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Luminosity and the Phenomenal

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by

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ABSTRACT

Though Timothy Williamson (2000) argues that we are not always in a position to know the phenomenal character of our experiences, critics retort that his argument overlooks views according to which the phenomenal properties involved in our experiences can serve to *constitute* our knowledge of their phenomenal character. I develop an argument against this view, contending that the phenomenal knowledge these critics envision would lack an adequate *conceptual role*: one who possessed such knowledge would nevertheless have no grasp of what it entailed or ruled out. At best, therefore, this knowledge cannot serve the foundational role its proponents imagine for it; and at worst, it will not count as knowledge at all. The upshot is that the best defense against Williamson turns out not to secure our epistemic foothold in the phenomenal realm.

INDEX WORDS: Epistemology, Philosophy of Mind, Luminosity

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DEDICATION

To Julia

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I owe a deep debt of gratitude to my family; to my partner Julia, for her unwavering support; to Juan, for his continued faith in me and in this project; and to Professor Scarantino, for both his encouragement and his sage advice.

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1 INTRODUCTION

A longstanding philosophical tradition holds that our epistemic access to the phenomenal character of our experiences is guaranteed: if we feel cold, or if we seem to see a certain shade of red, no evil demon could undermine our knowledge of this fact.[1] To be more precise, wherever our experience has phenomenal properties that determine what it is like to undergo it—apart from (if not altogether unrelated to) what this experience represents, or whether it has thus far been taken up into higher-order thought—this tradition holds that we are therefore in a position to know that our experience has those properties.[2] While the notion of being in a position to know is somewhat loose, whether or not one is in a position to know something is intended to reflect whether there are epistemic defeaters to that knowledge in the circumstances; so one who lacks the concepts that would be involved in the knowledge of some fact might nevertheless be in a position to know that fact, so long as their epistemic circumstances otherwise conduce to that knowledge.[3] In the case of facts about the phenomenal character of our experience, the attractive thought is that these facts are in all circumstances open to our knowledge.

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[1] I nod here, of course, to Descartes, who is often figured as the forefather of this tradition. But similar ideas appear at the foundation of a wide range of philosophical undertakings, from those of Roderick Chisholm (1982) to, in more recent times, Declan Smithies (2019).

[2] So stated, this is a thesis about our epistemic access to the contents of what Block (2002) calls 'P-Consciousness' (or phenomenal consciousness) rather than 'A-Consciousness' (or access consciousness). It is whether or not we feel pain, for instance, not whether or not we also believe that we feel pain, to which our epistemic access is in the first instance guaranteed (although the thesis that our epistemic access to our own beliefs is also guaranteed is often held in tandem with the former). I am thankful to Andrea Scarantino for urging me to note this distinction. Furthermore, while I speak here and throughout as if experiences were particulars that themselves instantiate phenomenal properties, one might also think of experiences as the instantiation of such properties on the part of the subject (Chalmers, 2003). I do not intend to take a stance on this matter, as I believe it is orthogonal to the central concerns of this thesis; I adopt this manner of speaking just because I find it more natural.

[3] When Williamson (2000, p. 95) introduces the notion of being in a position to know, he leaves it somewhat loose in order to make more flexible the position of his opponents, who claim that there are some conditions (such as phenomenal conditions) that cannot obtain without our being in a position to know so. In particular, Williamson holds that (as is in line with the above) one can nevertheless be in a position to know what one lacks the concepts to know. I follow Williamson (and critics) in supposing that this notion is intuitive enough to make use of in this context. I am thankful to Andrea Scarantino for encouraging me to get clear on this point.

Following Williamson (2000), let us render this as the thesis that our own phenomenal condition, *viz*. the phenomenal properties of our experience, is *luminous*, where a condition C is luminous just in case:

> (L) For every case α, if in α C obtains, then in α one is in a position to know that C obtains (p. 95).[4]

Williamson goes on to argue, however, that no phenomenal condition—and in fact no non-trivial condition whatsoever, phenomenal or otherwise—can be luminous.[5] If this is right, it would destabilize an eminent epistemological tradition stretching back at least as far as Descartes.

Call those who would defend this tradition *luminists*. The predominant luminist rejoinder to Williamson is that his argument fails to account for a certain familiar picture of the connection between the phenomenal properties of our experiences and our beliefs on the matter. In outline, this picture holds that the phenomenal properties of an experience can serve to *constitute* certain of our beliefs about that experience—so the phenomenal properties in virtue of which an experience is one of feeling cold, for instance, might themselves become constituents of a belief to the effect that one feels cold. Such a belief would be infallible, since one could not even hold it without having an experience of the phenomenal character that it picks out (the phenomenal properties of this experience being themselves constituents of the belief). The upshot is that our

[4] A *case* is what Williamson calls a centered possible world: a possible world with a distinguished subject and time. A *condition* obtains or fails to obtain at each case and can be specified with a sentential clause in which 'one' and the present tense refer to the distinguished subject and time of the case at hand (as in the condition that one feels cold). To be in a certain *phenomenal* condition is to have an experience that instantiates certain phenomenal properties.

[5] As we shall see, the argument that Williamson gives is not effective against the claim that some condition is luminous unless that condition can cease to obtain over time, and so is not effective against conditions that must obtain, cannot obtain, or are eternal. Williamson provides reasons to think that these conditions do not threaten the generalization that no non-trivial conditions are luminous (2000, p. 108). Regardless, the phenomenal conditions in which we are interested here are not like these putative counterexamples in this regard.

epistemic access to the phenomenal character of experiences might be more secure than Williamson imagines.

The aim of this thesis is to challenge the picture of phenomenal thought that underwrites this luminist rejoinder to Williamson. The nerve of the challenge is that restricting the thought that one is in some phenomenal condition to the actual occurrence of that condition turns out to prevent such thinking from facilitating even basic inferences about that condition. Such thinking could thus involve no grasp of what would follow from our being in a given phenomenal condition, nor what it would it rule out; to borrow a term of art, phenomenal thought of the sort that luminists propose would lack an adequate *conceptual role*. If we take this aspect of thought to be essential, then the luminist picture of phenomenal thought ends up being untenable. And even if we do not—as I consider at the end of the thesis—the epistemic value of such thought nevertheless falls far short of luminist ambitions, insofar as it cannot serve the foundational role that has often been imagined for it. If I am right, the result is that there is no stretch of the world in which we are guaranteed an epistemic foothold—no realm of luminous conditions.

2 ANTI-LUMINOSITY

Let us start with a reconstruction of the original anti-luminosity argument as Williamson gives it. Williamson asks that we consider a scenario along the following lines:

> **Cold Morning.** A series of cases contiguous in time, $\alpha_0 \ldots \alpha_n$, describes each millisecond of a given morning. Over the course of this morning, a subject S undergoes a gradual transition from feeling cold (at α_0) to feeling hot (at α_n), focusing throughout the morning just on whether or not their experience is one of feeling cold. Although they cannot discriminate their feelings of cold from one case to the next, S has complete confidence that they feel cold at α_0 and that they feel hot at α_n (pp. 96-97).

Since whether or not we feel cold is a matter of the phenomenal properties of our experience, the condition that one feels cold is a phenomenal condition. According to the luminist, therefore, this condition is also luminous. Assume (for an eventual *reductio*) that this is correct. It follows that, whenever this condition obtains over the course of Cold Morning, S is in a position to know as much. In turn, given that S focuses throughout Cold Morning just on whether or not this condition obtains, the following principle results:

> (L_S) If in α_i S feels cold, then in α_i S knows that they feel cold.

The other key premise that Williamson relies upon in his argument is the following principle:

(M_i) If in α_i S knows that they feel cold, then in α_{i+1} S feels cold.

This conditional expresses the idea that what S knows requires a *margin for error*: it must be true not just in the actual case, but also in any nearby case that S cannot discriminate from the actual case (as are adjacent cases in the series $\alpha_0 \ldots \alpha_n$). Suppose S believes that they feel cold at α_i but does not feel cold at α_{i+1}. Then it seems that their basis for belief in α_i is too unreliable to support knowledge, insofar as (by hypothesis) S cannot tell α_i and α_{i+1} apart; their belief is not *safe* in the sense that it was too nearly false. So if knowledge requires safety, as is often supposed, then a margin-for-error principle such as (M_i) should hold for scenarios like Cold Morning.[6]

Now the *reductio* kicks in. S feels cold at α_0; so by (L_S) S also knows they feel cold at α_0. But since this knowledge requires a margin for error, by (M_0) S must also feel cold at the next case, that is, at α_1. S then also knows by (L_S) that they feel cold at α_1; and so by (M_0) S also feels cold at α_2. Iterating this reasoning, we can deduce that S feels cold even at α_n. Yet by hypothesis, S feels hot at α_n. One of our assumptions is steering us wrong. Since the assumptions that comprise Cold Morning appear unproblematic, and (M_i) is supposed to capture a precondition of knowledge, Williamson concludes that the culprit must be (L_S)—a direct consequence of assuming that the condition that one feels cold is luminous. But this condition is not unique: scenarios analogous to Cold Morning can be constructed for all phenomenal conditions. So it would seem that, on pain of contradiction, no such condition can be luminous.

As expected, luminists draw a different conclusion, arguing that we should abandon (M_i) to preserve (L_S). Recall that (M_i) depends on the thought that knowledge must be *safe*—a belief cannot be knowledge if it was almost false. This thought is often formalized as follows:

[6] For an influential statement of the thought that knowledge requires safety from error, see Ernest Sosa (1999).

> (SAF) If in α one knows that *p*, then for all nearby cases β, if in β one believes that *p*, then in β it is true that *p*.[7]

In less formal terms, (SAF) is intended to capture the intuition that one does not have knowledge where one holds a belief that just so happens to be true, but that one would also have held in quite similar circumstances in which it would have been false. (SAF) is a popular principle, and most luminists accept it.[8] Yet note that (SAF) alone does not get us (M_i) when applied to Cold Morning. For supposing S knows in some case α_i that they feel cold, then (SAF) does not demand that S also feel cold in the next case α_{i+1}, as would (M_i), *unless* in α_{i+1} S continues to believe as much.[9] If in α_{i+1} S instead relinquishes this belief—perhaps because in α_{i+1} it ceases to be true—then (M_i) will not follow.[10] Appealing to the thought that knowledge must be safe from error in order to get (M_i), as Williamson intends to, thus requires making the further assumption that S might fail to relinquish their belief in such a transition—that is, that S might wind up holding a false belief

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[7] As Amia Srinivasan (2015, fn. 10) notes, which cases count as nearby for the purposes of evaluating the safety of a belief is a controversial matter, with Williamson (2000) arguing that such judgments must be downstream of our intuitions about what counts as an instance of knowledge. One can accede to (SAF), however, without taking it that this matter is settled, as (SAF) is intended just to capture the fact that our judgments about whether a true belief is an instance of knowledge are sensitive to considerations of counterfactual circumstances in which the same belief is held in error. Moreover, for our purposes, it seems obvious that adjacent cases in the series $\alpha_0 \ldots \alpha_n$ would count as nearby cases to one another with respect to the safety of the beliefs that S forms about their feelings of cold, given that S cannot tell these cases apart with respect to those feelings.

[8] Brian Weatherson (2004), Selim Berker (2008), and Murali Ramachandran (2009) all accept versions of (SAF) in the course of their counterarguments to Williamson, though see Neta and Rohrbaugh (2004) and Brueckner and Fiocco (2002) for luminist challenges to such requirements. I do not address these challenges here, as several of those to whom I intend to respond do not themselves find them compelling.

[9] Or at least unless S believes this in some nearby case β_{i+1} that is otherwise a phenomenal duplicate of α_{i+1} (as then (SAF) would demand that S feel cold in β_{i+1} and so in turn in α_{i+1}). This point owes to Amia Srinivasan (2015, p. 302).

[10] It might be thought that the (quite plausible) stipulation in Cold Morning that S cannot discriminate their phenomenal condition from one case to the next would rule out their beliefs responding this fast to such conditions' ceasing to obtain. Murali Ramachandran (2009), however, proposes that we understand this stipulation as follows:

> (LIM) If in α_i S believes that they feel cold, then in α_{i+1} S does not believe that they do not feel cold (p. 666).

According to (LIM), S cannot draw a positive distinction between their feelings of cold at α_i and α_{i+1}, but their beliefs on the matter might still be infallible. It thus satisfies both intuitions: that we sometimes cannot tell our own phenomenal conditions apart from moment to moment, and that our (considered) beliefs about our own phenomenal conditions cannot be mistaken.

about their own feelings of cold. But if we think that there is a deep connection between what our phenomenal condition is and what we believe it to be, as the luminist does, then this assumption will be unpalatable. In particular, luminists often note that this assumption runs afoul of the plausible thought that there is a *constitutive connection* between our phenomenal conditions and our beliefs about them. Consider:

> (CON) If one has done all one can to decide whether a phenomenal condition C obtains for oneself in the present case, then if one believes that C obtains for oneself in the present case, then C does obtain for oneself in the present case.

Selim Berker (2008, p. 8) introduces (CON) as the "weakest version of a constitutive connection" between the phenomenal and the doxastic that would serve to block the move from (SAF) to (M_i). The thought is rather intuitive: whether one feels cold seems to be a matter about which one could not make mistakes, at least so long as one is being careful. Of course, that this thought is intuitive does not guarantee that it will turn out to be true. Yet it does show that the luminist has at least a *prima facie* rejoinder to the assumption of (M_i): where one never errs, one needs no margin for error. And without this crucial premise of the *reductio*, assuming that phenomenal conditions are luminous will no longer lead us into contradiction.[11]

[11] Amia Srinivasan (2015) argues that casting (SAF) in terms of degree of confidence can get around (CON):

> (C-SAF) If in α one knows with degree of confidence *d* that *p*, then *p* is true in any sufficiently similar case β in which one has at an-most-slightly-lower degree of confidence *d′* that *p* (p. 309).

According to (C-SAF), even misplaced confidence short of outright belief can preclude knowledge. If this is so, then (CON) will not be enough to block the move to (M_i), as (CON) does not rule out misplaced confidence about our phenomenal conditions. Setting aside the (quite controversial) matter of whether (C-SAF) is true, however, the luminist can just introduce an analogue to (CON) cast in terms of degrees of confidence:

The upshot is that the anti-luminist must address the idea of a constitutive connection between the phenomenal and the doxastic in order for their argument to get off the ground. Berker puts the point well when he observes that Williamson appears to suppose a *perceptual model* for phenomenal knowledge, according to which coming to know our phenomenal conditions is akin to training some inner sight upon them, with all the possibilities for error that this metaphor would suggest (2008, p. 19). Yet this model need not be supposed; for phenomenal thought might be free from the sort of fallibility that the anti-luminosity argument exploits. Nor must proposing a constitutive connection between the phenomenal and the doxastic involve construing our phenomenal conditions as downstream of our beliefs about them, as it would if one held that "feeling cold were simply a matter of believing oneself to feel cold" (Srinivasan, 2015, p. 315). This would be for the proposed constitution to run from the doxastic to the phenomenal; but it is far more plausible to suppose that the constitution here runs in the opposite direction, with phenomenal properties serving somehow to constitute beliefs about themselves.[12]

(CON′) If one has done all one can do to decide whether some phenomenal condition C obtains for oneself in the present case, then if one has some significant degree of confidence that C obtains for oneself in the present case, then C does obtain for oneself in the present case.

(CON′) expresses the plausible thought that there is a constitutive connection between our phenomenal conditions and our significant confidence about these conditions (where confidence is significant just in case its being misplaced would preclude nearby knowledge). (CON′) thus blocks the move from (C-SAF) to (M_i): as soon as S no longer feels cold, their confidence to that effect will vanish. Srinivasan points to this discontinuous drop in degrees of confidence as a reason to reject (CON′), following Berker (2008, p.15) in noting that "physical systems are rarely characterized by such discontinuity" (2015, p. 315). Yet even if there is never discontinuous variation in the quanta in the brain upon which degrees of confidence supervene, that does not rule out discontinuous variation in degrees of confidence themselves: the contours of our mental talk, as should not be surprising, are not those of our neuroscience.

[12] Srinivasan has in mind here a view like that which Crispin Wright (1989, 1998) reads in Wittgenstein (1953), or which Annalisa Coliva (2009) has developed, on which we are infallible about (some of) our mental states just insofar as our having those states is a matter of taking ourselves to have them. There is some debate about whether knowledge that is in this sense "no cognitive achievement" (Srinivasan, 2015, p. 317) could even count as such; but regardless, such views are ill-suited to accommodating our epistemic situation with respect to our phenomenal conditions, since (among other considerations) we should like to be able to ascribe phenomenal conditions even to creatures, such as babies and animals, that lack the conceptual wherewithal to hold beliefs about these conditions. As is suggested above, the sort of constitutivism that best suits the luminist about phenomenal conditions is rather one on which it is the phenomenal that is prior to the doxastic in the order of constitution.

At the same time, the fact that such a position is *prima facie* plausible does not, on its own, vindicate the luminist. If (CON) is all that stands in the way of the anti-luminosity argument, after all, we should expect the luminist to provide some more robust statement of what the constitutive connection between the phenomenal and the doxastic amounts to such that (CON) holds.[13] And if elaborating this connection turns out to render it untenable, then the prospects for the luminist will look rather slim indeed. With these points in mind, let us now look at how luminists have, in fact, elaborated this connection.

[13] It might be objected that this expectation misplaces the burden of proof: it is the anti-luminist who needs to show that the constitutive connection between the phenomenal and the doxastic cannot be maintained, rather than the luminist who needs to defend it. Thus Berker, for instance, goes so far as to claim that this expectation "would beg the question against the defender of luminosity" (2008, p. 9). There are two points to be made here. The first is that to expect a defense of (CON) is not in a strict sense to beg the question against a proponent of (L), seeing as the two theses are distinct: the first concerns that which we cannot believe without its being so, while the latter concerns that which cannot be so without our knowledge. That these theses are often defended in tandem is an orthogonal matter. The second point, however, is that questions about the burden of proof are immaterial to the logical relations among the claims at issue, which—if the foregoing is correct—do turn out to be such that maintaining (L) for phenomenal conditions requires maintaining (CON). As the rest of this thesis presents arguments to the effect that the best available defenses of (CON) end up being unworkable, therefore, it is in the end of little consequence whether luminists were, in fact, under genuine dialectical pressure to mount those defenses.

3 VARIETIES OF CONSTITUTIVE CONNECTION

As we saw, Williamson offers a powerful argument against the supposition that phenomenal conditions are luminous, with (CON) seeming to be luminists' most promising means of rejoinder. The fate of this argument, and so in turn of an eminent epistemological tradition, thus appears to hang on whether and what support luminists can marshal for this principle. This section outlines recent attempts in this direction, in order to get us in a position to evaluate their prospects, and so those of luminism itself, in the subsequent sections.

While there are doubtless numerous possible accounts of the constitutive connection between the phenomenal and the doxastic that the luminist might appeal to in support of (CON), I want to focus in the bulk of this thesis on one approach that has achieved predominance as of late among avowed luminists: the so-called *direct phenomenal concept* approach (Chalmers, 2003; Duncan, 2016; Barz, 2017). In order to motivate focusing on this account in what follows, however, I will first approach it via some alternatives.

Perhaps the most familiar picture of the connection between phenomenal conditions and our beliefs about them is that the two are just identical. Thus Brian Weatherson (2004) suggests:

> " … when [one] is in some phenomenal state, the very same brain states constitute both the phenomena and a belief about the phenomena" (p. 379).[14]

This view is rather natural, and it would get the luminist (CON): the belief that one is in some phenomenal condition could not be false if one and the same state instantiates both the condition

[14] A similar picture is also suggested by Keith Hossack (2002). Note that the view, as stated, can be tightened up somewhat: we can drop the physicalism implicit in identifying both phenomenal conditions and beliefs with further brain states, and would also want to identify phenomenal conditions with doxastic attitudes at large, such that the view yields not only (CON), but (CON′) (cf. footnote eleven above).

and the belief. Yet there are reasons to prefer a more subtle account. As Weatherson notes himself, there appear to be important disanalogies between phenomenal and belief states: while it is not often denied that belief states have conceptual contents, whether the same is true of phenomenal states is quite contentious (p. 380). Gareth Evans (1982) and Christopher Peacocke (1992), for instance, each argue that phenomenal states must have non-conceptual contents insofar as (among other considerations) the fineness of grain of these states' contents outstrips the fineness of grain of our conceptual repertoire. The claim that a single state can instantiate both a phenomenal condition and a belief is therefore liable to raise concerns, regardless of which is assimilated to the other. It would be preferable if the luminist could leave these questions open.

If the identification of phenomenal conditions with beliefs is too coarse-grained, the luminist might instead locate the constitutive connection between the phenomenal and the doxastic at the level of concepts. One alternative Weatherson and others suggest is that beliefs about our own phenomenal conditions make use of an *inner demonstrative* concept: S might adopt the belief 'I feel thus' on Cold Morning, for instance, and so pick out their phenomenal condition via demonstration (p. 380).[15] Such beliefs have to represent S as being in their actual phenomenal condition, as no other condition is there to be demonstrated. Yet the appeal to demonstration ends up doing little work for the luminist on its own. Consider: if the belief 'I feel thus' must be true insofar as 'thus' just picks out our actual phenomenal condition, the belief 'I am here' must likewise be true insofar as 'here' just picks out our actual location. But no one would think this means that our location is luminous: the belief 'I am here' is infallible just because it concerns the trivial condition that one is here (wherever that ends up being). Insofar as the belief 'I feel thus' is

[15] Brie Gertler (2012), for instance, has developed a similar view, though her account is far more substantive than is the offhand comment that Weatherson makes, and perhaps hews closer to the direct phenomenal concept account considered below.

infallible for the same reason, then, it will be in the same boat. To drive the point home, consider that this luminist maneuver, if effective, would also serve to render our beliefs about *others'* phenomenal conditions infallible: one could just as well call out 'She feels thus!' and be assured of its truth, assuming the demonstrative managed to refer. Yet whatever guaranteed epistemic access such demonstration could afford us to the phenomenal character of others' experiences is, of course, not of the sort in which the luminist is interested. Of course, it will be objected, our situation with respect to our own phenomenal condition is quite unlike our situation with respect to that of others. Our own phenomenal condition, it might be thought, is somehow *self-presenting*: it lies before our mind in a manner which that of others just does not. And this is indeed true as far as it goes; but note that it is also just what is to be explained. Demonstration alone, that is, fails to account for (CON) without appeal to the self-presenting nature of our phenomenal conditions, and this is just what the luminist is supposed to account for in elaborating the constitutive connection between the phenomenal and the doxastic. Appealing to the semantics of demonstratives thus does nothing on its own to shore up (CON).

This brings us last to the predominant luminist account of (CON). In two recent papers, Wolfgang Barz (2017) and Matt Duncan (2016) have developed a defense of (CON) that appeals to the notion of a *direct phenomenal concept*.[16] In outline, the thought is that direct attention to the phenomenal properties of our experiences allows us to token mental representations of these properties, called direct phenomenal concepts, that these properties' instances themselves *constitute*. As Barz glosses it, direct phenomenal concepts are thus "concepts that literally contain the experiences to which they refer" (p. 492). So when S attends to their feelings of cold on Cold Morning, for instance, this allows S to form a concept that has those feelings themselves—that

[16] The notion of a direct phenomenal concept owes in the first instance to David Chalmers (2003).

particular instance of phenomenal coldness—as a constituent, conceiving phenomenal coldness via direct exemplification. Per Katalin Balog (2012), this process can be understood as one in which direct phenomenal concepts 'quote' instances of the properties to which these concepts refer, much as a sentence can refer to a word in quoting a token of it. Unlike most of our other concepts of phenomenal properties, therefore, direct phenomenal concepts refer to phenomenal properties without the mediation of a descriptive mode of presentation: because these concepts *contain* instances of these properties, direct phenomenal concepts are supposed to provide unmediated insight into these properties' natures.[17]

The resulting picture looks to possess several advantages for the luminist. In the first instance, the more fine-grained connection between phenomenal properties and phenomenal concepts is supposed to allow direct phenomenal concepts to give conceptual form to phenomenal content, and so to avoid earlier worries about disanalogies between these forms of representation—a process that Duncan, following Chalmers (2003), describes as "the 'taking up' of phenomenal content into [a] concept" (p. 5). And since direct phenomenal concepts contain instances of their referents as constituents, these concepts should also facilitate a more substantive grasp of our phenomenal conditions than could demonstrative reference alone. As Duncan writes:

> "When one thinks, 'my experience is thus', and thereby forms a direct phenomenal concept, the 'thus' does not indicate a blind act of demonstration on a par with 'that

[17] Compare, for instance, what Chalmers (2003) calls *relational phenomenal concepts*, being concepts that pick out phenomenal properties via their relation to non-phenomenal properties and objects; or *pure phenomenal concepts*, being concepts that pick out phenomenal properties in terms of their intrinsic nature (but which need not have those properties as constituents). Both relational and pure (non-direct) phenomenal concepts belong to the broader class of *standing phenomenal concepts*, being those phenomenal concepts that (unlike direct phenomenal concepts) can be possessed and tokened independent of their referents' instantiation. As might be expected, it is standing phenomenal concepts that facilitate the great bulk of our thinking about phenomenal conditions. I conder the relationship between direct and standing phenomenal concepts in greater depth later on.

> thing over there' or 'those people in the other room', which may succeed in referring without the thinker's grasping what she is referring to" (p. 6).

Most important for the luminist, however, is that this picture secures (CON). We cannot even possess or token direct phenomenal concepts without instantiating the phenomenal properties to which these concepts refer, given that these concepts *contain* instances of those properties; so the belief that some phenomenal condition obtains, so long as it involves a direct phenomenal concept, will be immune from error. As Barz writes: "one cannot hold a belief [that makes use of a direct phenomenal concept] if one does not undergo the experience that is part of the direct phenomenal concept one thereby uses … [such beliefs] are *infallible*" (p. 485).[18]

The account that direct phenomenal concepts provide of the constitutive connection between the phenomenal and the doxastic thus looks to offer luminists considerable resources for a defense of (CON), and so in turn of the claim that the phenomenal is a realm of luminous conditions. Moreover, there is some reason to think that other such accounts would need to hew close to this model in order to be viable for the luminist. As we have seen, direct phenomenal concepts have meaningful advantages over accounts that treat the phenomenal-doxastic connection either at the level of doxastic attitudes, such as belief, or in terms of demonstrative reference alone. And although other accounts of phenomenal concepts are available, these accounts are not intended to challenge the perceptual model of phenomenal knowledge: rather than taking the connection between the phenomenal and the doxastic to be constitutive, such accounts are content to assume that phenomenal concepts, much like other concepts, track properties independent of

[18] Or at least beliefs that use direct phenomenal concepts just to ascribe to ourselves the very phenomenal properties that constitute those concepts' tokens will be infallible; for there is in principle no barrier to our using these concepts to mistakenly deny the ascription to ourselves of their referents, for instance.

them, and so can in principle be misapplied.[19] If this model is to be denied, therefore, it is not obvious what alternative there might be to the position that phenomenal properties are themselves an integral part of their own conception. At least luminists, so far as I know, have advanced no such accounts. Of course, the finer details of this position might differ; the point is that the most viable option for the luminist sees them committed to something in the neighborhood. And it is just this commitment, as I will now argue, that turns out to be problematic.

[19] The notion of a phenomenal concept hails in the first instance from the debate between physicalists and dualists, with those on either side of the debate invoking the notion to shore up their preferred answers to the so-called hard problem(s) of consciousness. It is because of this different theoretical ambition that other accounts of phenomenal concepts, besides direct phenomenal concepts, do not furnish the sort of infallibility that luminists require to resist the anti-luminosity argument. To take an example: perhaps phenomenal concepts consist, as Loar (1990) and others have suggested, in the capacity to recognize our phenomenal conditions as belonging to one or another qualitative type. This view nevertheless suggests no mechanism that would, in principle, foreclose this recognitive capacity from erring—nor, for its purposes, need it to.

4 THE CONCEPTUAL ROLE OF DIRECT PHENOMENAL CONCEPTS

I have thus far avoided pressing on the claim that (as Barz writes) "there is a clear sense in which a conscious experience is *inside* a concept" (p. 484). Yet this claim might well strike us as rather suspicious. Just how can instances of properties, phenomenal or otherwise, constitute tokens of their own concepts?[20] What sort of grasp could such concepts provide of their referents? And above all, what grounds might there be for accepting that there could be such concepts after all?

One approach to this question is to establish some minimal condition that direct phenomenal concepts would have to meet just in order for us to countenance them as genuine concepts. And in fact we can see the suggestion of such a condition in a statement that Barz gives of a related concern. As Barz writes:

> " … it is not at all easy to positively state what exactly the epistemic value of beliefs [involving direct phenomenal concepts] is; in particular, exactly what inferences they license us to draw or what other beliefs they can be used to evidentially support" (fn. 27).

Though Barz puts the point in terms of the epistemic value of direct phenomenal concepts, it is not too much of a stretch to see these remarks as bearing on the status of direct phenomenal concepts as such. Motivating this version of the concern would then be the plausible thought that direct phenomenal concepts, just in order to count as concepts, need to have some identifiable role in the reasoning of those who possess them; for otherwise it will be hard to see what grasp these concepts

[20] As Katalin Balog (2012) notes, atoms also constitute tokens of their own concepts, but this constitution is not supposed to account for the content of these concepts, as it is in the case of direct phenomenal concepts (p. 21). It is *this* feature of direct phenomenal concepts that is puzzling.

could provide of phenomenal properties. Barz goes on to argue that such concerns can be dismissed, seeing as phenomenal properties, *qua* phenomenal, must provide us with *some* grasp of their character, even if this grasp is "ineffable" and so not susceptible to articulation in inference (p. 491). For reasons that will become apparent, I think this response is misguided. But for now I propose just to see how far this line of investigation can take us.

It will be helpful to frame this investigation in terms of the *conceptual role* of direct phenomenal concepts. While the notion of conceptual role is contested, I mean to borrow the term here just to denote those inferences that exercising direct phenomenal concepts in beliefs about our phenomenal conditions would put us in a position to draw about those conditions.[21] For the moment, I will leave the notion of being in a position to draw an inference somewhat loose; suffice it that, if one is in a position to draw an inference, then one is at least disposed to follow thoughts of its premise(s) with thoughts of its conclusion(s). So perhaps exercising a direct phenomenal concept in the belief that one feels cold would put one in a position to infer that one does not feel hot, or exercising a direct phenomenal concept in the belief that one smells sulfur would put one in a position to infer that one smells something pungent; these inferences would then be ascribed to these concepts' respective conceptual roles. In more general terms, the inferences that comprise direct phenomenal concepts' conceptual roles can be thought of as those that serve to situate given phenomenal conditions in the broader space of possible phenomenal conditions, articulating what being in those conditions amounts to in terms of the relations of resemblance and difference, exclusion and inclusion, that these conditions stand in to one another.[22] I will thus sometimes speak

[21] While this is a rather narrow notion of conceptual role, it is all that is needed for the purposes of the following arguments. While I do not claim that the best notion of conceptual role does not include more than the inferences that concepts facilitate about their referents, I do think that a narrow conceptual role of this sort is at least a minimal requirement on concept possession. For more on conceptual role, see Greenberg and Harman (2006).

[22] See Nelson Goodman (1951) and Austen Clark (1993) for two influential statements to the effect that phenomenal properties form quality spaces of this sort.

of direct phenomenal concepts' conceptual roles as a matter of these concepts' situating us within that space.

The argument I now want to make is that direct phenomenal concepts cannot have an adequate conceptual role, and so should not be admitted as genuine concepts. In particular, I propose that the conceptual role of a direct phenomenal concept is adequate in this sense just in case possessing that concept suffices for being in a position to draw *some* non-trivial inference(s) about the condition to which it pertains (where an inference is non-trivial just in case it would not follow from being in any phenomenal condition whatsoever).[23] It should be emphasized how minimal this condition on concept possession is. It does not presuppose that the content of direct phenomenal concepts would consist in their conceptual roles, for one, nor that grasping some entailment in particular is ever required to possess a concept, but rather leaves both of these questions open.[24] The thought is instead that direct phenomenal concepts could provide no genuine conception of our phenomenal conditions if possessing them would not even put us in a position to articulate *something* about what it would amount to for these conditions to obtain, whatever that turns out to be. If this principle strikes one as suspicious, however, I consider at the end of the thesis whether abandoning it would do the luminist much good.

We can break down the problem of determining whether direct phenomenal concepts could have adequate conceptual roles into two more manageable problems. Note first that the inferences that would comprise direct phenomenal concepts' conceptual roles involve the exercise of *multiple* phenomenal concepts: ascribing the inference from 'I see scarlet' to 'I see red' to the conceptual role of the direct phenomenal concept of scarlet, for instance, involves locating that concept in an

[23] For instance, inferring 'I am now in some phenomenal condition' from the exercise of a direct phenomenal concept would be trivial, and so would not make for an adequate conceptual role on its own.
[24] Williamson (2003) himself denies that a grasp of any particular entailment is ever a condition on concept possession. I tackle a related objection in more depth later on.

inferential relation to some further phenomenal concept of red (whether this is a direct phenomenal concept or otherwise). Providing an account of the conceptual role of direct phenomenal concepts can thus be construed as the task of locating these concepts in inferential relations of this sort. There are then two exhaustive general approaches for the luminist to adopt in this regard. On one hand, the conceptual role of direct phenomenal concepts might comprise inferences that involve the exercise just of further direct phenomenal concepts. And on the other hand, the conceptual role of direct phenomenal concepts might comprise inferences that involve, in addition to the exercise of direct phenomenal concepts themselves, the exercise of non-direct phenomenal concepts: those phenomenal concepts that, unlike direct phenomenal concepts, can be possessed absent their referents' instantiation. Since these two general kinds of phenomenal concept exhaust the conception under which the space of possible phenomenal conditions is available to us, however, demonstrating that neither sort of inference could contribute to direct phenomenal concepts' conceptual roles thus amounts to demonstrating that these concepts could not have adequate conceptual roles altogether, in the sense elaborated above. The following arguments are thus directed towards this task, considering each proposal in turn. The upshot will be that direct phenomenal concepts deliver an inadequate account of the constitutive connection between the phenomenal and the doxastic.

4.1 Inferential Relations Between Direct Phenomenal Concepts

Let us start with the proposal that the conceptual roles of direct phenomenal concepts derive from their inferential relations to one another. According to this proposal, if exercising a direct phenomenal concept in the belief that one feels cold would put one in a position to infer that one does not feel hot, then forming the latter belief would also involve the exercise of a direct

phenomenal concept (*viz*. the direct phenomenal concept of heat). The thought is that the conceptual roles of direct phenomenal concepts can be articulated along these lines, as comprising inferences that situate phenomenal conditions in relation to others also conceived in direct phenomenal terms.

This proposal, however, faces an immediate problem. Recall that, for the luminist, the main advantage of direct phenomenal concepts is that one cannot possess them in the absence of their referents. Yet since one also cannot feel both hot and cold at the same time—at least insofar as these feelings are a matter of our overall experience of temperature—for that reason one also cannot possess direct phenomenal concepts of these feelings at the same time.[25] So if the beliefs 'I feel cold' and 'I do not feel hot' would involve these concepts, it follows that one could not even entertain these beliefs at the same time, let alone infer from one to the other. This proposal thus fails to account for a basic demand on these concepts' conceptual roles. But the issue is not limited to this particular inference. Consider, for instance, other opposing pairs of direct phenomenal concepts, such as those of red and green, which pertain to conditions that one can be in at a single time without issue.[26] One inference that might be thought to belong to these concepts' conceptual roles is that experiences of red are not experiences of green (and *vice versa*). Yet because direct phenomenal concepts are supposed to derive their contents from the properties that constitute them, one will form the same direct phenomenal color concepts regardless of whether one experiences these colors alone or alongside others, as in either case it is the same properties to which one attends. It follows that forming the direct phenomenal concept of red does not suffice

[25] One can, of course, also feel localized varieties of hot and cold. There is a question here of whether the phenomenology of overall temperature is in fact distinct from the phenomenology of localized temperature, but the argument does not turn on settling the matter. While the example of direct phenomenal concepts that one *cannot* possess at one time is more forceful, the argument relies only on the fact that any combination of direct phenomenal concepts *might not* be available to one at a single time.

[26] I am thankful to Andrea Scarantino for urging this point.

for one to grasp that the condition to which it pertains is not one to which the direct phenomenal concept of green would pertain, and so that the corresponding inference does not belong to either of these concepts' conceptual roles. To put the point at the more general level, since we cannot possess direct phenomenal concepts pertaining to conditions that lie outside our actual phenomenal conditions in the space of possibilities, the inferences that would situate our actual phenomenal conditions in relation to others within that space thus could not involve the exercise of further direct phenomenal concepts. So if the conceptual role of direct phenomenal concepts were in fact to derive from their inferential relations to one another, then exercising these concepts would provide no grasp of where our phenomenal conditions stand within that space. This proposal thus fails to furnish direct phenomenal concepts with an adequate conceptual role.

Having stated the complaint against this proposal, I now turn to objections. One possible complication owes to the fact that (in picturesque terms) there are overlaps in the space of possible phenomenal conditions: since the experience of scarlet is also the experience of red and of color, for instance, it might be thought that direct phenomenal concepts of these properties will come together, allowing one to infer from 'I experience scarlet' to 'I experience red' (and so on).

The issue with this suggestion is that it is unclear how a single phenomenal token might serve as an exemplar of more than one of the phenomenal properties it instantiates. Suppose one has an experience of scarlet: how then might the direct phenomenal concept one could form of scarlet on this basis differ from that one could form of red? On the basis of this experience alone, it seems, the whole concept one could have of what it is for something to be red would end up being a concept of what it is for something to be scarlet; for this experience discloses no other manner in which something could be red, nor how this would compare or contrast with its being scarlet. Abstracting from one concept (such as of scarlet) to a more general concept (such as of

red) rather requires some grasp of the manner in which things might deviate from instances of the former while remaining instances of the latter; and one has no such grasp on the basis of one exemplar. As Duncan writes, direct phenomenal concepts thus pertain to "*specific* phenomenal properties" alone (p. 7). For this reason, no such inferences between direct phenomenal concepts could belong to their conceptual roles.

Another objection concerns the supposition that grasping an entailment requires possessing all of the concepts that would be involved in stating that entailment at one time.[27] I supposed above that grasping that 'I feel cold' entails 'I do not feel hot' requires being able, at least in principle, to entertain these thoughts at once (as one could not if these thoughts made use of direct phenomenal concepts). Yet this claim might be contested. In particular, it might be pointed out that using direct phenomenal concepts has the result that our thinking conforms to certain *dispositions* that could be said to constitute a grasp of these entailments. Since we could not exercise direct phenomenal concepts in such beliefs as 'I feel cold' and 'I feel hot' at the same time, for instance, and so are disposed not to, we might appear to have an implicit grasp that such beliefs contradict one another, even if we could not make this grasp explicit in inference. Direct phenomenal concepts' conceptual roles might therefore be construed as deriving from dispositions of this sort, affording an implicit grasp of what being in different phenomenal conditions would rule out.

Since this objection hinges on our understanding of such notions as grasping an entailment, which were earlier left somewhat loose, let us now revisit them. In this connection, I want to maintain that, in order for a pattern in our thinking to reflect an implicit grasp of how the thoughts involved are related to one another, that pattern must indeed be subject to reflection, which does require our being able to exercise all of the concepts involved in that pattern of thought at one

[27] Thanks to Juan Sebastián Piñeros Glasscock for raising this point.

time. As I understand them, a central aim of such notions as grasping an entailment is to distinguish patterns of thought that comprise genuine understanding from those that amount to no more than rote sounding off; and it is hard to imagine how a pattern of thought might be more rote than if one were *in principle* incapable of reflecting upon it. I take it that something like this thought motivates Peacocke (1992) to hold that, where our possession of concepts depends on our grasp of relations of entailment, this grasp requires our finding these relations "primitively compelling" and so (*a fortiori*) being capable of reflecting on them (pp. 6-7). Yet if this is right, then the dispositions appealed to above are not enough to secure our grasp of the corresponding entailments. In other words, if one can never have the conceptual wherewithal required to so much as comprehend the question of whether feeling cold contradicts feeling hot—as would be the case if this question were posed in terms of the relevant direct phenomenal concepts—then it is implausible to suppose that one nevertheless has some implicit grasp of its answer. Direct phenomenal concepts' conceptual roles thus accrue no benefit from the dispositions that would attach to their use.

Let us take stock. If the above arguments are right, the result is that, whatever grasp direct phenomenal concepts might provide of what being in a given phenomenal condition would amount to, this grasp cannot be spelled out in inferences that involve the exercise of further direct phenomenal concepts. The fact that these concepts are unavailable in the absence of their referents proves too limiting for this proposal to be feasible. The luminist will thus have to look elsewhere for an account of these concepts' conceptual roles.

4.2 Inferential Relations Between Direct & Standing Phenomenal Concepts

This brings us to the second and final such proposal, according to which the conceptual roles of direct phenomenal concepts derive from their inferential relations to what Duncan calls "standing" phenomenal concepts: those concepts of phenomenal properties that can be possessed and tokened independent of their referents' instantiation (p. 5). Standing phenomenal concepts, as might be expected, facilitate the great bulk of our thinking about phenomenal conditions. To take an example, consider what Chalmers (2003) calls *relational* phenomenal concepts: those concept that pick out phenomenal properties via their relation to non-phenomenal properties and objects, such as the concept of the scent of fresh-cut grass (the relation here being that fresh-cut grass tends to occasion experiences of a distinctive phenomenal character). For our purposes, what is most important about these concepts is that, unlike direct phenomenal concepts, standing phenomenal concepts can be used to think about phenomenal conditions other than our occurrent phenomenal conditions, and so should avoid the problems that faced the luminists' previous proposal. On this new proposal, direct phenomenal concepts' conceptual roles comprise inferences involving the exercise of *both* direct *and* standing phenomenal concepts. So if exercising a direct phenomenal concept in the belief that one feels cold would put one in a position to infer that one does not feel hot, for instance, on this proposal forming the latter belief would itself involve exercising a standing phenomenal concept (*viz*. some standing phenomenal concept of heat). The conceptual roles of direct phenomenal concepts would then comprise inferences of this sort, situating our actual phenomenal conditions in relation to others conceived in terms of our repertoire of standing phenomenal concepts.

The problem with this proposal stems from the fact that it fails to distinguish standing and direct phenomenal concepts to the extent the luminist requires. Note that if the conceptual roles of

direct phenomenal concepts derive just from their inferential relations to standing phenomenal concepts, then for each given direct phenomenal concept, there is in principle no barrier to our possessing a standing phenomenal concept with just the same conceptual role in; for nothing would then foreclose locating a standing phenomenal concept in all of the same inferential relations. For instance: suppose that, on this proposal, exercising the direct phenomenal concept of some shade of scarlet in beliefs of the form 'I see this shade of scarlet' also puts one in a position to infer beliefs of the form 'I see a shade of red'; 'I see a shade lighter than maroon'; and so on, with the latter beliefs each making use of standing phenomenal concepts of the phenomenal properties in question. What reason then is there to suppose that no standing phenomenal concept could take on this conceptual role? It is not as if direct phenomenal concepts reveal something about their referents that would outstrip the expressive resources of our repertoire of standing phenomenal concepts; in fact, on this proposal, just the opposite is true. Accounting for direct phenomenal concepts' conceptual roles in terms of their inferential relations to standing phenomenal concepts thus opens the door to these concepts' having shared conceptual roles.

The reason this is problematic for the luminist is that it undercuts the claim of direct phenomenal concepts to secure (CON) and so issue in safe beliefs. Recall that beliefs formed using direct phenomenal concepts are supposed to be safe in the sense required for knowledge insofar as, per (CON), there are no circumstances under which one could hold the same beliefs in error. Now this claim hinges on how beliefs are to be counted as the same for epistemic purposes; and here there is good reason to think that substituting a direct phenomenal concept for its standing doppelganger does not make for a difference in the relevant sense. In the first instance, on standard accounts that individuate concepts according to considerations of informativeness, the shared conceptual role of direct phenomenal concepts and their standing doppelgangers entails that these

concepts are not even distinct.[28] In particular, since there is *ex hypothesi* nothing that follows from the exercise of a direct phenomenal concept that would not follow from the exercise of its standing doppelganger, statements of the form '*D* is *S*' (where *D* stands for some direct phenomenal concept and *S* for its standing doppelganger) are uninformative, and so establish that the involved concepts are identical. If this is right, then one would end up holding the same beliefs whether one used direct phenomenal concepts or their standing doppelgangers. Yet the same considerations motivate this claim even apart from these assumptions about concept individuation. To illustrate, imagine that, on Cold Morning, S goes from holding a true belief of the form 'I feel cold' that makes use of a direct phenomenal concept at some case α_i, to holding a false belief of the form 'I feel cold' that makes use of the standing doppelganger of that concept at the subsequent case α_{i+1}. Now since S themselves is in principle unable to distinguish these beliefs, given that neither has implications that the other does not, from their perspective their beliefs are just the same in α_i and α_{i+1}. And for this reason it seems that their belief in α_i cannot be knowledge, insofar as to their mind it is the same belief that is held in error just a moment later. In other words, the two beliefs should count as the same for epistemic purposes, even if the concepts that comprise them are different. If this is right, it follows that direct phenomenal concepts no longer secure (CON): for even if the exercise of direct phenomenal concepts is itself infallible, their standing doppelgangers can nevertheless be used to hold all of the same beliefs in error. The proposal under consideration therefore undermines direct phenomenal concepts' claim to provide infallible epistemic access to our phenomenal conditions, and so their theoretical usefulness for the luminist.

[28] I am thinking here of the approach to concept individuation found in Frege and, in more recent times, Christopher Peacocke (1992). Because this approach is in general more fine-grained than its alternatives, it should be unproblematic to assume it here, seeing as those alternatives would see it even more difficult to distinguish direct phenomenal concepts from their standing doppelgangers.

Let us now consider some objections to the claim that direct phenomenal concepts are (at least for epistemic purposes) identical to their standing doppelgangers. In the first instance, the luminist might insist that direct phenomenal concepts must provide *some* more robust grasp of phenomenal properties than could other phenomenal concepts, even if this difference does not register at the level of conceptual role as here understood, given that the former concepts have actual instances of these properties as constituents. Yet for the luminist to lean on this expectation, however plausible on its face, would be for them to invite again the same worries that brought us to this point in the first place—worries, that is, about just what this distinctive grasp amounts to. And if it turns out that the luminist must resort to accounting for this grasp in terms of our standing phenomenal concepts, as looks to be the case, then it is hard to see how it could be invoked to support a distinction between these concepts and their standing doppelgangers. On the current proposal, after all, there just is nothing more to be said about our phenomenal properties on the basis of their falling under some direct phenomenal concept—and so, it would seem, nothing more in which our grasp of these properties could consist—that would not itself be expressed in terms of our standing phenomenal concepts. The challenge that the luminist must overcome in order to salvage the current proposal is thus the same as that which the proposal was designed to address.

Another approach the luminist might adopt involves appeal to the distinctive manner in which direct phenomenal concepts' constitution secures their reference. Even if direct phenomenal concepts share their conceptual roles with their standing doppelgangers, the thought goes, the former nevertheless exhibit more dependable ties to the world, in that the reference of a direct phenomenal concept owes to its having an actual instance of its referent as a constituent. Should this not then serve to distinguish direct phenomenal concepts from their standing doppelgangers for epistemic purposes? Two possible lines of thought can be distinguished here. On one hand, the

luminist might argue that the differences in the manner in which these concepts' referents are fixed have the result that direct phenomenal concepts and their standing doppelgangers do not refer to the same phenomenal properties, despite their shared conceptual roles. Yet it is hard to see how these concepts could fail to corefer. Where conceptual role alone underdetermines reference, it is most often taken to depend on concepts' environment of use; but direct phenomenal concepts and their standing doppelgangers share a single environment, being the mind of a subject. In particular, nothing at all seems to prevent one from being disposed to exercise direct phenomenal concepts and their standing doppelgangers with reference to just the same phenomenal properties; indeed, given that these standing doppelgangers share their conceptual roles with concepts having those properties as constituents, it is difficult to imagine otherwise. In particular, because direct phenomenal concepts' standing doppelgangers would share the robust (if not maximal) inferential integration into our repertoire of standing phenomenal concepts that, on this proposal, direct phenomenal concepts' unique constitution would be expected to sustain, it seems the shared conceptual roles of these concepts just could not provide greater grounds for taking them to corefer. To hold otherwise would thus be tantamount to maintaining that conceptual role can swing free of reference even in the limit.

On the other hand, the luminist might construe the unique constitution of direct phenomenal concepts as an infallible *mechanism* for arriving at beliefs about our phenomenal conditions, even if these concepts' standing doppelgangers could be used to arrive at the same beliefs in error.[29] A few points are in order here. First of all, in order to make this thought work, the luminist will need to adopt versions of (SAF) and (CON) relativized to mechanisms of belief-formation, and it is not obvious that we should accept this. Recall the example considered above:

[29] Weatherson, picking up a point from Mark Sainsbury (1996), makes a similar suggestion at one point (p. 381).

if S forms a true belief using a direct phenomenal concept, will its epistemic status remain untouched even if S believes just the same thing in error, using the standing doppelganger of that concept, in the next case over? It seems not. Even if this point is conceded to the luminist, however, it is worth stepping back and asking what this proposal amounts to. What rendered the proposal of direct phenomenal concepts plausible was their promise to explain our unique epistemic situation with respect to our own phenomenal conditions. Yet on the version of this proposal that the luminist has now been driven to, direct phenomenal concepts turn out to disclose nothing about their referents that outstrips the expressive resources of our standing phenomenal concepts: it is indistinguishable from our perspective, as we have seen, whether the belief 'I feel cold' makes use of a direct phenomenal concept or its standing doppelganger. Absent this upshot, what remains of the proposal is that our usual beliefs about phenomenal properties will, in some veridical cases, just so happen to have instances of those properties as constituents, with this constitution doing no further work in those cases; and this should strike us as rather *ad hoc*. To be sure, this constitution would comprise an infallible mechanism of belief-formation; but what reason is there now to suppose that such constitution could, let alone does, obtain? In this case I am inclined to judge that the theoretical grounds for positing direct phenomenal concepts have become too weak for them to seem more than an *ad hoc* device for filling a role in luminists' counterarguments to Williamson.

We can now take stock. While the proposal under consideration secures for direct phenomenal concepts the conceptual roles that we might expect for them, it does so at the cost of undermining their claim to provide privileged epistemic access to our phenomenal conditions. Taken in tandem with the result that direct phenomenal concepts' conceptual roles also cannot be articulated in terms of their inferential relations to one another, the consequence is that the luminist has no viable account of these concepts' conceptual roles: thinking of phenomenal conditions in

terms of direct phenomenal concepts would leave us without an articulable grasp of what it would amount to for these conditions to obtain. I urged above that, should this end up being the case, this would give us good reason to reject direct phenomenal concepts altogether. Before we take this final step, however, it is worth considering some final objections.

4.3 Objections

The first objection concerns the fact that I have thus far considered as potential elements in direct phenomenal concepts' conceptual roles just those inferences that would serve to situate given phenomenal conditions in relation to one another. Yet there are other sorts of inference that the exercise of our phenomenal concepts can enter into—in particular, inferences that link our phenomenal conditions to conditions in the external world (as when the light clues us in to the time). The thought is that if phenomenal properties can thus serve as reliable indicators of external properties, then the use of these properties in thought might consist not in their facilitating insight into their own character, but rather basic inferences about our environmental circumstances; and if this is so, then direct phenomenal concepts will have adequate conceptual roles after all.

The omission of this alternative, however, was not accidental. Implicit in the above is that the variant of conceptual role in which we should be interested here is *a priori*: it is the role that a concept must have in our thinking in order for us even to count as possessing it, and so that our mere possession in turn entitles us to. Whatever *a posteriori* role direct phenomenal concepts might take on in our thinking, after all, cannot owe in the first instance to their constitution, and so is irrelevant to whether sense might be made of "the 'taking up' of phenomenal content into [a] concept" (Duncan, p. 5). Yet now the conceptual role to which this objection appeals is, of course, *a posteriori*: for it is rather uncontroversial that there is no good inference *a priori* from the

phenomenal character of our experiences to the environmental circumstances that occasion them.[30] This alternative conceptual role thus fails to answer our initial concern. There is reason to doubt, moreover, that direct phenomenal concepts could take on the conceptual role suggested. As was just noted, the inferences that hook up phenomenal and external conditions require the mediation of *a posteriori* generalizations: that certain casts of light correspond to certain times, for instance, is something established on the basis of repeated observation. But it is doubtful whether direct phenomenal concepts could participate in these sorts of *a posteriori* generalization, given that these concepts do not persist in the absence of their referents. Each time these concepts become available to us, in other words, might as well be the first; so there is no chance to establish correlations of the sort that could underwrite the required *a posteriori* generalizations. Appealing to inferential relations that overstep the sphere of the phenomenal thus fails to answer the problem at hand.

The second objection picks up on a line of thought mentioned at the outset of this section. As I noted then, Barz dismisses worries similar to those that I develop here on the grounds that phenomenal properties, *qua* phenomenal, must provide us with some grasp of their character, even if this grasp is "ineffable" and so not susceptible to inferential articulation (p. 491). Paraphrasing this thought, we can read Barz as arguing that the condition on concept possession elaborated above, according to which concepts must facilitate some non-trivial inference(s) about their referents, is inapplicable in the case of direct phenomenal concepts: for if these concepts do provide some more immediate grasp of their referents than can other concepts, it will be mistaken to expect that this grasp could be spelled out in the manner attempted above. On this picture, direct phenomenal concepts are rather *atomic* phenomenal concepts, serving as a kind of bedrock out of

[30] Pär Sundström (2011) writes that "phenomenal concept theorists generally agree that phenomenal concepts—however they should exactly be understood—are *inferentially isolated* from physical concepts in the sense that one can't infer a phenomenal characterisation of consciousness from a purely physical characterisation, however extensive" (p. 271).

which more complex thought can develop—what Barz glosses as an "interface between the realm of the phenomenal and the realm of the conceptual" (fn. 27).[31]

It will be evident from the above that I think there is ample reason to reject all less demanding pictures of concept possession under which direct phenomenal concepts would be admissible as such. Yet the better response to this objection is not, I think, to further adjudicate the boundaries of our concepts on those grounds. The point I want to press instead is that wherever such boundaries are drawn will, in the end, be a matter of our ambitions for the associated notions; and settling these boundaries such that direct phenomenal concepts fall within them does nothing to change the fact that direct phenomenal concepts cannot live up to the luminists' ambitions. It is worth emphasizing here that the historical pull of luminism has been its guarantee of an epistemic foundation: the promise, as Williamson puts it, is that thought can build out "from the starting point of that cognitive home" (2000, p. 113). It should be clear from the above, however, that whatever cognitive home direct phenomenal concepts would afford us could not fulfill this promise. As we saw, direct phenomenal concepts would be relegated to complete inferential isolation from the rest of our conceptual repertoire: there is nothing (perhaps apart from trivialities) that exercising these concepts would put one in a position to infer. In particular, possessing direct phenomenal concepts could provide no grasp of what being in some phenomenal condition would

[31] This picture is not unfamiliar, and often coincides with the claim that the phenomenal is a luminous realm. In its most radical form, this picture is that of naïve sense-data theories, according to which (as Wilfrid Sellars put it) "physical objects are patterns of sense contents" (1997, p. 31). But we also find similar claims in views that are far afield from those of the sense-data theorists. David Papineau (2006), for instance, writes of phenomenal concepts:

> "When it comes to these basic points of contact, I find it hard to take seriously any alternative to the assumption that our atomic concepts are related to reality by facts external to our *a priori* grasp, such as causal or historical facts" (p. 102).

Albeit for different reasons, the thought remains that we should not expect the fundamental elements of our thinking—*viz*. our phenomenal concepts—to provide *a priori* insight into the nature of their referents, articulable in terms of the *a priori* inferences that such thinking would facilitate about those referents.

rule out, nor how that condition resembles or differs from others; nor could the exercise of these concepts issue in evidence or reasons for action. Insisting in the face of these deficiencies that these concepts furnish some ineffable grasp of their referents, and so should be admitted as genuine concepts regardless, does not change this. Whatever cognitive home these concepts could afford, that is, it would come at the cost of our cognitive house arrest.

4.4 Direct Phenomenal Concepts & Anti-Luminosity

Having reviewed arguments to the effect that direct phenomenal concepts cannot answer luminists' theoretical troubles, it is now worth returning, in closing, to the ramifications of this result for the anti-luminosity argument.

Though Williamson intends his argument to rule out all (non-trivial) luminous conditions, I have focused here, in keeping with the literature, on those candidate luminous conditions with the greatest historical and intuitive claim to that status: phenomenal conditions. So interpreted, the upshot of the argument is that, *contra* Cartesian dogma, even our phenomenal conditions do not guarantee our epistemic foothold in the world. As we saw, however, this argument relies on a supposition that can be questioned in the case of phenomenal conditions, *viz*. that our beliefs about these conditions are fallible. For if such beliefs are *infallible*, as per (CON), then knowledge of our phenomenal condition needs no margin for error: the belief that one is in some phenomenal condition will be safe even if it would have been false under quite similar counterfactual circumstances, given that one then could not have held that belief under those circumstances. It is in the service of (CON) that luminists have thus appealed to direct phenomenal concepts, arguing that these concepts sustain a picture of the connection between the phenomenal and the doxastic that belies the supposition that such beliefs are fallible. In short, then, the significance of

foreclosing this appeal to direct phenomenal concepts, as I have attempted to do here, is to undermine the main reason for accepting this picture of the phenomenal-doxastic connection and so, in turn, the main impediment to the anti-luminosity argument. In particular, absent direct phenomenal concepts, luminists have provided no reason to accept (CON); and absent (CON), there is no reason that knowledge of our phenomenal condition should not require a margin for error. To return to the example of Cold Morning: if S holds a true belief about their feelings of cold at α_i, this belief cannot be safe (and so cannot be knowledge) *unless* S would not hold this same belief in error a millisecond later, at α_{i+1}; and since, absent (CON), nothing in principle prevents S from such error, their belief in α_i cannot be safe unless it would, in fact, be true in α_{i+1} (just as the margin-for-error principle states). Maintaining (SAF) without (CON) thus requires accepting the margin-for-error principle; and as we have seen, this principle, taken together with the assumption that some (phenomenal) condition is luminous, leads to contradiction. If the arguments above are correct, therefore, then the *reductio*, and so the threat to Cartesian dogma, is preserved against the luminists' foremost rejoinder.

Two final aspects of this result still stand to be clarified. The first is that I have intended to call into question, not direct phenomenal concepts *per se*, but luminist appeals thereto. As we saw, one of the main problems for these concepts is that luminists' need to secure (CON) frustrates the proposal to treat these concepts' conceptual roles in terms of their inferential relations to standing phenomenal concepts; but this proposal suffers no such difficulties if these concepts are not intended to secure (CON). For all I have said here, in other words, there is no problem with *fallible* direct phenomenal concepts, with conceptual roles comprising inferential relations to standing phenomenal concepts; it is just that such concepts would be of no use to the luminist.[32] The second

[32] Indeed, David Chalmers (2003), in his article introducing the notion of a direct phenomenal concept, gives reason to believe that these concepts will not be infallible.

is that I have not intended to call into question luminists' reading of the anti-luminosity argument, according to which it supposes that (CON) is false. While I have endeavored to show that serious difficulties await all attempts to show that (CON) is true—including those that luminists have mounted to date—it remains the case that a successful defense of (CON) would suffice to disarm the argument as Williamson gives it, which is therefore that much less decisive. As with all things philosophical, then, the situation is more nuanced than it would at first appear. At present, however, I have intended just to argue that anti-luminism about the phenomenal is, on balance, the stronger position; as well as to bring out some novel difficulties facing attempts to characterize our (seeming) intimate acquaintance with the phenomenal character of our experience.

5 CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to intervene in debates surrounding an age-old question: is our epistemic access to the phenomenal realm guaranteed? The original anti-luminosity argument gave us powerful reason to think not, but failed to address the possibility of a constitutive connection between the phenomenal and the doxastic. The upshot was thus a desideratum for the luminist: deliver an account of this connection. Direct phenomenal concepts emerged as the most viable approach, taking phenomenal properties to furnish infallible concepts of themselves. Yet the luminists' need for these concepts not to persist past the instantiation of those properties made spelling out these concepts' conceptual roles problematic. The consequence was that direct phenomenal concepts turned out not to secure the phenomenal as a realm of privileged epistemic access after all, leaving the substance of the anti-luminosity argument untouched.

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