The problem of consciousness: an assessment of Michael Tye's and David Chalmers' criticisms of the phenomenal concept strategy

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This paper presents a critical assessment of Michael Tye's and David Chalmers' criticisms of the phenomenal concept strategy. The assessment is done with a view to defend the phenomenal concept strategy against Tye's and Chalmers' arguments. The phenomenal concept strategy is a strategy developed by physicalists to defend physicalism in the attempt to address the problem of consciousness. For Michael Tye, who was previously an advocate of the phenomenal concept strategy, there is the possibility that two or more distinct phenomenal concepts can refer to the same phenomenal experience and this indicates that phenomenal concepts have no special status as claimed by physicalists and are, in turn, not concepts at all. David Chalmers, on the other hand, raises a dilemma for the phenomenal concept strategy by stating that it is either that the strategy cannot explain the epistemic reality (i.e. knowledge) of consciousness or that the strategy cannot explain this knowledge in physicalist terms. Any of these two indicates that the phenomenal concept strategy is unsuccessful. This paper posits that Tye's and Chalmers' criticisms misrepresent the stance of the phenomenal concept strategy. This paper maintains that the phenomenal concept strategy, if understood differently, still provides a plausible support for physicalism in addressing the problem of consciousness.

Keywords: Consciousness, conceivability argument, knowledge argument, master argument, phenomenal concept strategy, physicalism.

Introduction

The quest to account for the possibility of how events, substances or properties in the physical realm causally relate with events, substances and properties which are in the mental realm constitutes what is referred to as the mind-body problem. In this regard, there are two broad theories, namely dualism and monism. Dualism asserts the existence of both the body and the mind as distinct substances, while monism asserts the existence of either of the two. Further, and traditionally too, monism can either be idealism – the view that the one thing that exists is the mental, or physicalism – the view that the one thing that exists is physical. However, most of the recent discourses on the mind-body problem have been under the distinction and opposition between dualism and physicalism (Crane 2001:43).

Physicalism, in a general sense, is the philosophical position that the universe and all in it are entirely physical. It is the view that the world is constituted of materials and governed by regularities that the science of physics is in the best position to identify and describe (Pettit 1993:213). With regard to the mind-body problem, physicalism is the thesis that a "person, with all his psychological attributes, is nothing over and above his body, with all its physical attributes" (Nagel 1965:339). The core of a dualist theory is the position that there are mental phenomena and physical entities which exist separately. Dualism rejects the physicalist claim by holding that there is an aspect of the human psychology which arguably remains elusive to the approach of physicalism. This aspect is consciousness, which is the subjective character of experience. It is considered nonphysical and beyond what can be captured in the framework of physics. According to dualism, the reality of consciousness falsifies the claim of physicalism and remains an intractable problem (Nagel 1997:519). Philosophers who subscribe to this dualist view are antiphysicalists.

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Antiphysicalists, who are advocates of the reality of consciousness, hold that there is something it is like to be in a conscious state; that is, there is a phenomenal feel involved in seeing a rose, suffering from headache and so on. Any of such phenomenal feels, antiphysicalists argue, is non-reducible to anything physical nor is it explainable in physicalist terms. An experiencing subject's (i.e. a conscious being) knowledge of his/her phenomenal feel is *phenomenal knowledge* and the concepts that are used to express this knowledge are *phenomenal concepts*. On the other side of the divide are physicalists who are advocates of physicalism. Some physicalists have banked on the nature of phenomenal concepts to argue that phenomenal experiences are reducible to physicalist terms. Hence, the phenomenal concept strategy appeals to phenomenal concepts; that is, the concepts that conscious beings possess when they become aware of the qualitative character of their phenomenal experience via introspection.

The 'what it is like' to be in a phenomenal conscious state forms the phenomenal property of that conscious state which in turn is subsumed under a concept. Whenever one is in a phenomenal conscious state, one brings such state to bear under a concept and this is referred to as a phenomenal concept. According to physicalists, concepts of consciousness are special in a way that concepts of physical phenomena are not and this can be said to have informed the antiphysicalists' erroneous view about what phenomenal concepts pick out (refer to) (Alter and Walter 2006:5). It has been argued that phenomenal concepts are not *a priori* reducible to physical concepts. One way that phenomenal concept strategists have responded to this criticism is to argue that there are many concepts, such as 'the' and 'that', which are not physical concepts but do not refer to non-physical entities. Thus, the fact that phenomenal concepts are irreducible to physical concepts does not mean that phenomenal concepts are not explainable in physicalist terms. Proponents of the phenomenal concept strategy argue that, despite the special nature of the concepts of consciousness, an experiencing subject's possession of the concepts can be explained in physicalist terms (Chalmers 2006: 167). They hold that the puzzles of consciousness are mistaken for granting that the epistemic gap that is entailed in the view that phenomenal concepts are not *a priori* reducible to physical concepts implies a metaphysical gap, i.e. there is a difference between phenomenal consciousness and the physical in reality.

Michael Tye and David Chalmers have criticised the position of the phenomenal concept strategy. Tye (2009:53), for instance, argues that the phenomenal concept strategy does not allow for fine-grained individuation of phenomenal concepts and phenomenal properties. This means that the phenomenal concept strategy allows different concepts that have different conceptual individuation to refer to the same phenomenal concept. For example, the concepts 'morning star' and 'evening star' refer to the same entity (Venus) but the concepts play different conceptual roles which make them different concepts. In the case of phenomenal concepts and experiences, Tye argues that the possibility that two or more phenomenal concepts can apply to the same phenomenal experience indicates that phenomenal concepts have no special status and are not concepts in the sense in which physicalists conceive of them. Chalmers appeals to the conceivability argument and argues that if the complete macrophysical truth about the universe without the phenomenal features of human beings is conceivable, then it follows that the phenomenal features of human beings are not physically explicable. On the other hand, if the complete macrophysical truth about the universe without the phenomenal features of human beings is not conceivable, phenomenal features of human beings cannot explain our knowledge of phenomenal experiences (Chalmers 2006:174). This raises a dilemma for the phenomenal concept strategy.

In what follows, discussion in Section 1 will focus on a critical examination of the reasons behind physicalists' appeal to the phenomenal concept strategy. In Sections 2 and 3, I present a critical exposition and assessment of Michael Tye's and David Chalmers' criticisms of the phenomenal concept strategy respectively. The last section will contain an attempt to rescue the phenomenal concept strategy by weighing its strength against some puzzles of consciousness which serve as the foundation of Tye's and Chalmers' criticisms of it. This is intended to show that these criticisms against the phenomenal concept strategy are inadequate.

Phenomenal concept strategy: a physicalist's solution to the problem of consciousness

One of the reasons that have been identified with physicalists' appeal to the phenomenal concept strategy is the puzzles of consciousness.[2] These puzzles include the explanatory gap, the zombie argument, and the knowledge argument. In the puzzle of the explanatory gap, it is argued that no amount of explanation of mental states in physical terms is sufficient and adequate to explain mental states (Levine 2002:354-361). The zombie argument maintains that if it is intelligibly conceivable that there is a possible world of zombies, which is in all microphysical aspects similar to our world but lacks the phenomenal consciousness of what it is like to be a zombie or to be in a conscious state, it follows that physicalism has no exhaustive explanation of all that is in our world. It shows that there are non-physical aspects in our world (Chalmers 1996:84). Frank Jackson's thought experiment about Mary in the black-and-white room popularises the knowledge argument which states that that given the complete knowledge of all physical facts, there are some facts of the world that remained unknown (Jackson 2002:273-280).

Advocates of the phenomenal concept strategy agree with the antiphysicalists' argument that there seems to be an epistemic gap between physical processes and phenomenal experiences but that this does not imply that there is an ontological gap between them. To admit of an ontological gap is to submit to dualism, but the physicalists hold that the concepts used to refer to phenomenal experiences are only conceptually different from concepts used to refer to physical processes; they refer to the same thing in the external world. This is likened to the way "H_2O" and "water" are conceptually different but refer to the same thing in the external world. Thus, for the physicalists, concepts may be dualistic; what they refer to is one.

Another reason is the failure of some versions of physicalism/materialism to successfully explain the oneness of reality. Some of these versions include behaviourism, mind-brain identity theory, functionalism, reductive and eliminative materialism. Among other criticisms that have been levelled against these versions of materialism/physicalism, is the accusation that they stand deficient in the face of the puzzles that the problem of consciousness presents to their thesis. For instance, eliminative materialism posits that we eliminate all talk about phenomenal experiences from our everyday vocabulary, everyday language-use, but how do we do this when confronted with the issue of Frank Jackson's Mary who learns a new thing after her release from the black-and-white room? How do we construct our language to avoid explaining Mary's post-release experience? Although, the implausibility of eliminative materialism is not to be solely hinged on its futuristic approach (since its advocates hold that science would soon develop to such an extent as to eradicate phenomenal language in the nearest future) (Churchland 1981:67), eliminative materialism seems hopeless in dealing with the puzzles of consciousness.

Considering the first reason listed above, the phenomenal concept strategy is adopted by physicalists as a tenable method for explaining the puzzles presented by the problem of consciousness. Brian Loar's paper "Phenomenal States" has been identified, arguably, as the source of the idea of the phenomenal concept strategy.[3] In the paper, Loar calls the conceptions of the phenomenal experiences that conscious beings have phenomenal concepts which are conceptually irreducible and do not *a priori* imply physical-functional concepts and that these features of the phenomenal concepts are what have blinded anti-physicalists into thinking that phenomenal states have distinct existence. But for Loar, the irreducibility of phenomenal concepts is compatible with the thesis of physicalism since it is possible to have it that way and also "take phenomenal qualities to be identical with physical-functional properties" (Loar 2002:295-

2. Michael Tye argues that physicalists believe they can explain the epistemic gap in the explanatory gap argument, the conceivability thesis in the zombie argument and the knowledge status of post-release Mary by appealing to phenomenal concept so as to show that all these puzzles can be brought under the physicalist system. See Tye, M. (2009). *Consciousness Revisited: Materialism without Phenomenal Concepts*, London: MIT Press, p.42.
3. Daniel Stoljar acknowledges Loar's paper "Phenomenal States" as the *locus classicus* of the phenomenal concept strategy. See Stoljar, D. (2005). "Physicalism and Phenomenal Concepts", *Mind*, 20.

296). For him, when the special nature of phenomenal concepts is taken into consideration, it would be understood that they pick out the same referents as physical concepts (Loar 2002: 295-296).

For instance, in the knowledge argument, Mary gains no new fact. She only learns old fact in a new way, just like a person who has long known that "morning star" refers to the planet Venus and has come to know, newly, that "evening star" refers to the same planet Venus. This individual does not know anything new, but knows something in a new way. Likewise Mary, the phenomenal concept she uses to instantiate her post-release phenomenal experience of red is a new way of learning the colour-experience which she has had in her pre-release days under the physicalist-induced system. It follows that just as "evening star" and "morning star" are conceptually different but both refer to the planet Venus, so also are physical concepts and phenomenal concepts conceptually different but pick out the same thing which is explicable in physicalist terms.

In the case of the conceivability of zombies, the phenomenal concept strategy allows that the conceivability of zombies is coherent but rejects the reasoning that it is ontologically possible. The allowance for the conceivability of zombies is attributed to the conceptual difference between phenomenal concepts and physical concepts, but since this difference does not translate to an ontological difference between what these concepts pick out, the ontological existence of zombie is denied. More so, it is conceivable that water is not H_2O, but it is metaphysically impossible that this is so. The puzzle of the explanatory gap is dealt with, by phenomenal concept strategy, by drawing attention to the *a priori* irreducibility of phenomenal concepts to physical concepts. The relationship between phenomenal concepts and physical concepts is *a posteriori* and this explains why there seems to be an explanatory gap which does not in any way signify an ontological gap between physical processes and phenomenal experiences. It is when it is shown that referents of both phenomenal concepts and physical concepts are the same that one can know that they do not refer to ontologically different entities but are only different on conceptual grounds.

All of these notwithstanding, the phenomenal concept strategy has been subjected to criticisms by both physicalists and anti-physicalists alike. Physicalists who argue against it do so for different reasons while still holding on to the thesis of physicalism. Antiphysicalists who criticise it do so to maintain that the strategy does not solve the problem of consciousness. In the next two sections, I will examine some of these criticisms of the phenomenal concept strategy headlined by Michael Tye and David Chalmers.

Michael Tye's criticism of the phenomenal concept strategy

Michael Tye, who used to be an advocate of the phenomenal concept strategy, in a turnaround, has become a critic of the strategy.[4] In his book, *Consciousness Revisited: Materialism without Phenomenal Concepts,* Tye disowns the specialness of phenomenal concepts, a position which he previously held, and claims that there are in fact no phenomenal concepts (Tye 2009: 39-53). He argues that there are difficulties with the idea of phenomenal concepts such that one is to conclude that there are no phenomenal concepts. This is a nihilist view about phenomenal concepts. To prove his point, Tye begins with a conceptual analysis of the terms "concept" and "thought content". He argues, for instance, that the concepts "coriander" and "cilantro" are two concepts that refer to the same thing (a spice) but the thought-content of a conscious being who thinks "coriander" to be a spice would be different from that of the conscious being who thinks "cilantro" to be a spice (Tye 2009: 39). This is to say that the phenomenal concept strategy does not allow for fine-grained individuation of phenomenal concepts and phenomenal properties. As concepts have different thought-contents, the phenomenal thought about a conscious experience maybe different if there are at least two concepts that refer to the conscious experience. Tye

4. Michael Tye previously held a supportive position for the phenomenal concept strategy arguing that one of the puzzles of consciousness, that is, the explanatory gap, is an illusion if the features of phenomenal concepts are clearly understood. See Tye, M. (1999). "Phenomenal Consciousness: The Explanatory Gap as a Cognitive Illusion", *Mind*, 108(432):705-725.

argues that the possibility that two or more phenomenal concepts can apply to the same phenomenal experience indicates that phenomenal concepts have no special status (Tye 2009: 56).

He argues further, in rejecting the specialness of phenomenal concepts, that arguments for the claim of concept possession are uninformative. He samples two likely answers which advocates of the phenomenal concepts may give to the question: "What is it to say that one possesses a concept?" The first answer may be that one possesses a given concept on the condition that one can exercise that concept on one's thoughts. This answer suggests a full understanding of the concept, but Tye considers this not informative since one can have a grasp of a phenomenal concept even with partial understanding of the concept in question. For instance, he argues that one cannot have the concepts "fortnight" and "red" without a grasp of the fact that they are a period of time and colour respectively, (Tye 2009: 41). Another answer can thus be the partial understanding of a concept, which Tye considers intuitively more attractive. In other words, the claim that phenomenal concepts are concepts possessed by conscious beings under which they subsume their phenomenal experience need not require full understanding of the concepts in question. This, it must be noted, indicates another build-up to Tye's nihilist claim about phenomena concepts. In a further argument, Tye states that:

> There is really *nothing* special about phenomenal concepts. The concepts we use in forming conceptions of our phenomenal states via introspection are just like many other concepts. Sometimes we use demonstratives and sometimes we use general concepts. These concepts, I grant, are *a priori* irreducible to physical concepts … But this is true of many, many concepts that have nothing to do with phenomenal consciousness … (Tye 2 009: 56).

Tye's claim, here, is that phenomenal concepts, for being irreducibly conceptual or physical, are in the same category as many other non-phenomenal concepts and as such they are not special and also cannot do the task that physicalists tend to put them to in tackling the problem of consciousness.

This claim is one-sided. The fact that phenomenal concepts share some features with non-phenomenal concepts does not make them non-special. After all, Tye's arguments have only shown that phenomenal concepts share "some" exact features with non-phenomenal concepts but not "all". It could not have been the case that the formulation, the linguistic use, the reference-fixing pattern and some other features of phenomenal concepts are all in tandem with the same characteristics in non-phenomenal concepts. All of these notwithstanding, Tye still maintains a physicalist stand against the problem of consciousness. The only change is his position on phenomenal concepts, which he now claims are not special and as a result are non-existent in the sense in which physicalists appeal to them.

In the light of this, to start with, Esa Diaz-Leon rejects Tye's claim that because phenomenal concepts refer directly to the entity they pick out, phenomenal concepts do not have fine-grained individuation (Diaz-Leon 2011:161). She argues that the issue of a fine-grained individuation requires that two concepts which have the same referents can have different individuation conditions. Thus, the phenomenal concepts satisfy. More so, Diaz-Leon argues, there is a uniqueness in the way phenomena concepts present their referents such that one cannot *a priori* know that different phenomena concepts are co-referential. This argument (Diaz-Leon's) is more plausible. The reason for this is that Tye's new position betrays the uniqueness attributable to phenomenal concepts which make them different from other concepts. After all, what Tye sets out to do is to reject the phenomenal concept. This, however, should not becloud his impartial rationalisation of an account of the phenomenal concept.

In addition, Diaz-Leon also calls in question Tye's demand for the condition to be satisfied for phenomenal concepts to explain the conceivability of zombies. The condition stipulated by Tye is that phenomenal concepts must be distinct from physical concepts in a way different from the fact that phenomenal concepts are irreducible to physical concepts. This condition shows a misconstruction of what the phenomenal concept strategy aims to show and that there is no need for the phenomenal concepts strategy to be committed to the fact that phenomenal concepts must be radically distinct from physical concepts. Thus, Tye's condition that to solve the puzzle of the conceivability of zombie argument,

a phenomenal concept must be radically distinct from physical concepts does not hold water, because this is implicit in most accounts of the phenomenal concepts.

There is also the claim that phenomenal concepts must be perspectival to explain the reason Mary lacks a phenomenal concept in the black-and-white room. This, according to Tye, is because possessing a phenomenal concept about a conscious experience requires having that experience, and since Mary does not experience red in the black-and-white room, she could not have possessed the phenomenal concept "red". In response, Diaz-Leon states that the phenomenal concept strategy can still allow for this in a fashion that suggests that the phenomenal concepts of never-had-before conscious experience are complex phenomenal concepts that can be possessed by bringing together different basic phenomenal concepts that are related to them (Diaz-Leon 2011:163). I subscribe to Diaz-Leon's view on this. For instance, a conscious being who has had the experience of the taste of rice at time t_1 and also had the taste of beans at time t_2 and has developed phenomenal concepts for each taste experience can form a phenomenal concept for the taste experience of eating rice and beans together at the same time. This explains the claim of combining basic phenomenal concepts of certain experiences to form complex phenomenal concepts of experiences yet to be had. This also explains the fact that whatever phenomenal concept Mary deploys to refer to the phenomenal experience of red, it may be a combination of more basic phenomenal concepts of white-and-black colour experience she has had in the white-and-black room.

In all, Tye's argument against the phenomenal concept strategy can be summed up as one which turns a blind eye to more fundamental features of phenomenal concepts to create a straw man against the phenomenal concept strategy and base his position of the non-existence of phenomenal concepts on it. Some of these features which include the view that phenomenal concepts are *a priori* irreducible to physical concepts indicate that the relationship between these concepts (since they are said to pick out the same thing) can only be known through empirical investigation of the referents they pick out in the physical body.

David Chalmers' criticism of the phenomenal concept strategy

According to David Chalmers, one of the responses to the explanatory gap as one of the puzzles of consciousness is by those who admit the presence of an explanatory gap between physical processes and phenomenal processes but attribute the gap to the way human beings conceive of consciousness (Chalmers 2006:167-180). Against the backdrop of this phenomenal concept strategy-inspired response to the explanatory gap, Chalmers raises a dilemma which in either way proves the phenomenal concept strategy unsuccessful. He puts the dilemma as follows:

> … if the relevant features of phenomenal concepts can be explained in physical terms, the features cannot explain the explanatory gap. And if the features can explain the explanatory gap, they cannot themselves be explained in physical terms (Chalmers 2006:168).

In other words, owing to the claim of advocates of the phenomenal concept strategy that the possession of phenomenal concepts is subsumable under physicalist terms, Chalmers' dilemma argument suggests that it is either the case that phenomenal concepts have physicalist expression and fail to explain the explanatory gap or that phenomenal concepts can explain the explanatory gap but have no physicalist expression. To understand this claim, it is important to explicate Chalmers' formulation of the thesis of the phenomenal concept strategy. He presents the thesis of the phenomenal concept strategy thus:

> Proponents put forward a thesis C attributing certain psychological features – call these the key features – to human beings. They *(proponents of the phenomenal concept strategy)* argue (1) that C is true: humans actually have the key features; (2) that C explains our epistemic situation with regard to consciousness: C explains why we are confronted with the relevant distractive epistemic gaps; and (3) that C itself can be explained in physical terms; one can (at least in principle) give a materialistically acceptable explanation of how it is that humans have the key features (Chalmers 2006: 172, italics mine).

For Chalmers, the thesis of the phenomenal concept strategy seems a powerful approach in dealing with the problem of consciousness but it does not, in itself, appear to be a direct solution to the problem of consciousness. Thus, it can be seen from this preliminary conception of the phenomenal concept strategy that Chalmers only considers it to have solved some puzzles which arise as a result of the problem of consciousness and not the problem itself. One important question one needs to ask at this point is whether Chalmers' formulation of the phenomenal concept strategy is correct or not. If it is correct, is it correct of all versions of the strategy or only some? This I will examine presently.

Back to the formulations with the three elements which are considered essential to the phenomenal concept strategy: Chalmers argues that no account of the phenomenal concepts strategy can satisfy elements 2 and 3 at the same time. In this resides the dilemma because, according to him, if element 2 is satisfied, element 3 cannot be satisfied and if element 3 is satisfied, element 2 cannot be satisfied all at the same time. This is what Chalmers calls the *Master Argument* against the phenomenal concept strategy. The structure of the argument goes thus:

> If P and not-C is conceivable, then C is not physically explicable.
>
> If P and not-C is not conceivable, then C cannot explain our epistemic situation.

From the above, it follows that:

> Either C is not physically explicable, or C cannot explain our epistemic situation (Chalmers 2006:174).

The argument states that for any thesis which attributes psychological features to human beings (C), it is either that the thesis is entailed *a priori* by the complete microphysical truth about the universe (P) or not. The conjunction of P and not C is conceivable. In other words, what will be the implication of having microphysical truths without psychological features? The consequence that would follow this antecedent conception is that psychological features of human beings are not physically explicable. The ground for this premise is the conceivability of some physical duplicate of human beings (say zombies) which satisfy all the P-condition of human beings but lack C-conditions. If this is the case, according to Chalmers, we would need further explanation why human beings in this world who satisfy the P-condition still exert the C-condition. The connection of this argument with the phenomenal concept strategy is that "if it is conceivable that P obtains without C obtaining, then we will have just the same sort of explanatory gap between physical processes and the relevant features of phenomenal concepts" (Chalmers 2006:175).

Chalmers cautions that the conceivability entailed in the first premise of the *Master Argument* has no relationship with possibility, for creatures conceivable in the light of P-condition and not C-condition may be metaphysically impossible. The conceivability in this is connected to reductive explanation which turns on the explanatory gap between consciousness and physicalism. Put differently, the kind of explanation required here is that which will show how microphysical truths/facts will *a priori* entail psychological features of human beings and since the conceivability of zombies has shown that this may not always be the case, then there is a need for additional explanation for the presence (or existence) of psychological features. Thus, the success of the phenomenal concept strategy lies in its ability to explain the epistemic gap that seems to exist in explaining how physical fact gives rise to conscious experience upon which phenomenal concepts are developed.

The first premise of the *Master Argument* appears like an argument which would crumble the position of the phenomenal concept strategy, but when examined closely it does not affect the thesis of the strategy. The first point to note in the *Master Argument* is the implicit agreement of the argument with the thesis of phenomenal concept strategy that the epistemic gap does not imply an ontological gap. This is owing to Chalmers' clarification of the connection between conceivability and possibility on the one hand and the connection between conceivability and reductive explanation on the other hand. Chalmers' argument does not affect the minimum claim of the phenomenal concept strategy. In a situation where it is possible to have microphysical truth and not have psychological features, one can as well argue that the

demand for an explanation will be asking too much of physicalism, which the phenomenal concept strategy has been developed to defend.

What is implied here is that a world where there are physical truths devoid of psychological features poses no threat to explanation of the presence of psychological features in this world. The claim of physicalism is that if there is anything that could be called a mental phenomenon, that thing is either physical or supervenes on the physical and if there is a world at all that lacks mental phenomena, then everything in there still remains physical.

The second premise of the *Master Argument* which states that if it is not conceivable to have microphysical truth without psychological features then it follows that our psychological features cannot explain our epistemic situation, can be simply understood as saying that microphysical truths do not *a priori* entail psychological features. Chalmers adds additional premises in order to drive home his point and they are as follows:

> If P and not-C is not conceivable, then zombies satisfy C.
>
> Zombies do not share our epistemic situation.
>
> If zombies satisfy C but do not share our epistemic situation, then C cannot explain our epistemic situation.

From these follows the conclusion that if P and not-C is not conceivable, then C cannot explain our epistemic situation (Chalmers 2006:176).

This second part of the argument assumes that zombies satisfy the C-condition, that is, zombies have psychological features; thus, it assumes an avoidance of the problem identified in the first part of the argument but comes with its own problem. The problem that would arise for the phenomenal concept strategy here is that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to differentiate between conscious beings and zombies. How is this so? Chalmers' argument here assumes that human beings and zombies both satisfy the C-condition but only human beings satisfy the E-condition which is about the truth-values and epistemic status of the beliefs possessed by human beings, but lacked by zombies. One of the reasons given by Chalmers for this disparity in epistemic status is that:

> … zombies have a much less accurate self-conception than conscious beings do. I believe that I am conscious, that I have states with remarkable qualitative character available to introspection, that these states resist transparent reductive explanation and so on. My zombie twin has corresponding beliefs. It is not straightforward to determine just what content these beliefs might possess. But there is a strong intuition that these beliefs are false, or at least that they are less justified than my beliefs (Chalmers 2006:177).

In sum, the epistemic position of human beings is different from that of zombies; when a zombie displays phenomenal ability, it would be different in content from when a human being does same. The point of this argument then is that even if some phenomenal concepts yield to physicalist explanation (since it is assumed that zombies satisfy the C-condition too) such phenomenal concepts will fail to explain the epistemic gap between physical processes/concepts and phenomenal processes/concepts.

Esa Diaz-Leon (2010: 933-951) objects to this second part of the *Master Argument* by stating that the argument poses no serious threat to the phenomenal concept strategy since phenomenal concepts are only required to explain why there is a gap between complete microphysical truth (P) and arbitrary truth about phenomenal consciousness (Q) and not to explain the whole of human's epistemic situation. She goes further to argue that what Chalmers bases his claim of the failure of the phenomenal concept strategy on is not a strong ground. Chalmers' claim is that any account of a phenomenal concept of psychological features/conscious experience (say C) that follows *a priori* from microphysical truth (P) will fail in the explanation of how features of phenomenal concepts result in the epistemic gap since every being that has psychological features has epistemic situation and it is conceivable that zombies have psychological features but lack epistemic situation. Diaz-Leon's response to this is that the relevant features of epistemic situation which is the inability to infer truth about phenomenal consciousness *a priori*

from physical truths is also satisfied by zombies. Thus, the epistemic situation which Chalmers wants to use as the point for saying phenomenal concepts cannot explain is also satisfied at the minimum level by zombies.

Peter Carruthers and Benedicte Veillet (2007:212-235) also argue that Chalmers' *Master Argument* against the phenomenal concept strategy is unsuccessful. They premised their argument on what can be called Chalmers' mistaken conception of epistemic status. Following from the second part of the *Master Argument* where Chalmers argues that, if it is conceivable that a human being and his/her zombie duplicate can satisfy the C-condition (that is, have phenomenal concept) but do not share the same epistemic status, then phenomenal concepts cannot explain epistemic situation, they argue that zombies do share in human beings' epistemic situation. Their argument for this claim goes thus: a human being and his/her zombie duplicate do have concepts they develop to refer to perceptual states they experience, but these concepts differ in contents. The content of a human being's phenomenal concept will involve a phenomenal state but that of his/her zombie duplicate could be said to involve "schemenomenal" states. From this, it can then be said that a human being and his/her zombie duplicate have beliefs with the same truth-value even though their beliefs are about different things. This, in turn, shows that they both share the same epistemic situation (Carruthers and Veillet 2007: 224).

Chalmers (2006:185) already pre-empts this kind of physicalist reply when he states that asserting that zombies share the same epistemic status as human beings as discussed above will either deflate the phenomenal knowledge of a conscious being or inflate the corresponding knowledge of zombies. This means that the argument would imply that a zombie knows *as much* (inflationary) as a human being or that a human being knows *as little* (deflationary) as a zombie and this has counter-intuitive consequences. Carruthers' and Veillet's response to this is that there is no need to assume such inflationary or deflationary turns in the epistemic status of both human beings and zombies. What is needed is the fact of pointing out that the objects of the epistemic state are about different things. Where does this argument lead? Owing to their claim that Chalmers' view about epistemic status is wrong, Carruthers and Veillet, while trying to avoid this inflationary and deflationary charge, submit thus:

> In our view, zombies are still zombies in that they are not phenomenally conscious. Their perceptual states don't have phenomenal feels … Yet they have something playing a certain role in their psychology – a role analogous to that phenomenal consciousness plays in ours. They have something epistemically just as good as consciousness, but they don't have anything that is phenomenally as good … Even though their schenomenal beliefs are true when our corresponding phenomenal beliefs are, their beliefs are, sadly enough, not about the same good stuff as our corresponding beliefs – they are not about the feel of experiences (Carruthers and Veillet 2007:212-236).

This is to show the fault in the second part of Chalmers' *Master Argument,* that it is conceivable that a human being and his/her zombie duplicate can satisfy the C-condition and still share the same epistemic status; thus it will follow that phenomenal concept can explain our epistemic status contrary to Chalmers' claim.

Phenomenal concept strategy and the puzzles of consciousness

Having discussed some of the criticisms of the phenomenal concept strategy and some of the flaws involved in the criticisms, I will proceed to examine the viability of the strategy against some of the puzzles in which the problem of consciousness manifests itself. This will involve assessing the phenomenal concept strategy against the knowledge argument and the conceivability argument. I will attempt an examination of the resolution of these puzzles through phenomenal concept strategy.

The knowledge argument is grounded on a thought experiment where Frank Jackson presents Mary who was locked up in a black-and-white room and had therein learned all the physical truths there are to be learnt about colours. On being released, Mary had her first experience of red and it is argued that such experience cannot be deduced from the physical truths about colours that she has learnt in the room, but

she rather acquires new phenomenal truths which are an indication of the falsity of physicalism that complete physical truth is the whole truth about the universe (Jackson 2002:273-280).

The success of the knowledge argument is one which will spell doom for physicalism and to avoid this, physicalists have found solace in the phenomenal concept strategy. The general assumption that runs through most versions of the phenomenal concept strategy is that the knowledge argument is mistaken in arriving at a metaphysical conclusion from an epistemological premise.[5] Now when dealing with the knowledge argument, some of the options open to a physicalist include (1) to reject the notion that Mary learns a new fact after her release; (2) to accept that Mary learns a new thing but that which she has learnt is subsumable in the physicalist system (see Loar 2002 and Balog 2012). These options are, however, not in any way exhaustive of what is available to the physicalist.

These two options are in tandem with the phenomenal concept strategy's approach to solving the Mary puzzle. The options are consistent with the physicalist claim that the knowledge argument embarks on a fallacious route of inferring an ontological gap between physical truth and phenomenal truths from an epistemic gap. The epistemic gap which the knowledge argument suggests exists in Mary's knowledge of physical truth and phenomenal truth is one which phenomenal concept strategists argue is derived from a mistaken idea of how we deploy concepts. The phenomenal concept strategists hold that the epistemic gap is a result of confusions about linguistic conceptualization. This confusion, as earlier stated, is in the wrong assumption that since phenomenal concepts are conceptually different, then their referents are ontologically different too. With regard to the knowledge argument, phenomenal concept strategists have also argued using identity-analogy to drive home their point that Mary, after her release, does not learn any new fact or even if it is to be accepted that Mary's post-release experience is novel, it can all be explained away on a contingent mode of identity case. Let us examine, for example, Brian Loar's take on the implication of the misconception about phenomenal concept and identities for the knowledge argument.

Brian Loar argues that phenomenal concepts are concepts conscious beings develop to instantiate the qualities of their phenomenal experiences and these phenomenal concepts are conceptually irreducible and do not *a priori* imply physical-functional concepts. This, for Loar, is where the anti-physicalist argument of an epistemic gap takes its root. These facts about phenomenal concepts seem endearing to the antiphysicalist's position, but Loar claims they are reconcilable to pursue a physicalist project as it is possible to accept "introspective concepts and their conceptual irreducibility, and at the same time take phenomenal qualities to be identical with physical-functional properties…"(Loar 2002:296). This is to say that the conceptual irreducibility of phenomenal concepts or the non-*apriori* deducibility of physical concepts from phenomenal concepts does not deny the fact that these two concepts refer to the same thing. To buttress his point, Loar samples two other instances that could serve as counter-examples to the claim arrived at in the knowledge argument. The first of these is the case of Max who learns that the bottle in front of him contains CH3CH2OH but does not know that the same bottle contains alcohol. At that time, Max has no concept to depict the concept "alcohol". When Max later comes to learn about the substance called alcohol, it can be said, on the reasoning of the knowledge argument, that he learns a new thing which is not identical with CH3CH2OH. Loar asserts that this does not follow. The second is the case of Margot who learns about the element *aurum* (the chemical composition of gold) but has never seen gold and when she later sees gold and forms a visual conception of it, following from the reasoning of the knowledge argument again, it can be said that she gets a new piece of information which is not identical with what she has learnt and known about *aurum*. This again, according to Loar, does not follow (Loar 2002:296-297).

5. The feature of conception isolation or independence of phenomenal concepts allows that phenomenal concepts are understood to be conceptually different from physical concepts, which explains the epistemological ground that antiphysicalists base their arguments on. However, advocates of the strategy hold that this does not mean that what these concepts pick out are ontologically distinct. See, Loar, B. (2002). "Phenomenal States" in Chalmers, D. J. (ed.) *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*.

One simple deduction from Loar's analogical counter-examples is that it can be erroneously held that Mary learns a new fact after her release given the nature of phenomenal concepts, but the fact remains that she learns a physical truth in a new way. The experience of red which Mary has in her post-release stage is just another way of conceiving the physical truths learnt in her pre-release stage.

Another puzzle of consciousness is the conceivability argument which poses a metaphysical challenge to physicalism. Premised on the logical possibility of zombies or a zombie world, the argument holds that it is consistent with reasoning to conceive of physical duplicates of human beings which lack the phenomenal experience of human beings. If this is the case, it follows that consciousness is not identical with physical features of human beings. This argument was popularised by David Chalmers (1996:95-96). One of the ways physicalists have responded to this argument is the denial of a logical connection between conceivability and metaphysical possibility. This argument holds that the conceivability of zombies or a zombie world does not entail their metaphysical possibility, hence what the conceivability argument proposes is an impossible ontological arrangement.

On the account of the phenomenal concept strategy, zombies or a zombie world are conceivable but their conceivability is one which is compatible with the thesis of physicalism. Katalin Balog (2012:8), while appealing to the constitutional account of phenomenal concepts, argues that the "reference of a phenomenal concept is determined by how it is constituted and not by any description that is *a priori* with the concept". From this, it can be understood that the directness of phenomenal concepts allows for zombies or a zombie world to be conceived but disallows that this conceivability entails an ontological difference between physical and phenomenal truths.

Another means of assessing the conceivability argument from the critical lens of the phenomenal concept strategy is to consider the conditional statement formulation of the argument posited by Chalmers. Let P represent a complete physical truth about the universe and Q represent phenomenal truth about the universe. Thus, a physicalist proposal can be represented by the conditional: if P then Q. But in a scenario where it is possible to have a world physically identical to our world but lacking on the phenomenal front, this can be represented as P and not Q. Given this further conjunctional statement, it would follow that physicalism is false and the conditional (if P then Q) it assumes is not *a priori* necessary (Chalmers 2006, pp. 172-176). Phenomenal concept strategists' response to this is that given the nature of phenomenal concepts the relationship between P and Q is necessary but *a posteriori*. What this means is that the conceptual but not ontological difference between phenomenal and physical concepts allows for the conjunction "P and not Q" but this does not translate to an ontological gap between P and Q.

Conclusion

From the arguments stated above, it must be noted that the criticisms raised by Michael Tye and David Chalmers against the phenomenal concept strategy take different logical paths. However, these criticisms fail in the bid to discredit the plausibility of the phenomenal concept strategy as a physicalist method developed in addressing the problem of consciousness. This is not to say that the phenomenal concept strategy is proof against flaws, but arguments in this paper have shown that the strategy does not falter in the face of the criticisms raised by Tye and Chalmers.

In the final analysis, it would be seen that Tye's and Chalmers' criticisms fail to capture the essential thesis of the phenomenal concept strategy. For the phenomenal concept strategy, when understood in its essential light, does not fall to the challenges raised by Tye and Chalmers. On another note, the phenomenal concept strategy has further been analysed in different ways to make up for challenges which has warranted different versions of the strategy. This is an indication that the physicalist project of developing the phenomenal concept strategy is being strengthened at every instance of being faced with challenges. Thus, the phenomenal concept strategy maintains its plausibility as a physicalist means of addressing the problem of consciousness.

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