premise (3). The falsity of identity physicalism then follows from the thesis of revelation. It is also worth noting that the success of the argument does not rely on the thesis of revelation being true with respect to *all* phenomenal properties. It only requires that the thesis holds true with respect to *some* phenomenal properties. Put differently, if there are situations where we know the essence of a phenomenal property by having an experience with that property, then identity physicalism is false – for that phenomenal property cannot be identical to some physical property, whereas identity physicalism says *all* phenomenal properties are physical properties.

In addition to the argument from revelation against identity physicalism, we can also formulate a similar argument with the same conclusion by appealing to PHENOMENAL-NARD₂. Consider the following argument using PHENOMENAL-NARD₂:

- (1) All there is to the essence of Q is X if and only if in having an experience-token with Q, S experiences the essence of Q as X and only as X.
- (2) If identity physicalism is true, then all there is to the essence of a phenomenal property is some physical property.
- (3) If all there is to the essence of a phenomenal property is some physical property, then in having an experience-token with Q, S experiences the essence of Q as X and only as X where X is a physical property.
- (4) It is not true that in having an experience-token with Q, S experiences the essence of Q as X and only as X where X is a physical property.
- (5) Identity physicalism is false.

(1) is PHENOMENAL-NARD₂. (2) appeals to the definition of identity physicalism. (3) arguably follows from (1) and (2). If all there is to the essence of Q is X and all there is to the essence of a phenomenal property is some physical property, then X would be a physical property. (4) seems intuitive – we certainly don't experience the painfulness of pain as C-fibres firing and form a conception of the former as the latter upon having a pain experience. (5) then follows from (2), (3) and (4).

In discussing the argument from PHENOMENAL-NARD₂ against identity physicalism, it is worth comparing it to Kripke's argument against identity physicalism in *Naming and Necessity* (1980). Kripke's argument crucially relies on two points: first, there is an intuition that pain and C-fibre stimulation are contingently related – it seems

with a complex internal structure. Neurons themselves are complex entities with internal structures where different elements within the same structure stand in certain relations to one another. It would then be puzzling that one essence-defining truth reveals that *phenomenal blue* has an essence that is structurally simple and the other reveals that it has an essence that is structurally complex.

that pain can exist without C-fibre stimulation and C-fibre stimulation without pain; and second, such an intuition cannot be explained away as in usual cases, such as explaining away the intuitive contingency between heat and molecular motion by drawing a distinction between heat and the appearance or feeling of heat. Though nothing in his argument explicitly relies on PHENOMENAL-NARD₂ (or revelation for that matter),⁷ it may nevertheless play a key role in Kripke's conceiving the intuition of contingency at issue. It may very well be that we tacitly appeal to PHENOMENAL-NARD₂ in arriving at the intuition that pain and C-fibres stimulation are distinct. After all, if we thought that PHENOMENAL-NARD₂ was false, that phenomenal properties have hidden essences, then it would be unclear as to why we would have the intuition that pain, which is individuated by its phenomenal character, is only contingently related to C-fibre stimulation – pain could have a hidden essence that is C-fibre stimulation.

Given the argument from PHENOMENAL-NARD₂ against identity physicalism, an identity physicalist would need to reject PHENOMENAL-NARD₂ but can nevertheless take the latter to be an intuitive claim. To such a physicalist, the intuition that the relation between pain and C-fibre stimulation is contingent is no surprise given the thought that the intuition is plausibly based on the intuitiveness of PHENOMENAL-NARD₂. Such a physicalist can further maintain that this intuition of contingency poses no problem for identity physicalism. One can explain away the intuition of contingency by insisting that PHENOMENAL-NARD₂ is false, that despite its intuitiveness there is in fact an appearance/reality distinction with respect to the natures of phenomenal properties. But of course, such a physicalist is expected to say more about why we should think that phenomenal properties have a 'reality' beyond their 'appearance' and how it is that we experience the essence of quale Q as X and only as X even though X is not the essence of Q. I shall say more about physicalists' strategies in §6. But for now, it is worth noting that given the intuitive appeal of PHENOMENAL-NARD₂, without a clear and plausible elaboration physicalism is, as Kripke concluded four decades ago, problematic.

5.2. *Against Grounding Physicalism*

However, one might not formulate physicalism as an identity thesis, that every phenomenal property is identical to some physical property. Instead, one might formulate physicalism as a grounding thesis and take phenomenal facts to be ultimately grounded in physical facts, where *grounding* is understood as a non-causal explanatory relation that holds between facts. While the arguments from revelation and the related version of NARD against grounding physicalism are less straightforward than corresponding arguments against identity physicalism, we can nevertheless formulate the relevant arguments given a certain formulation of grounding physicalism. I shall first discuss a formulation of grounding physicalism which would allow us to formulate

⁷ Lewis (1995) interprets Kripke as relying on the thesis of revelation, though such an interpretation is contentious (see Stoljar 2009).

an argument from revelation against grounding physicalism. I shall then briefly discuss whether this argument is sound.

Grounding physicalists hold (G):

- (G) The fact that S instantiates physical property P grounds the fact that S instantiates phenomenal property Q.

Facts like (G) are grounding facts – facts about grounding. There is a question as to what grounds a grounding fact like (G). Consider a simpler example from Dasgupta (2014):

- (C) The fact that an event *e* contains people engaged in C-activities (i.e. giving talks, listening to talks, asking questions, and so on) grounds the fact that *e* is a conference.

Following Dasgupta (2014), one might say that (C) is grounded in a *general connection* held between C-activities and conferences. As Dasgupta (2014: 567) puts it, a conference is just ‘the kind of thing that you get when people engage in those activities’. A natural way to spell out this general connection is through the notion of essence.⁸ Here, both the essence of conferences and the essence of C-activities seem to be relevant. Conferences are *essentially* events consisting of activities where people are formally engaged in the communication and exchange of ideas.⁹ Now, C-activities (i.e. giving talks, listening to talks, asking questions, and so on) are *essentially* just such activities.¹⁰ (C) is thus understood as being grounded in the following two facts:

- (C.i) Event *e* contains people engaged in C-activities.

⁸ There are different ways to formulate the idea of a general connection, which give rise to different versions of what Dasgupta (2014: 568) calls ‘brute connectivism’: it could be an *essential* truth (‘brute essentialism’), or a *necessary* truth (‘brute necessitarianism’), or a *conceptual* truth (‘brute conceptualism’), or a *metaphysical law* (‘brute nomicism’). For Dasgupta (2014: 569), the general connection that grounds a grounding fact is necessary such that ‘if some Xs ground Y, then necessarily if the Xs obtain then Y obtains’. In his paper, Dasgupta focuses on *brute essentialism*, which is also what I focus on in formulating arguments from revelation/PHENOMENAL-NARD₂ against grounding physicalism. So, the arguments here depend on formulating grounding physicalism in this particular way.

⁹ For Dasgupta (2014), essential facts are groundless and in particular, they are ‘autonomous’ – they are ungrounded and are also not apt for being grounded.

¹⁰ Giving a talk, listening to a talk, asking a question and so on are different instances of C-activities. It is the essence of C-activities rather than essences of the instances that seems to matter here. On this picture, the ground is a kind that has many instances and the essence of the ground is the property that all instances have (see Aleksiev 2022).

(C.ii) The essence of conferences and the essence of C-activities are such that if an event contains people engaged in C-activities then it is a conference ('if C then F' for short).¹¹

(C) obtains *because* (C.i) and (C.ii) do. (C.ii) posits a tight connection between the respective essence of conferences and C-activities on the one hand and the general connection 'if C then F' on the other. As we saw, if one knows what conferences essentially are and what C-activities essentially are, one can deduce that 'if C then F'.¹² That is, the latter truth is *a priori* entailed from the essential truths about conferences and C-activities.

Similarly, we can think of (G) as grounded in a general connection held between physical property P and quale Q, such that a subject would instantiate phenomenal property Q when the same subject instantiates physical property P. A grounding physicalist can say that (G) is grounded in the following two further facts:

(G.i) S instantiates physical property P.

(G.ii) The essence of phenomenal property Q and the essence of physical property P are such that if something instantiates physical property P then this something instantiates phenomenal property Q (i.e. 'if P then Q' for short).

(G) obtains *because* (G.i) and (G.ii) do. (G.ii) posits a tight connection between the essences of P and Q on the one hand, and the general connection 'if P then Q' on the other. One might take this tight connection to entail the following: if one knows the essence of Q (i.e. know that 'Q is X' where 'X' captures the essence of Q) and also knows the essence of P (i.e. know that 'P is Y' where 'Y' captures the essence of P), then one can in principle deduce that 'if P then Q'. That is, the latter truth is *a priori* entailed from the essential truths about Q and P (i.e. 'Q is X' and 'P is Y') (see also Aleksiev 2022; Roelofs forthcoming).

Given this clarification, we can put forward an argument from revelation against grounding physicalism as follows:¹³

¹¹ For Dasgupta (2014), essential facts are groundless and in particular, they are 'autonomous' – they are ungrounded and are also not apt for being grounded.

¹² Imagine a person who is at an event with C-activities. She knows that C-activities are taking place. She also knows that conferences are essentially events containing people formally engaged in the communication and exchange of ideas. But for some bizarre reason, she does not know that C-activities are just activities where people are formally engaged in the communication and exchange of ideas. As a result, this unfortunate person does not know that she is at a conference.

¹³ For related discussion against grounding physicalism, see also Goff (2019) and Aleksiev (2022).

- (1) By having an experience-token with phenomenal property Q, S is in a position to know that 'Q is X', where the predicate 'X' captures the essence of Q.
- (2) If grounding physicalism is true, then the essence of phenomenal property Q and the essence of P are such that if P then Q.
- (3) If the essence of phenomenal property Q and the essence of P are such that if P then Q, then by having an experience-token with phenomenal property Q, S is in a position to know that 'Q is X', where 'X' is a predicate that captures the essence of Q and is such that 'If P then Q' is *a priori* entailed by 'Q is X' and 'P is Y' (where 'Y' captures the essence of P).
- (4) It is not true that by having an experience-token with phenomenal property Q, S is in a position to know that 'Q is X', where 'X' is a predicate that captures the essence of Q and is such that 'If P then Q' is *a priori* entailed by 'Q is X' and 'P is Y' (where 'Y' captures the essence of P).
- (5) Grounding physicalism is false.

One can similarly formulate an argument against grounding physicalism from PHENOMENAL-NARD₂ (see Appendix B). In the above argument, (1) is the thesis of revelation. (2) appeals to the aforesaid formulation of grounding physicalism and in particular (G.ii). (3) appeals to (1) and (2) and lays out what the predicate 'X' would need to be if revelation and grounding physicalism thus conceived were true. (4) claims that 'X' cannot be a predicate that both captures the essence of Q and is such that 'If P then Q' follows *a priori* from the respective essence-capturing truths about Q and P, i.e. 'Q is X' and 'P is Y'. (5), i.e. the falsity of grounding physicalism, then follows from (2), (3) and (4).

The most contentious premise is (4) and is worth elaborating on. Whether or not (4) is true depends not only on what 'Q is X' (where 'X' captures the essence of Q) turns out to be, but also on what 'P is Y' (where 'Y' captures the essence of P) turns out to be. One might think that while we are in a position to know what 'Q is X' looks like, we have no idea what 'P is Y' might look like. Put differently, while we know the essences of phenomenal properties, we have no idea about the essences of physical properties – whatever they are, they are not exhausted by what physical sciences have told us so far (e.g. Stoljar 2006). For a physicalist making this point, it may well be plausible that 'If P then Q' is *a priori* entailed by 'Q is X' (where 'X' captures the essence of Q) and 'P is Y' (where 'Y' captures the essence of P).¹⁴ Put differently, it may well be the case that (4) is false, that by having an experience-token with phenomenal property Q, S is in a position to know that 'Q is X', where 'X' is a predicate that captures the essence of Q and is such

¹⁴ Roelofs (forthcoming) makes a related point that constitutive panpsychism does not face the argument from revelation, because we precisely do not know the essences of the microphenomenal properties posited by that theory.

that 'If P then Q' is *a priori* entailed by 'Q is X' and 'P is Y' (where 'Y' captures the essence of P).¹⁵

However, for many physicalists, physical sciences have told us enough about what physical properties are, that we know what kind of truth 'P is Y' (where 'Y' captures the essence of P) would look like. For instance, physical properties are often thought of as structural and dynamic properties. According to Chalmers (2003; see also Alter 2016), structural properties are understood as spatial and formal (i.e. logical and mathematical) properties, whereas the dynamic properties are temporal and nomic properties. The essence-capturing truth 'P is Y' is then a truth concerning *structures and dynamics*, where 'Y' is a structural-and-dynamic predicate that captures the essence of P. In contrast, the essence-capturing truth 'Q is X' is sometimes thought of as a truth that goes beyond structures and dynamics, i.e. a truth that is not in purely structural and dynamic terms (see Chalmers 2003; Alter 2016). Such a theorist might further contend that the respective essence-capturing truths about Q and P, i.e. 'Q is X' and 'P is Y', do not *a priori* entail 'If P then Q'. She might argue that properties with structural and dynamic essences cannot give rise to properties whose essences are not purely structural and dynamic. Since P's essence is exhausted by its structural and dynamic features whereas Q's essence is not, it might seem that something else is needed, in addition to P, to give rise to Q given the kind of essence it has. Having established this, such a theorist would then argue that (4) is true – that 'X' is not a predicate that both captures the essence of Q and is such that 'If P then Q' is *a priori* entailed by truths concerning the essence of Q and the essence of P.

There is much to be said about the above argument from revelation against grounding physicalism, especially with respect to (4). For instance, even if we grant that 'P is Y' is a truth concerning structures and dynamics, precisely how to understand these latter notions is matter of controversy (Stoljar 2015; Alter 2016). While there is a clear argument from revelation against identity physicalism, the argument against grounding physicalism is at least less straightforward.

6. Physicalist Responses and Their Limitations

Granting the arguments against physicalism from revelation and the related version of NARD, physicalists would have to reject these claims. In this section, I shall grant the arguments discussed in §5 and consider physicalists' responses. While all physicalists would reject PHENOMENAL-NARD₂ by maintaining an appearance/reality distinction with

¹⁵ It is also a point of contention as to what 'Q is X' looks like. A commonsense role functionalist might insist that phenomenal properties have functional essences and such essences are revealed in experience. Furthermore, she might deny (4) and contend that 'X' is a predicate that captures the essence of Q in commonsense psychological terms and is such that 'If P then Q' is *a priori* entailed from respective truths about the essences of Q and P. In Liu (2019), I argue that commonsense role functionalism is incompatible with revelation even setting aside the general concern that, intuitively, a state's having a certain functional role does not guarantee that the state has any phenomenology.

respect to the essences of phenomenal properties, they might respond differently with respect to different components of revelation. This section focuses on different ways that physicalists might reject the thesis of revelation and also discusses the limitations of their responses.

Consider the two components of revelation:

- (i) By having an experience-token with phenomenal property Q, S is in a position to know that 'Q is X'.
- (ii) 'X' captures the essence of Q.

In §2, we considered what the essence-capturing truth 'Q is X' would look like if revelation is true. We noted that 'X' is plausibly a predicate that captures the what-it-is-likeness of Q but may be hard to put into words. Relatedly, in terms of PHENOMENAL-NARD₂, we can say that we experience the essence of Q as X and only as X in the sense that we experience Q's what-it-is-likeness and only its what-it-is-likeness when having an experience with Q. Understood this way, (i) seems compelling regardless of whether or not (ii) is true. Phenomenal properties manifest their what-it-is-likeness. We form the belief that 'Q is X' (where 'X' captures Q's what-it-is-likeness) where the latter belief is grounded in a phenomenal appearance of Q as having what-it-is-likeness X. Once this belief is formed, it seems tempting to then say that such what-it-is-likeness is just what defines phenomenal property Q rather than to argue that the essence of Q is hidden.

In relation to revelation thus understood, physicalists can reject either (i) or (ii). Below, I explain different strategies used by physicalists in response to revelation.

6.1. Denying (ii)

Physicalists like Papineau (2020) accept (i) while rejecting (ii) – they concede the truth of the belief 'Q is X' (where 'X' captures the what-it-is-likeness of Q) formed upon having an experience with Q, but nevertheless deny that this 'X' captures the essence of Q. These physicalists are usually phenomenal concept strategists (e.g. Loar 1997; Papineau 2002; Balog 2012). They argue that we have two distinct conceptions – phenomenal and physical – of the same phenomenal property, which is physical in its essence.

Objections against the phenomenal concept strategy are usually centred around the idea that phenomenal concepts are revelatory with respect to the natures of their referents (see Horgan and Tienson 2001; Levine 2001: 84; 2007; Nida-Rümelin 2007; Goff 2011, 2015). Nevertheless, this is precisely the point that many phenomenal concept strategists resist. For these physicalists, phenomenal concepts, as McLaughlin (2001: 34) notes, 'do not conceptually reveal anything about the essential nature of phenomenal properties: they simply name or demonstrate them' (see also Papineau 2007; Balog 2012).

In addressing revelation head-on, Papineau (2020: 27) acknowledges its intuitiveness but questions its all-things-considered plausibility. Relying on a formulation of revelation in terms of the notion of introspection, Papineau agrees that introspection can 'tell us what experiences we are having, and various other things about

them', but casts doubt on the idea that it can tell us about the natures of experiences. In particular, Papineau (2020: 27) notes that '[a]ny normal information-delivering process is inevitably fallible and only partially informative about the nature of its objects' and treating introspection as an exception 'would seem to take us beyond the realm of naturally explicable faculties'.

In response, it is questionable that we cannot have a naturalistic view about introspection while maintaining that the qualia we introspect themselves are non-physical (e.g. see Coleman's (2019) quotational higher-order theory).¹⁶ More importantly, a proponent of revelation is unlikely to be taken aback by the worry that the faculty of introspection may be naturally inexplicable. After all, such a theorist is probably already an anti-physicalist who thinks that phenomenal properties, which are the objects of our introspection, are themselves non-physical.

6.2. Denying (i)

A more radical physicalist approach is to deny (i). There are at least three different ways to deny (i). The most radical option is to be an illusionist and deny outright that experiences have phenomenal properties including what-it-is-likeness. A second option is to concede that experiences have phenomenal properties but reject that having an experience puts one in a position to know what it is like to have that experience. A third option is to concede that experiences have phenomenal properties but deny that they have what-it-is-likeness. This third option has been articulated extensively by Pereboom in a number of places (2011, 2016, 2019).¹⁷ In the rest of this section, I shall focus on Pereboom's position.

In denying (i), Pereboom (2011: 14; see also 2016, 2019) has argued for his qualitative inaccuracy hypothesis (QIH):

[QIH]: It is an open possibility that introspective representation is inaccurate in the respect that it represents phenomenal properties as having qualitative natures they do not in fact have.

By 'qualitative natures' of phenomenal properties, Pereboom (2016: 173) means 'the what-it's-like features of sensory states' which, he says, are 'illusory in that they don't

¹⁶ Coleman (2019) talks in terms of the notion of acquaintance where the latter is construed in terms of the notion of embedding or part-whole constitution rather than representation, but the point equally applies to the notion of introspection.

¹⁷ Early on, I defined phenomenal properties as properties of subjects which constitute there being something it is like for a subject to undergo experiences with these properties. On this definition of 'phenomenal property', the denial that experiences have what-it-is-likeness amounts to illusionism which denies that experiences have phenomenal properties. So, Pereboom's position might simply amount to a version of illusionism, i.e. the first option. Pereboom can nevertheless maintain the talk of 'phenomenal properties', as he indeed does, and qualify them

exist'. On this view, an experience can have a phenomenal property Q, and introspection systematically and inaccurately represents the nature of Q as what-it-is-likeness X, which gives rise to the subject's false belief that 'Q has what-it-is-likeness X', but X simply does not exist. Pereboom motivates his QIH by drawing an analogy with colour and perceptual representation. On a number of theories of colour, colour properties do not have the qualitative natures that perception represents them to have. Consider a corresponding qualitative inaccuracy hypothesis regarding colour properties:

[QIH-c]: It is an open possibility that perceptual representation is inaccurate in the respect that it represents colour properties as having qualitative natures they do not in fact have.

For instance, physicalists about colour might say that the essence of colour property C is the surface reflectance property S, but perception does not accurately represent C as S, and instead represents C as having a primitive, qualitative nature Y. As Pereboom sees it, just as it is possible for there to be systematic perceptual misrepresentations of the natures of colour properties, it is possible for there to be systematic introspective misrepresentations of the natures of phenomenal properties.

Now, the alleged analogy between QIH and QIH-c relies on the alleged analogy between introspective representation and perceptual representation in the two cases. By perceptual representation, we usually mean *perceptual experience* – to say that my perception *represents* a car as red is just to say that it *phenomenally appears* to me that the car is red. Given the analogy, introspective representation is naturally understood as *phenomenal appearance* – to say that introspection represents Q as having what-it-is-likeness X is just to say that it *phenomenally appears* that Q has what-it-is-likeness X. Pereboom himself seems to adopt this understanding of introspective representation as he writes (2011: 22, fn.33):¹⁸

The open possibility I am envisioning [QIH] would have us making errors of ignorance of our introspection-based beliefs about phenomenal properties, since such beliefs would be based on *appearances* that fail to do justice to the real qualitative nature of those properties. (*italics added*)

On this understanding of introspective representation, QIH denies PHENOMENAL-NARD₂ and claims that there is a systematic discrepancy between the phenomenal appearance of Q's essence, i.e. as X, and Q's essence, which is not X. This way of thinking about the phenomenal appearance of the essence of Q as X is different from the one occurring in §3.2, which does not construe the phenomenal appearance as distinct from the

to be properties of subjects which account for the *illusion* that experiences have what-it-is-likeness.

¹⁸ It is also worth noting that in his replies to critics (2013: 758), Pereboom seems to be open to adopt the assumption that introspective representations are *beliefs*, rather than *experiences*. Elsewhere, I have argued that QIH is problematic on the belief-conception of introspective representation (Liu 2020).

experience with Q.¹⁹ In this case, the phenomenal appearance or introspective representation of Q as having what-it-is-likeness X is a second-order experience that is distinct from the original experience – call it 'e1' – with phenomenal property Q. The original experience e1 has Q where Q lacks what-it-is-likeness X. The introspective experience – call it 'e2' – misrepresents e1's Q as having X.

But this makes Pereboom's QIH highly implausible. Elsewhere (Liu 2020), I have argued that QIH thus understood potentially leads to an infinite regress. The illusion that e1's Q has what-it-is-likeness X is explained by positing as second-order experience e2 which misrepresents Q as having X. But e2 also seems to have a certain what-it-is-likeness, and the phenomenal appearance of e2's phenomenal property Q' as having what-it-is-likeness X' must also be an illusion. To account for the latter illusion, we would need to posit a third-order experience e3 which represents Q' as having X'. If e3 also seems to have a certain what-it-is-likeness, then this leads to a regress of introspective misrepresentations/experiences. Pereboom (2016: 178) denies such a regress by suggesting that '[a]t some level, I form only a belief, without distinctive phenomenology, that I am representing a mental state'. But this baffles the mind. Suppose that it is on the basis of e1, e2, and e3, I arrive at the judgement 'Q has what-it-is-likeness X'. How can that judgement be based on an illusion that Q has X when there is nothing it is like for me to have the three experiences that are supposed to create the illusion?

Here it is also worth noting that those who maintain a similarity between introspective representation and perceptual representation typically hold the inner sense theory of introspection, or what Shoemaker (1994) calls 'the broad perceptual model' of introspection (see also Armstrong 1968). On this theory, the two are similar in the sense that the relationship between introspective representation and what is introspectively represented, i.e. a mental state, can be thought of as causal and independent, just like the relationship between perceptual representation and what is perceptually represented, i.e. external objects and their properties (Shoemaker 1994: 271). But insofar that there is an analogy, the notion of introspective representation is understood as *belief*, not *experience* (see Shoemaker 1994: 271). As Moran (2001: 14) points out, no inner sense theorist would say that one's introspective belief that one is having a headache is 'mediated by an appearance of the headache'; on this theory, 'there is simply nothing quasi-experiential in the offing to begin with'. Overall, more needs to be said to make intelligible the idea that our introspective experience systematically misrepresents the natures of phenomenal properties.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I have primarily focused on the relationship between the thesis of revelation and the no appearance/reality distinction thesis with respect to conscious experience, i.e. NARD, as well as the threat they pose to physicalism. In relation to

¹⁹ In that case, phenomenal appearance is unlike perceptual representation/experience because the latter certainly admits an appearance/reality distinction with respect to what it represents.

revelation, we saw that it is an epistemic claim about how an experience with a phenomenal property Q puts us in a position to know the essence of Q. This latter knowledge is formulated as 'Q is X' where 'X' captures the essence of Q. In relation to NARD, we saw that it can be construed as a thesis about either the instantiations of phenomenal properties or the essences of phenomenal properties. It is the latter construal, understood as a phenomenological claim about our experiences of phenomenal properties, that is directly relevant to the thesis of revelation. Both revelation and the related version of NARD pose a problem for physicalism if the latter is construed as either an identity thesis or a grounding thesis. Physicalists typically reject revelation and the related version of NARD; their precise responses are varied but nevertheless face limitations.

Appendix A

The following proof shows that revelation, i.e. (i)&(ii), entails PHENOMENAL-NARD₂, i.e. (iii)↔(iv), given two additional premises, i.e. (ii)→(iii) and [(i)&(ii)]→(iv):

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. (i)&(ii) | Premise 1 |
| 2. (ii)→(iii) | Premise 2 |
| 3. [(i)&(ii)]→(iv) | Premise 3 |
| 4. (iv) | Hypothesis |
| 5. (ii) | &Elimination 1 |
| 6. (iii) | → Elimination 2, 5 |
| 7. (iii) | Hypothesis |
| 8. (i)&(ii) | Premise 1 |
| 9. (iv) | → Elimination 3, 8 |
| 10. (iii)↔(iv) | ↔ Introduction 4, 6, 7, 9 |

Appendix B

The following is an argument against grounding physicalism using (a) of PHENOMENAL-NARD₂ as premise (1):

- (1) All there is to the essence of Q is X if and only if in having an experience-token with Q, S experiences the essence of Q as X and only as X.
- (2) If grounding physicalism is true, then the essence of phenomenal property Q and the essence of physical property P are such that if P then Q.
- (3) If the essence of phenomenal property Q and the essence of physical property P are such that if P then Q, then in having an experience-token with phenomenal property Q, S experiences the essence of Q as X and only as X where X is such that if S knows the essence of P in addition to knowing the essence of Q, S is in a position to know *a priori* that 'if P then Q'.

- (4) It is not true that in having an experience-token with phenomenal property Q, S experiences the essence of Q as X and only as X where X is such that if S knows the essence of P in addition to knowing the essence of Q, S is in a position to know *a priori* that ‘if P then Q’.
- (5) Grounding physicalism is false.

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