

## There is No Paradox of Phenomenal Judgment

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*Epiphenomenalist Dualism:* Certain physical states give rise to non-physical conscious experiences, but these non-physical experiences are themselves causally inefficacious

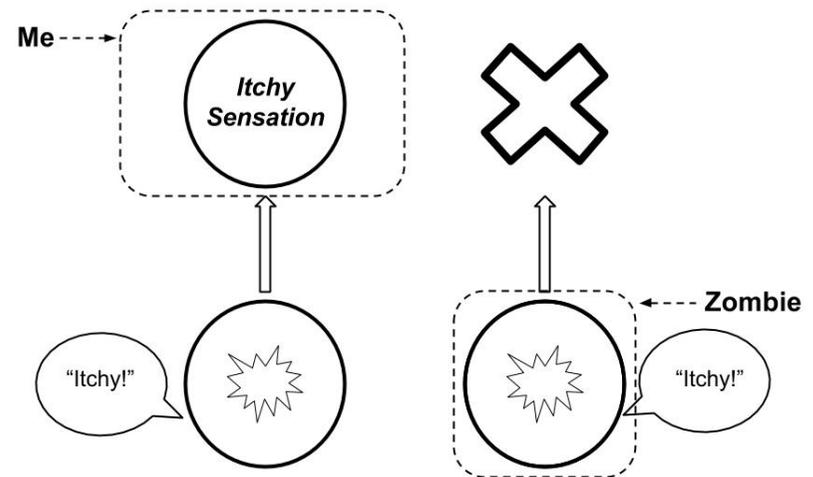
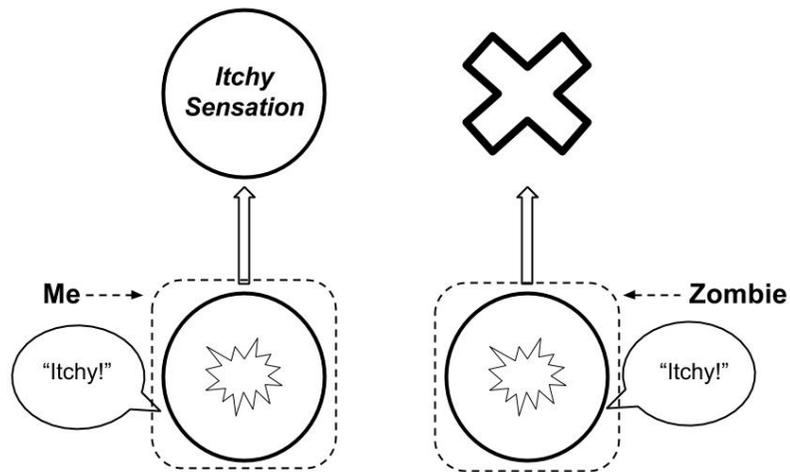
*Claim:* There is nothing paradoxical about the epiphenomenalist's understanding of phenomenal judgments or phenomenal self-knowledge. The appearance of paradox emerges from inconsistently combining (epiphenomenalist) dualism about qualia with a physicalistic conception of subjects of experience and cognitive processes.

### The Alleged Paradox

1. If epiphenomenalism is true, I have a zombie twin (z-twin) in another possible world.
2. As she scratches at her leg, the very same things go on inside of her brain as inside of my brain. These brain processes cause the very same sounds "Itchiness feels like *this*" to come out of her mouth as come out of my mouth.

3. So my z-twin has the very same phenomenal judgments as me – "Itchiness feels like this" – formed by the very same mechanism.
4. But my z-twin's judgment is not only false, it's not justified.
5. If her judgment is not justified, and my judgment was formed by the same mechanism, then my judgment can't be justified either.
6. So – if epiphenomenalism is true – my phenomenal judgment isn't justified.
7. But it clearly is justified.
8. So epiphenomenalism is false.

*Challenge:* I am a physical creature; my beliefs are physical states. The epiphenomenalist tells us that qualia are non-physical, and that they don't have any causal impact on the physical world. It follows that they don't have any impact on me or on my beliefs. So they are irrelevant to me and my beliefs. So I could not possibly latch onto them to think about them or have any knowledge of them. But this is clearly mistaken; so epiphenomenalism is false.



### The Diagnosis

The “paradox” implicitly assumes a *physicalistic* conception of belief and of persons.

The dualist should insist that my conscious experiences are essential to *me* and to my *beliefs*: constituting (or partially constituting) both me and my phenomenal judgments.

**Moral:** Dualists should be dualists all the way down. If qualia are non-physical, then persons and their mental states are (at least in part) non-physical too.

### Rejecting (P3)

Premise (P3) involves two claims:

- (i) My z-twin has the same phenomenal judgment as me – after all, the same things happen in her brain as mine, causing the same sounds to leave her lips.
- (ii) Her judgment is formed by the same mechanism as mine – after all, our brains are doing precisely the same things.

**(i):** If I and my phenomenal judgment are partially composed of my (non-physical) conscious experiences, my z-twin does not have the same phenomenal judgments as me, since she does not have any such experiences.

(ii): My phenomenal judgments are formed not only by the physical workings of my brain, but also the *laws of generation* responsible that generate these phenomenal experiences. No such mechanism is at work for my z-twin.

## Phenomenal Judgments

How might phenomenal judgments be “composed out of” conscious experiences?

### *Constitutional Theory of Phenomenal Concepts*

We can *use* token phenomenal experiences as constituents of our thoughts, to think about experiences of the relevant type. “I hate \*itchy sensation\*!”

- I am directly acquainted with the phenomenal experience of itchiness, in a very intimate fashion. The experience is – literally – a part of my mind/thought.
- I don’t stand “at a distance” from my belief’s truth-makers. The nature of the object of my belief – the essence of itchiness – is directly presented to me (it is a constituent of me) as the means by which I think about itchiness.
  - **Me:** Phenomenal belief; awesome justification
  - **Zombie:** No phenomenal belief; no awesome justification

There’s a crucial step missing from this defense against the paradox. *We need an explanation as to how it is that you can stand in the relevant epistemic relationship to your experiences, such that they can be constituents of your thoughts.*

*Your* experience of itchiness can serve as a constituent of your thoughts. But *my* experience of itchiness cannot serve as a constituent of your thoughts. Why?

## Kirk’s Currents

Epiphenomenalists can’t hold that we’re epistemically acquainted with just any old qualia:

- I’m not epistemically acquainted with your qualia.
- If there were a zombie world where a red quale was suddenly introduced to the world, none of the zombies would magically gain epistemic contact with it.

There must be some explanation for how it is that we can have epistemic contact with qualia.

**Suggestion:** To have epistemic contact with epiphenomenal qualia, the qualia must be “caused by and isomorphic to the relevant physical processes.”

**Problem:** We can generate other examples of epiphenomena that are caused by and isomorphic to our brain processes, where we don't thereby have epistemic contact with the epiphenomena.

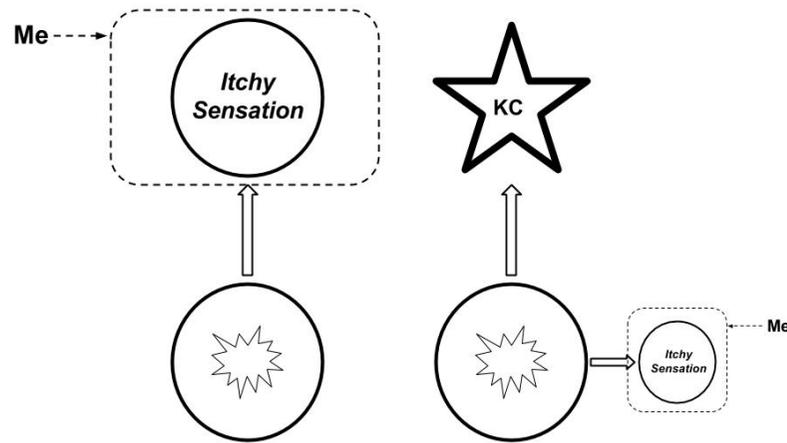
- Imagine that in addition to producing qualia, our brain processes produce “minute patterns of electrical activity which are in relevant respects isomorphic to them – but have no effects on them” (79). We never observe these **Kirk's Currents (KC)** nor do we ever come to know anything about them.
- KC seem possible. But they're an epiphenomena “caused by and isomorphic to the relevant physical processes”, that we're not thereby in epistemic contact with.
- So the same criterion for epistemic contact cannot be sufficient for epistemic contact with epiphenomenal qualia. Something more than causation, plus isomorphism must be necessary for epistemic contact.

Three further options from Kirk:

1. Intrinsic properties of the physical relata (our brains)
  - Very same physical components are involved in generating both e-qualia and KC, so this can't explain how I could have epistemic contact with one and not the other.
2. Intrinsic properties of qualia
  - The “intrinsic properties could be whatever you please (provided that they remain inert); I should still not be able to notice, think about, attend to, remember, or compare them” (79).
3. The distinctive relation between our brains and qualia
  - It's mysterious what distinctive relation there could be between the physical properties and qualia that couldn't be replicated for KC.
  - Why can't simply say?: *We're acquainted with our qualia or qualia (partially) constitute our phenomenal judgments.*
    - A complete answer to the paradox must explain *how* it is that we can have this kind of epistemic contact with epiphenomenal qualia, given that we cannot have such contact with other epiphenomena.

## Resolving the Paradox

Kirk's analysis of the relationship between e-qualia and KC follows naturally from a physicalistic conception of subjects and their beliefs. But there's no reason for the dualist to accept such conceptions. It's only when presupposing that qualia is something distinct from me (like KC) that the two cases are parallel.



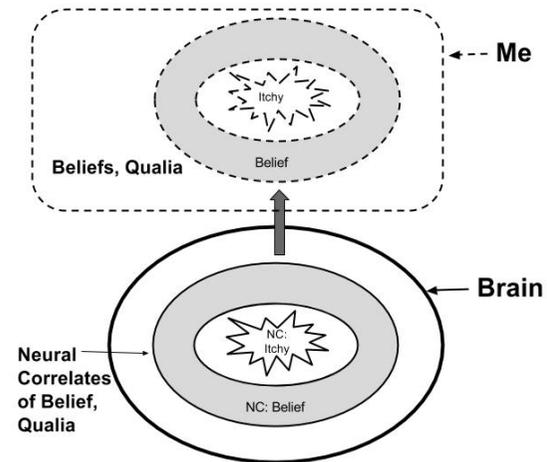
**Cognitive Processes Challenge:** Even if e-qualia (partially) constitute the subject, they are cut off from the *cognitive processes* that are essential for us to think about, notice, or attend to them.

**Diagnosis:** The initial puzzle seemed compelling if we started from a physicalistic conception of persons, and combined this with the epiphenomenalist's dualism about consciousness. This new variant looks puzzling if we start from a physicalistic conception of

cognitive processes – which renders them cut off from our (e-)qualia. As before, the dualist need not (and should not) accept this.

- Extension of holding qualia to be isomorphic to brain processes: hold that the occurrent thoughts, desires, noticings, etc. that my brain generates have isomorphic phenomenal parallels

Cognitive processes are not (purely) physical processes, but (at least partially) phenomenal ones:



I notice that my leg feels itchy. The itchiness that I feel partially constitutes both *me* and *my cognitive process*. This noticing, along with my belief that a mosquito caused the sensation, my desire that the sensation cease, and the sensation itself, are all constituents of *me*.

- E-qualia: constituent of subject
- E-qualia: constituent of subject's cognitive processes
- Cognitive processes: constituent of subject

There is no distance between (i) experiences, (ii) the cognitive processes that involve to them, and (iii) the subjects who have them. The relationship between these things is not causal; it is *constitutive*.

We may not have epistemic access to the neural processes underwriting our cognitive processes. But we do have access to our beliefs, desires, thinkings, attendings, and so on, if these beliefs, desires, etc. are understood in accordance with dualism: as phenomenal.

*Why can't subjects and their cognitive processes be partially constituted by KC in a parallel way?*

- Intrinsic nature of subjects and their qualia: Qualia aren't just any old non-physical property, nor are they just any old epiphenomenal property. Qualia are, by their nature, the sorts of things that constitute subjects.

*Why can e-qualia can serve as a constituent of our beliefs (and other cognitive processes), whereas KC can't?*

- (i) An item is eligible to serve as a constituent of a subject's belief if it – like the belief – is a (mental) part of the subject.
  - A subject's qualia are an element of her mind; a subject's KC are not. It is this shared constitutive relationship that beliefs and qualia stand in to subjects that accounts for their distinctive epistemic relationship.
- (ii) Why are beliefs are eligible to contain qualia? Two plausible observations about beliefs (and other cognitive processes):
  - a. Cognitive processes – beliefs, desires, noticings, attendings – are essentially processes *of a subject*. There can't be a belief without there being someone who believes, or a noticing without there being someone who notices.
  - b. Beliefs are essentially representational. In representing, they fundamentally represent *to a subject*. It is not the case that just any old process (or any old epiphenomenal process) is suited to present the world to subjects.

- i. Nothing about Kirk's Currents should lead us to think that they are, by their natures, suited to present the world to conscious subjects.
- ii. Qualia are suited to this. There is something that it's like to have contents of a belief presented to you. The world is presented to me – the conscious subject – using phenomenology. Beliefs are essentially phenomenal. But they are not essentially Kirk's Currents-full.

Despite both being caused by and isomorphic to brain processes, the relationship between subjects and their e-qualia/KC differs:

- (i) KC stand in a different relationship to *subjects* (given the correct dualistic understanding of subjects as distinct from their brains), since KC are not constituents of the subject and the subject's cognitive processes.
- (ii) This relationship differs because the *intrinsic properties of qualia* and KC are different: Qualia are uniquely suited to being parts of subjects and their cognitive processes, in a way that KC are not.

## Conclusion

Phenomenal judgments appear paradoxical only when one combines the epiphenomenalist's dualistic picture of qualia with a physicalistic conception of subjects and their cognitive processes.

We should not be surprised that trying to squeeze a dualistic picture of qualia into a physicalistic conception of the rest of the mind will have bizarre results.

*Moral:* Not that epiphenomenalism is false, but that epiphenomenalist dualists should be "thoroughgoing dualists" – embracing the importance of the non-physical not only in accounting for qualia, but also in accounting for subjects and their cognitive lives.