

Conscious thinking and cognitive phenomenology: topics, views and future developments

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This introduction presents a state of the art of philosophical research on cognitive phenomenology and its relation to the nature of conscious thinking more generally. We firstly introduce the question of cognitive phenomenology, the motivation for the debate, and situate the discussion within the fields of philosophy (analytic and phenomenological traditions), cognitive psychology and consciousness studies. Secondly, we review the main research on the question, which we argue has so far situated the cognitive phenomenology debate around the following topics and arguments: phenomenal contrast, epistemic arguments and challenges, introspection, ontology and temporal character, intentionality, inner speech, agency, holistic perspective, categorical perception, value, and phenomenological description. Thirdly, we suggest future developments by pointing to four questions that can be explored in relation to the cognitive phenomenology discussion: the self and self-awareness, attention, emotions and general theories of consciousness. We finalise by briefly presenting the six articles of this Special Issue, which engage with some of the topics mentioned and contribute to enlarge the discussion by connecting it to different areas of philosophical investigation.

Keywords: phenomenal character; thought; cognitive experience; consciousness; inner speech; agency; perceptual experience

What is the nature of conscious cognition or conscious thinking? What is it like to undergo an experience of thinking? What does it feel like? Does it have a “raw feel”? Or a kind of cognitive colouring of its own distinct from any accompanying emotional feeling? Is that intuitive sense of experiencing a sensation or something else? In recent years, the question of the experiential or phenomenal character of conscious thought, what has been generally called “cognitive phenomenology” has gained an important place within analytic philosophy of mind and also within recent discussion in phenomenology. The main questions in the debate include: does conscious thought have a proprietary phenomenal character, that is, does it have its own specific cognitive “phenomenology”?¹ Or can the phenomenal character of occurrent, conscious, cognitive episodes be explained solely in terms of more familiar kinds of phenomenal experiences – such as sensory, perceptual or emotional experiences (assuming that their phenomenality has been more fully limned)? Does conscious cognition (whose precise varieties also need to be carefully identified and disambiguated) have its own dedicated form of phenomenality or does that phenomenality reduce to the phenomenality of the accompanying sensuous or emotional states? If conscious

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cognitive experiences have their own peculiar phenomenology – how can it be characterised? Does it simply reduce to the experiences of attentiveness, voluntary control, reflective awareness, and so on, or are other experiences involved?

Needless to say, this area of research is divided between defenders and deniers of cognitive phenomenology, and arguments on both sides have been presented and discussed although often without taking great care to give fine-grained account of precisely what, for example, sensory or sensuous phenomenality means. There is often a rather general assumption that speaking of the phenomenology of cognitive experiences is somehow doing something that is close to the hearts of classic phenomenologists. And this raises an added question, therefore, whether the tradition of phenomenology has anything particularly relevant to contribute to the current debates concerning the phenomenality of cognition (“cognitive phenomenology” *au sens courant*).

The importance of these debates concerning cognition and its purported phenomenality can be seen in relation to various facts. Firstly, the claim that cognition has its own unique phenomenality questions various fundamental assumptions current in consciousness research, given that investigations on the phenomenal character or what-it-is-likeness of experience (Nagel 1974) are normally centred in the domain of sensations and perceptions, sometimes extending it also to bodily experiences, emotions or agency, but not specifically to experiences of thinking *per se*. Precisely because phenomenality has too readily been assumed to have a sensuous character, general theories of consciousness continue to be formulated at the expense precisely of excluding cognitive experiences. But, if it turns out, on the other hand, that there is a specific or proprietary phenomenal character of thought, how does this discovery in itself influence current theories of (phenomenal) consciousness? For a long time, for instance, the exercise of cognition has been regarded as something that can be replicated by machines and computers, but if it is has its own peculiar phenomenality, does this not complicate debates about computation and artificial intelligence?

Secondly, the puzzles about the nature, role and efficacy of consciousness, creating the so-called “hard problem” of consciousness, have been mainly treated in regard primarily to perceptual experiences. It is worth asking, then: how does cognitive phenomenology modify the characterisation of such puzzles? Do the same puzzles arise for conscious thought or cognitive experiences? Is conscious thought just another part of the easy problems of consciousness, related to informational processes and intentionality (Chalmers 1996)? If a defence of a specific cognitive phenomenology succeeds, it seems that the hard problem cannot be readily separated from the easy problems, or it might turn out that there are no easy problems of consciousness after all (Shields 2011).

Thirdly, investigating the character of the experiences of thought or thinking may very well modify established conceptions concerning the nature of conscious thought generally and in relation to other features exhibited by thought, such as intentionality, agency, rationality, etc. In this sense, the exploration of cognitive phenomenology might cast doubt, for instance, on those views of the mind that seek to sharply separate intentionality and phenomenal consciousness (see Horgan and Tienson (2002) and Montague (2010) for explanation). In general, thus, what is at stake is a fundamental questioning of assumed uses of “phenomenal character” as restricted to sensations and perceptual experiences and, thus, of our overall conception of the reach and nature of phenomenal consciousness. Earlier debates concerning the phenomenal character of experiences (closely tied to parallel debates concerning the existence of “qualia” and the “first-person” character of conscious experiences) tended to start from rather narrow premises and unexamined assumptions concerning phenomenality, one which restricted all phenomenology to a felt sensuousness.

The discussion of cognitive phenomenology contributes to various fields of philosophical and more broadly cognitive science research. Within philosophy, both analytic philosophy of mind and the tradition of phenomenology, as philosophical traditions and methodologies, can help shedding light on the topic, with the challenge of finding common grounds for debate beyond particular approaches and interests. Over and above the philosophical arena, cognitive phenomenology can become relevant for interdisciplinary research on consciousness and investigations on cognitive psychology, thus enriching those disciplines with different perspectives. In this way, cognitive phenomenology appears as a fruitful field of research with relevant connections in philosophical and empirical researches.

It is the aim of this Special Issue to contribute to enlarge the debate on cognitive phenomenology by presenting six articles that engage with the present discussion and also focus on some underexplored questions, including some reference to the history of the topic in the modern philosophical tradition. In this Introduction, we present an overview of the current state of the art on cognitive phenomenology and conscious thought, situating the topic in different fields of research. Then we contribute with a presentation of the main topics and views, and suggest new paths for future research and development. In the last section we introduce the contributed papers with a brief summary.

1. *Conscious thinking: an underexplored domain?*

What is the nature of conscious cognition or conscious thinking? Different answers have been given, at least, in three areas: philosophy, cognitive psychology and consciousness studies. Let us briefly present how conscious thought is treated in those three areas.

Within philosophy, two domains have been separately examined in philosophy of mind and phenomenology: the nature of consciousness and the nature of cognition or thought. What is the relation between them? One connection that has been established between cognition and consciousness appears when cognition is connected to *perceptual* experience. In this area, there is discussion concerning the question of the cognitive penetrability of perceptual experience, and also on what is the relation of justification between perceptual experience and cognition, among other topics. These issues, however, are more concerned with the nature of perception and perceptual experiences, and the influence of thought on them, than with the nature of cognition or conscious cognition per se.

At the same time, one might feel perplexed with the title of this section that states that conscious thinking or cognition is a rather unattended or unexplored phenomenon, given that, at least since Descartes' reflections on thinking and the self, considerations of conscious thinking have been quite at the centre of philosophical theorisation. The phenomenological tradition, beginning with Brentano and Husserl, has also discussed the nature of conscious awareness. These classical phenomenologists, however, have mainly focused their analysis on perceptual experiences and many other sorts of experiences – imagination, emotions, memory, and so on – without attending primarily to the structures of the experience of *thinking* as such (although both Brentano and Husserl have much to say about the nature and structure of judgement, it has not been primarily interrogated as a specifically conscious activity where the modality of its phenomenality is regarded as playing an essential role).

Moreover, it should be noted that the concepts of “consciousness” and “thought” have not retained a univocal meaning through history, and knowledge of the changes and of the evolution of these concepts might help shed light on the situation of cognitive phenomenology as the debate emerged in the last decade of the twentieth century (see Bayne and

Montague (2011) and Siewert (2011) for a history of the question). Jansen's contribution to the issue offers historical insights for the contemporary debate, by highlighting some aspects of Kant's and Husserl's accounts on thinking.

Within the analytical philosophical tradition, the contemporary debate on cognitive phenomenology began in the 1990s, and an important contribution to this was Goldman's (1993), who did not preclude the idea of there being experiential or qualitative aspects of thoughts:

The terms qualia and qualitative are sometimes restricted to sensations (percepts and somatic feelings), but we should not allow this to preclude the possibility of other mental events (beliefs, thoughts, etc.) having a phenomenological or experiential dimension. (Goldman 1993, 24)

This paper was followed by a response from Lormand (1996), who posited a quartet of phenomenal states that did not, however, include thought. A view in support of Goldman's insight was put forward by Strawson in the first edition of *Mental Reality* (1994), where he argues for the reality of cognitive experience presenting the much discussed case of the experience of understanding or coming-to-understand. In the same decade, Siewert (1998) also talks about sudden realisations or "insights" as thoughts for which no sensory elements might explain their phenomenal character. Of course, there is a much older debate in European philosophy (found for instance in Bergson (1946) or Lonergan (1992)) concerning the nature of intuition, including the intuitive grasp of cognitive states and their contents and objects (see Rooth and Rowbottom (2014) for a contemporary overview on intuitions), as well as discussions about the nature of insight and specifically the kind of moment of immediate understanding often described as the "Eureka" experience, "aha" moment or just as "insight".

Goldman, Strawson, Siewert and others were the main precursors of the contemporary debate on cognitive phenomenology, which started to establish itself in the field philosophy of mind after that decade. Several works argued in favour of cognitive phenomenology in the beginning of our century (Horgan and Tienson 2002; Loar 2003; Pitt 2004; Graham, Horgan, and Tienson 2007, among others) but it was not until 2011 that a whole edited volume dedicated to the question was first published with the title *Cognitive Phenomenology*, edited Bayne and Montague (2011). More recently, a second edited volume by Breyer and Gutland (2016), *The Phenomenology of Thinking: Philosophical Investigations into the Character of Cognitive Experiences* addresses the cognitive phenomenology debate in the interface between analytic and phenomenological traditions in philosophy. The reasons for this revival are varied, but it may have been partially due to the proposals of various models of consciousness as higher-or-same order monitoring of mental states (as Prinz 2011 notes) and, certainly, to the interest in forms of intentionality as phenomenal intentionality in which intentionality is grounded in phenomenality (Kriegel 2014). The research in cognitive phenomenology was one aspect that paved the way for a new approach to the mind that countered functionalist and representationalist views.

It is useful to briefly highlight the situation in cognitive psychology and consciousness studies more generally. Within cognitive psychology, there is a well-established division between unconscious and conscious thoughts on the basis of two different cognitive systems or processes that underlie thinking (Frankish 2011): System 1 involves forms or reasoning that are automatic, intuitive, and mostly unconscious; and System 2 gives rise to forms of reasoning that are controlled, reflective and generally conscious. Research on conscious thought or cognition, thus, normally appeals to controlled and reflective forms

of thinking, or even attentive thinking (Dijksterhuis and Nordgren 2006), somehow assuming that the *conscious* aspect of thought is thereby fully considered. But is the consciousness involved in conscious thought adequately described and explained by just appealing to attention, control, or reflection? Whereas sometimes these notions appear jointly in the characterisation of conscious thought, specific philosophical reflection should be able to distinguish and treat them separately and in relation to the (phenomenally) conscious character of thought. As another side of the same coin, much research on the area seems to be mainly focused on unconscious thought or cognition (Kihlstrom 2013), thereby leaving the connection to consciousness unattended.

One might think that the proper field of enquiry concerning the conscious character of thought is consciousness studies, given that thought is one mode or capacity within the mind. But the situation within consciousness studies does not give grounds for optimism: most research on consciousness is normally carried out in domains other than thought or cognition. Both scientific and philosophical theories of consciousness tend mainly to focus on sensory and perceptual experience, or even emotional, bodily experiences and action (Velmans and Schneider 2007; Block 2009; Van Gulick 2014), proposing general accounts of consciousness that normally do not have thought or cognition as its main *explanandum*. At most, theories that relate thought or cognition with consciousness characterise thought as a form of access consciousness (Block 1995), namely, a kind of consciousness (questioned by some as such, though) responsible for the information poised for the rational control of thought and action. As a symptom of the weak sense in which access consciousness is a form of consciousness, we can see that Block (2007) himself later prefers to talk about ‘cognitive access’.

As we have seen, the domain of conscious thought or cognition and its phenomenal character remains overlooked in cognitive psychology due to the dominant assumption that the conscious aspect is already explained by appeals to control, reflection or attention, and overlooked in interdisciplinary consciousness studies due to the latter’s focus on other domains of experience. In philosophy, the renewed interest in consciousness that began in the 1990s posed the question on cognitive phenomenology and its connection to conscious thought and started to build this new field of research within philosophy of mind and phenomenology.

2. Topics and views

This section will present the current state of the art of the cognitive phenomenology discussion, highlighting those elements and aspects that contribute to characterise the nature of conscious thought and thinking more generally. The debate on cognitive phenomenology has so far been situated around the following arguments and topics: phenomenal contrast, epistemic arguments and challenges, introspection, ontology and temporal character, intentionality, inner speech, agency, holistic perspective, categorical perception, value, and phenomenological description.

Two main arguments that have guided the discussion situate experience and introspective awareness at the basis: the phenomenal contrast argument and the epistemic argument. Accounts drawing on *phenomenal contrast* present real cases or thought experiments with two different scenarios in which it is hypothesised that several elements remain constant while in one scenario there is a fact that could not obtain unless we postulate the existence of cognitive phenomenology (Kriegel 2006). The fact that is present in one scenario but not in another is, for example, understanding a certain sentence in natural language (Husserl 1970; Strawson [1994] 2010), for instance an ambiguous sentence (Siewert 1998), intuiting

a mathematical proof (Chudnoff 2015), or presenting hypothetical cases of sudden realisations of zombies that lack sensory, emotional or algedonic (i.e. open to pain or pleasure) phenomenology (Kriegel 2015). The fact that is presented as relevant in one scenario but not the other is precisely what constitutes the issue at stake, in the sense that the question is whether it is explained appealing to cognitive phenomenology or not. Detractors of this kind of argument have argued that there is a contrast but it is not phenomenal, that the method in itself is questionable (Koksvik 2015), that other kinds of phenomenology suffice for explaining away such contrast (Carruthers and Veillet 2011; Prinz 2011; Robinson 2011; Tye and Wright 2011), or that zombie phenomenal contrast scenarios for cognitive phenomenology are not imaginable (Pautz 2013). A variation of phenomenal contrast argument is the case of *phenomenal comparison* (Graham, Horgan, and Tienson 2009), where instead of varying just an element in the contrast, there is an overall variation of all the elements except from some feature that is common to both scenarios. The idea is that this common feature is the feature that accounts for the experience and the one that makes a constitutive contribution to phenomenology (Hopp 2016). In general, phenomenal contrast arguments try to motivate cognitive phenomenology views by appealing to experienced or felt differences accessible by introspection, that is, appealing to the subject's own experiences when presented with the cases described.

Within the domain of our capacity to experience certain relevant features, we find *epistemic arguments*, which have also been at the core of the cognitive phenomenology debate. Their main idea is that phenomenal character has a certain special character or role when it comes to our epistemic capabilities. Pitt (2004) presents the most discussed epistemic argument for knowledge of content of our thoughts, in which he argues that in order to accomplish certain cognitive functions – distinguish between thoughts and other kinds of mental states, distinguish the thought that p from the thought that q , and identify the thought that p as the thought it is – we need to postulate a proprietary, distinctive and individuating cognitive phenomenology (for each function we can perform, respectively). This epistemic argument has been contested by a number of authors, arguing that there are alternative accounts of knowledge of thought contents (Levine 2011; Tye and Wright 2011), and so that postulation of cognitive phenomenology is not necessary (see also Pitt 2011 for responses to these objections).

Still within epistemology and in relation to the metaphysics of mind, some authors have engaged with the *epistemic challenges* that have been associated with consciousness: the explanatory gap (Levine 1983), the knowledge argument (Jackson 1982) and zombie scenarios (Kirk 1974; Chalmers 1996). As Bayne and Montague (2011) note, two questions are relevant here: do these kinds of puzzles also arise for conscious thought? And more fundamentally, do these challenges function as criteria or markers for phenomenal consciousness? Regarding the explanatory gap, Carruthers and Veillet (2011) argue against cognitive phenomenology based on the argument that there is no explanatory gap for thought, given that inverted-experience scenarios are not conceivable. On the other side, Kriegel (2015) presents the conceivability of a creature whose life is exhausted by intellectual of cognitive activities, and argues that this leads to an explanatory gap. Carruthers and Veillet's argument has also been resisted by McClelland (2016) on the basis of the idea that invertibility is not a condition for phenomenality. On the side of the knowledge argument, Goldman (1993) presents an analogy with the colour case by suggesting that someone who never experienced propositional attitudes of doubt or disappointment, for instance, would learn something new when first undergoing such experience. However, Bayne (manuscript) considers the possibility of the knowledge argument for thought very difficult. Also, Goff (2012), based on rule-following considerations, argues that cognitive phenomenology

poses a new hard problem for physicalism. Finally, are zombie scenarios possible for thought? Horgan (2011) argues for the conceivability of cognitive zombies, that is, creatures that share with us sensory but not cognitive phenomenology, and so defends the existence of cognitive phenomenology. However, Carruthers and Veillet (2011) also raise doubts on the conceivability of a cognitive zombie by claiming that it is not clear whether the zombies' deficits are that their concepts are incapable of making a causal or a constitutive contribution to their phenomenology, a distinction they regard as relevant for the discussion.

Going further into the field of epistemology, the debate on cognitive phenomenology has been highlighted as also important for deciding the *epistemic role of consciousness* in justifying belief. Whereas there is an extensive discussion on how perceptual experiences may justify beliefs and thoughts, the parallel or similar question has not been equally treated within the specific domain of cognition. In particular, considerations arise as to whether non-perceptual consciousness or, specifically, cognitive experiences, may also play a role in the epistemic justification and knowledge (Chudnoff 2011; Smithies 2013). Dorsch (this issue) develops the claim that the phenomenal character of judgemental thoughts marks them as having a certain rational role and as providing epistemic reasons. He thus contributes to the connection between phenomenal consciousness and (epistemic) rationality more broadly.

Many of the arguments exposed so far, especially phenomenal contrast and epistemic arguments, but also accounts of the epistemic role of cognitive phenomenology, normally rely in some way or another on certain assumptions concerning the functioning of *introspection*, given that they presuppose we have certain direct or special access to our episodes of thinking, be it their contents or attitudes. In this sense, the discussion on cognitive phenomenology has certainly raised questions in relation to introspection. Many authors have seen the disagreement in the cognitive phenomenology as a disagreement as to what introspection reveals (Schwitzgebel 2008; Spener 2011): defenders of cognitive phenomenology affirm, and opponents deny, the existence of cognitive phenomenology on an introspective basis. Since the beginning of the debate, many authors have directly appealed to what introspection reveals to them (Goldman 1993; Lormand 1996; Horgan and Tienson 2002; Carruthers and Veillet 2011; Prinz 2011). This has contributed to evidence for the unreliability of introspection (Schwitzgebel 2008) and has raised scepticism as to whether the cognitive phenomenology debate can be solved appealing solely to introspection (Chudnoff 2015, among others) and has added more suspicions to older doubts regarding introspective methods (Smith and Thomasson 2005). Of course, as with the term "phenomenology" itself, a lot depends here on how introspection is to be understood. Classical phenomenologists of the Husserlian kind were never happy to describe their understanding of conscious awareness or reflective access as "introspection" that was already being promoted as a specific method in empirical psychology at the time (by Titchener among others). The invocation of introspection without further specification can hardly be used as a ground for resisting the efficacy of cognitive phenomenology, since it is very much the question of the character of carrying out of this kind of cognitive awareness that itself is at stake in the discussion. Much of the scepticism concerning introspection, then, is simply begging the question. One either attributes too much or too little to introspection, thereby assuming either way some form of cognitive phenomenology belonging to it. One cannot invoke the concept of introspection to clarify issues in cognitive phenomenology (for or against) without begging the question because one is assuming that introspection has itself no cognitive phenomenology and hence that already assumes a position on the discussion.

The presentation of the debate so far has highlighted the fact that motivating cognitive differences in experience has been a central attempt to defend cognitive phenomenology (both for phenomenal contrast and epistemic arguments), together with epistemic challenges generally attributed to experience and appealings to introspective evidence. But we also find many other arguments in the field that attempt to provide reasoning beyond the field of introspection, such as: the ontological argument, arguments based on intentionality, inner speech, agency, the holistic character of certain elements of experience, categorical perception or value.

Ontology, and in particular the temporal character of experience, has been seen as a promising field of research. Tye and Wright (2011), following Soteriou (2007, 2009) and Geach (1957), specifically raise the question of the temporal character of thought. They argue that thoughts, in contrast with other kinds of experiences, do not have the required ontological profile (a processive character) to be part of the stream of consciousness and so to be the bearers of cognitive phenomenology. This argument raises issues concerning the metaphysics of the constituents of stream of consciousness such as their temporal profile. It has been discussed in detail by Chudnoff (2015), who argues that the fact that consciousness is stream-like is compatible with denying that all experiences persist processively, and by Jorba (2015), who examines the notion of “processive character” at stake and argues that a reconstructed version of the ontological argument succeeds for some cognitive episodes but fails with others and that, contrary to what it may seem, this fits well with cognitive phenomenology views.

Given the fact that cognitive mental episodes or experiences of thinking are *about* something, that is, they exhibit intentionality, the topic of cognitive phenomenology has also had impact on accounts of *intentionality* or its elements, in various ways. The relation between intentionality and consciousness has been extensively treated for the perceptual domain (Block 1996; Tye 1995), but remains relatively underexplored for the cognitive field. Several questions arise in this area, such as which is the relation between intentional and phenomenal properties in thought, or the relation between conscious cognitive intentional content and unconscious cognitive content. Many authors accept the existence of unconscious intentionality, but the presence of such a domain remains problematic for proponents of the phenomenal intentionality programme, who nevertheless have proposed different accounts (Searle 1989; Loar 2003; Strawson 2008; Kriegel 2011, Pitt [Manuscript, Forthcoming](#)). Phenomenal intentionality is understood as a kind of intentionality that presents a tight connection with phenomenal consciousness, to be specified in various distinct claims (Siewert 1998; Loar 2003; for more details, see Kriegel 2014). Some authors argue for the general claim that some intentional content is determined by phenomenology alone (Pitt 2009; Strawson 2008), and others also include cognitive phenomenology as a particular instance of the view (Farkas 2008; Horgan and Tienson 2002 – see (Bailey and Richards 2014) for arguments against Horgan and Tienson’s account). Also within this area, different accounts of the intentionality of thought and language have dealt with the so-called Frege cases, which, for the case of language, involve sentences of the form “*a is b*”, where “*a*” and “*b*” are supposed to be co-referential singular terms yet different in cognitive value. Voltolini (this issue) addresses Frege-style cases in relation to the cognitive phenomenology debate, arguing, against Kriegel (2011), that these cases cannot be accounted for in terms of a difference in cognitive phenomenology, although knowing that such objects are the same involves an “aha” experience endowed with a proprietary phenomenology.

Within the domain of intentionality, it is common to divide the content/object side from the act/attitude side. Debates on the content side have also involved the discussion on the particularity of perception (Smith 2011; Montague 2011) and cognition (Smith 2016), that

is, the problem of how does the particularity of an individual (“this-ness”) appear in consciousness (perceptual or cognitive, respectively). Both mentioned authors argue that this might be a route to recognise cognitive phenomenology besides sensory or perceptual one (see Strawson 2008 and Montague 2015 for accounts on the relation between cognitive phenomenology and representational content). Some other authors have also focused on the side of attitudes or acts. This is the case of Brown (2007), who argues that there is an associated feeling in judging, the feeling of conviction, for example (reprising the discussions concerning the “feeling” of conviction or certainty found in Mill and other so-called “psychologicistic” logicians in the nineteenth century and vigorously attacked by Husserl in his *Logical Investigations*). This is also the case of Klausen, who presents the view that propositional attitudes have a specific phenomenal character (2008), excluding mental states such as beliefs (2013). In a similar way, Jorba (2016) extends Pitt’s epistemic argument to cognitive attitudes, defending a specific attitudinal cognitive phenomenology. Views on the contrary have been put forward by Prinz (2007, 2011) and Robinson (2005, 2011), for example, who argue that what accounts for attitudinal phenomenology are the phenomenology of desire and doubt, and/or some forms of emotions and epistemic feelings such as curiosity, novelty or confusion.

An old and pervasive question relating to cognitive experiences and conscious thinking in general is the relation of thought to language. This topic has been discussed from multiple angles and perspectives, but it receives an interesting treatment in the cognitive phenomenology debate, namely: the question of the connection between conscious thought and so-called *inner speech* or silent speech. While opponents of cognitive phenomenology tend to appeal to inner speech as the sensory phenomenon present in most conscious thinking and (at least partially) responsible for its phenomenology (Robinson 2005; Prinz 2011; Tye and Wright 2011), some other authors have argued that certain accounts of inner speech might be more aligned with cognitive phenomenology views than it seems (Jorba and Vicente 2014). Most of our thinking involves words or images, but forms of non-linguistic and non-imagistic thought have also been examined. In fact, the debate on imageless thought carried out by psychologists at the beginning of the twentieth century (Woodworth 1906) reemerges in the contemporary scene under new guises. This is the case of Lohmar’s (2016) phenomenological analysis of non-linguistic systems of representation, where he explores, often with reference to the character of non-linguistic animal cognition, the idea that language is just one of the various possible ways to express our thought. In an empirically informed way, Hurlburt and Akther (2008) present the experience of unsymbolised thinking through the Descriptive Sampling Experience (DES) method, arguing for the existence of a differentiated and explicit experience without words or images. This phenomenon, however, has been questioned on the basis of possible confabulation from the side of subjects (Engelbert and Carruthers 2011), appealing to masking effects of the tools used in the experiment (Tye and Wright 2011), or arguing that unsymbolised thinking is not, after all, devoid of sensory/perceptual representations (Byrne 2011; and see (Hurlburt 2011) for a defence of the phenomenon). Vicente and Martínez-Manrique (this issue) take up the phenomenon of unsymbolised thinking and propose an explanation of its origin that is continuous with the activity of inner speech.

Another prominent aspect of conscious thinking in general is its *agential character*, namely, the fact that some conscious thinking can be considered an activity or a mental action (O’Brien and Soteriou 2009). In this area, the question arises as to how to characterise this agential aspect of conscious thinking and what implications this has for the metaphysics and epistemology of consciousness (see (Soteriou 2013) for a detailed exploration of the role of mental agency in conscious thinking). One particular question

arising in this respect, specifically, is whether there is a *sense of agency* in conscious thinking and how this purported sense should be described and explained. Horgan (2011), for example, presents “a guide for the perplexed” where he examines a path from agentive phenomenology – the what-it’s-likeness of experiencing one’s behaviour as one’s own actions – to cognitive phenomenology through the characterisation of partial zombies. Two articles in this issue also contribute to exploring the connection between conscious thought and the sense of agency. On the one hand, Jansen tackles the question of agentive phenomenology from the perspective of both Kant and Husserl. On the other hand, Vicente and Martínez-Manrique present their account of unsymbolised thinking as capable of explaining the sense of agency that some conscious thinking exhibits.

If we shift focus from single cognitive experiences to a broader domain that considers several mental states together, that is, if we take a *holistic perspective*, we might find another strand of argumentation related to the phenomenal character of conscious thought. Nes (2012), for instance, argues that conceptual content makes a constitutive contribution to phenomenology by constituting its thematic unity, namely, a unity among the sensory, cognitive and affective states associated with it. Chudnoff (2013) argues that a mathematical thought is experienced in a way that depends on the holistic cognitive experience the subject has when grasping a mathematical proof. In the same line of thought, Nes (2016) also examines the what-it’s-likeness of inferences in phenomenal consciousness. Also, Jorba (2016), drawing on Husserlian insights, takes a holistic perspective on cognitive experiences by presenting the horizon of possibilities that is open by episodes of thinking and argues that it is an instance of cognitive phenomenology. Similarly, Hopp (2016) examines “horizons” and “empty intentions” – those intentions that, according to Husserl, point towards some of the experiences that would present the same thing from another perspective or focus on another aspect, and which also count as part of our cognitive phenomenology.

Beside the domain of cognition, there may be other areas of the mind in which it seems reasonable to find cognitive states or elements with phenomenal character. Bayne and Montague (2011) highlight the domain of *categorical perception*, emotion and epistemic feelings (we treat the latter two below). Within perception, there has been considerable discussion on the question of whether only low-level perceptual properties (colour, shape, movement, etc.) or whether also high-level ones (being a tree, etc.) are represented in perceptual experience (Siegel 2010). This topic can be seen as continuous with the cognitive phenomenology debate (Bayne 2009), insofar as one of the issues at stake is whether conceptual representation has a phenomenology, no matter whether it appears in perception, cognition or other domains. Contributing to this, Chudnoff (2016) has recently presented the question on whether *moral perceptions*, that is, seeing that someone is wrongfully treating an animal, have to be considered high-level perceptions or rather instances of intellectual intuition. He argues that these cases are sometimes cognitive and examples of low-level intuition, thus construing an argument for cognitive phenomenology views.

The connection between *value* and conscious thought is already suggested by Siewert (1998) and, developing in this direction, Strawson (2011) constructs a *modus tollens* argument from interestingness of life or experience: if cognitive experiences did not exist life would be boring; life is not boring, so cognitive experiences exist (see Kriegel 2015 for a similar formulation of the argument). Chudnoff (2015) argues there is a gap in this argument and proposes to close it adding some premises on the differences in value, in order to present an argument in favour of cognitive phenomenology.

Some of the mentioned works explore the character of experiences of thinking, besides the discussion on the existence or not of a phenomenal character specific to thought, thus

contributing to a *phenomenological description* of different types of cognitive experiences, in the sense of the philosophical tradition beginning with Husserl. It is worth noting that Husserl and others specifically use verbal nouns to describe actively conscious acts-of-experiencing, for example, “Erfahren”, “Wahrnehmen,” “Denken,” “Urteilen” (experiencing, perceiving, thinking, judging), rather than the abstract nouns that pick out the states of experience, perception, and so forth. In German, and in English, “thought” can signify the act or process of thinking or the objective thought (for which Husserl and Frege will use the term “der Gedanke”, what is thought). Within phenomenological descriptions, it is worth mentioning Smith’s (2011) examination of three types of consciously thinking, classified according to the kind of object they are directed at: thinking about what one is seeing, everyday thinking about current events, and thinking about abstract objects. Smith’s aim is to outline the key structures of consciousness in an experience of consciously thinking, analysing structural modal features of them such as intentionality, phenomenal character, inner and reflexive awareness, spatiotemporality or embodiment. Crowell (2016), relying on Heidegger, presents a phenomenology of thinking as a way of being in which meaning is experienced as at issue. Specifically thinking about philosophical problems might be another type of activity worth of inquiry and with ancient roots in the history of philosophy; a recent discussion on the character of philosophical thinking is carried out by Bernet (2016). Another detailed instance of phenomenological description is Kriegel’s (2016) characterisation of the activity of making a judgment that p , where he presents a Ramsey sentence of twenty-three phenomenological platitudes about what it is like to make a judgment, based on considerations from Bolzano.

3. Future developments

Whereas there is some work done in most of the topics and areas mentioned above, there are also less-developed questions that appear in the horizon for further research on cognitive phenomenology and conscious thinking. We will mention four of them, based on the fact that a few works have initiated new paths, even if there are not extensive treatments on the questions yet: the self and self-awareness, attention, emotions, and general theories of consciousness.

First, we find the connection of cognitive phenomenology with *self-awareness* or the *self*. If “self-awareness” is interpreted as awareness of our thoughts, the question turns somehow into the familiar issue of investigating the conscious character of thought or thinking, but if “self-awareness” refers to the self or subject as such, then one could envisage interesting connections with the cognitive phenomenology debate. Phenomenologists have emphasised that thoughts are not just experienced by me but are also experienced as “mine”. They have the character of “mineness”. Indeed, it seems there can be pathological cases, for example, in schizophrenia, where subjects can no longer identify their occurrent mental experiences as *their own* thoughts, and have hallucinations of other people speaking to them or “hear” voices. The specific mineness of my own thought (and associated pathologies) is a crucial phenomenon that is all but ignored in the literature on cognitive phenomenology to date. Jansen and Guillot (this issue) examine one aspect in this line of research. Jansen examines Kant’s account of what it is like for me to be aware of myself as thinker and Guillot investigates the nature of the self-concept and argues that it is a kind of phenomenal concept whose phenomenal basis lies in cognitive phenomenology. This piece thus also originally brings phenomenal concepts into the debate, which opens a fruitful avenue of research.

As a second area of future development we find the topic of *attention*. Extensive research has been done on the psychology of attention in perceptual experiences and action, but the area remains underdeveloped with respect to cognitive experiences. The connection between attention and phenomenal consciousness has been explored in the sense in which the phenomenal character can be modulated by attention, or discussing whether attention is necessary or sufficient for consciousness. But how does attention work in conscious thinking and how should we characterise the role of attention in cognitive experiences? Already in 1891, Stout (1891) argued that an important job for a theory of attention was to explain its role in reflective thought, and Husserl (1970) considers that the concept of attention applies both to sensibility and thinking. His manuscripts on attention have now been published allowing for more intensive research in this area (Husserl 2004). Contemporarily, Peacocke (1998), for example, distinguishes between the situation in which attention makes something the object of perception and when attention is occupied in conscious thought, thus problematising the fact of having “objects” of attention in thought.

Thirdly, if we move to the field of *emotions*, the structure of the debate on cognitive phenomenology is reproduced: some accounts defend, and some deny, that emotions have distinctive phenomenal components. Gunther (2004), for instance, argues that some emotional states have distinctive phenomenal properties, and Montague (2009) presents emotions as intentional attitudes with affective phenomenology, which, she argues, is non-sensory. The implications of this issue on cognition may be that, if these other domains also possess a specific or distinctive phenomenal character, then there might be continuity with the case of thought. But more closely related to the issue of cognitive phenomenology is whether emotions possess cognitive elements that are experienced or have cognitive phenomenology on their own. Cognitivist theories of emotions (see (Solomon 2004) for an overview), for example, might argue that the cognitive elements of emotions provide evidence for cognitive phenomenology. On the other hand, perceptual accounts of emotions, like Prinz’s (2004), might restrict their phenomenal character to the one possessed by their sensory elements. Related to the field emotions, one may also appeal to *episodic feelings*, that is, feelings of knowing, understanding, remembering, etc. (Koriat 2000; Arango-Muñoz 2014). The question here appears as to whether these feelings may have a phenomenal character that is distinctively related to their cognitive elements. The familiar tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon (whereby one knows and almost has the word for something on one’s lips or in one’s head but fails to be able to find it at that specific moment) has been both proposed as an example of cognitive phenomenology (Goldman 1993) and as an example of just sensory phenomenology (Lormand 1996). In any case, the field of emotions and feelings remains as an interesting area to be further explored.

Finally, and situating ourselves in a more general perspective, we can wonder about the relation that the issues presented here have to *general theories of consciousness*, that is, questions such as how the existence and nature of cognitive phenomenology affects theories of consciousness or which are the consequences of such theories for the present matters. As far as we know, only proponents of Higher Order Thought (HOT) Theories of consciousness and of the Attended Intermediate Representation (AIR) Theory of consciousness have addressed the question of the existence of cognitive phenomenology from within their general theories. Brown and Mandik (2012), for example, argue that HOT theory of the kind endorsed by Rosenthal (2005) entails the acceptance of cognitive phenomenology, arguing that on the HOT theory all phenomenology is cognitive and that all conscious thoughts have phenomenology. In contrast, Prinz (2011), building on his AIR theory of phenomenal consciousness, argues for the limitation of phenomenology to the sensory

and perceptual domain, thus excluding cognitive phenomenology for conscious thought. As far as we know, other theories of consciousness, such as the Global Workspace Theory (Baars 1988), information integration theory (Tononi 2007), biological theories of consciousness (Block 1978; Lamme 2003) and others have not yet provided detailed positions regarding several aspects of the cognitive phenomenology debate. In our present issue, though, Sebastián discusses “access” and “non-access” theories of consciousness in order to assess the question of the relation of cognitive phenomenology and cognitive access (see also Jorba and Vicente (2014) on this question), thus contributing to connecting the cognitive phenomenology debate to some general theories of consciousness.

4. Articles of the *Special Issue*

The articles of this Special Issue contribute to discuss several aspects of the cognitive phenomenology debate and enlarge the discussion by connecting it to different topics and areas of philosophical investigation. They are diverse in nature and so there are no relevant overlaps in the topics they treat, except from agency (treated by Jansen, and Vicente and Martínez-Manrique) and the self (considered in Guillot’s and Jansen’s contributions). In what follows we introduce each article following the alphabetical order of the authors.

In the first article, Fabian Dorsch focuses on the phenomenology of cognitive attitudes or what they are like from the inside and raises a relevant connection between phenomenal character and rationality. In particular, he examines two aspects that thoughts share with experiences and that are phenomenologically salient: their rational role and their determination by external factors. In the case of judgemental thought, he defends the view that the rational role of thoughts, that is, their capacity to respond to epistemic reasons provided by other mental episodes or states, is constitutive of, or reflected in, their phenomenal character. And more specifically, he argues that this rational role is phenomenologically salient in virtue of the fact that judgmental thoughts are phenomenally marked as being determined by such reasons. In so doing, the author comparatively discusses other kinds of mental episodes such as pictorial experiences, imaginative thoughts, or episodic memories.

In the second article, Marie Guillot, connects the cognitive phenomenology debate to the discussion on the concept of self, the concept one uses to think about oneself as oneself, by proposing an account of the concept of self as phenomenally grounded in the phenomenology of intellection. She starts with a defining feature of the concept, the “Thinker Intuition” or the fact that I think of myself as *the thinker* (of this very thought) and discusses the indexical view of capturing such a feature. Alternatively, she defends what she calls the “phenomenal model” of the concept, which is based on the idea that phenomenal concepts provide a good model for understanding the I-concept and, specifically, that the phenomenal basis of the phenomenal-appearance I-concept is a generic form of cognitive phenomenology, namely, the phenomenology of intellection. Guillot finally argues that this view better grasps the Thinker Intuition, presents some advantages in comparison to rival accounts and also discusses possible objections.

Julia Jansen, in the third article, addresses the question of our awareness of our cognitive activity by drawing on Kant’s conceptions of inner sense and apperception and Husserl’s notions of lived experience and self-awareness. In this way, she carefully connects the contemporary cognitive phenomenology debate with the Kantian and Husserlian accounts of what she calls “agentive” and “proprietary” aspects of their views. She argues that one Kantian contribution to the debate is that the what it is like for me to be aware of myself as thinker should be a proper part of cognitive phenomenology, and this

in turn gives rise to the connection of cognitive phenomenology with agentive phenomenology or the what-it's-likeness of experiencing one's behaviours as one's own actions. Regarding Husserl, Jansen acknowledges that many Husserlian distinctions cut across several assumptions in the contemporary debate but nevertheless points to what Husserl calls "empty intentions" and "experiences of truth" as making a constitutive contribution to phenomenal character. The author further presents Husserl's treatment of attention as part of agentive aspects of cognitive phenomenology.

In the fourth contribution of this Special Issue, Agustín Vicente and Fernando Martínez-Manrique, based on the experimental findings of Hurlburt et al., focus on a specific kind of conscious thought, unsymbolised thinking, in order to provide an explanation of its origin. They present a characterisation of the phenomenon as presenting two main properties: propositional character, which they defend gives us reasons to think that it is a conceptual and syntactic phenomena, and effability, which shows us that it is a linguistic phenomenon. Accordingly, they propose an account of the nature of unsymbolised thinking that is continuous with the activity of inner speech. More specifically, they argue that unsymbolised thinking is a form of inner speech in which the speech action is aborted before the intention to talk is implemented by motor commands. The authors further defend that this proposal contributes to account for the elements of agency and ownership associated with both unsymbolised thinking and inner speech. Finally they defend the hypothesis from a possible objection and relate their account to the cognitive phenomenology debate.

Miguel Ángel Sebastián, in the fifth article, presents a challenge to cognitive phenomenology defenders by examining the relation between access and phenomenal consciousness in the domain of thought. He proceeds by assuming the view according to which cognitive access is not constitutive of phenomenal consciousness in the cases of perception and emotion. Then Sebastián construes a conditional argument according to which if the mechanisms responsible for cognitive access can be disentangled from the mechanisms that give rise to phenomenology, the same is to be expected in the case of thought. This leads to the following dilemma: either there are thoughts with cognitive phenomenology we lack access to or there is no cognitive phenomenology. He then argues in favour of the first horn of it by presenting empirical evidence of the existence of explicit thoughts we lack cognitive access to.

The final contribution of this Issue is Alberto Voltolini's treatment of Frege cases in relation to cognitive phenomenology. The author argues against Kriegel's characterisation of these cases in terms of a difference in cognitive phenomenology and alternatively proposes an account of them that appeals to intentional objects conceived as schematic objects, that is, objects that have no metaphysical nature insofar as they are just thought-of – thus differentiating his account from Meinongian ones. Even if this alternative characterisation does not appeal to cognitive phenomenology directly, Voltolini argues that cognitive phenomenology is indirectly involved in these cases, given the "aha"-experience involved in the realisation that presumable solves the cases.

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Note

1. *Nota bene*: current researchers in the field tend to use the term “phenomenology” in this rather restricted sense, namely, in attempting to pick out the particular phenomenal character of experiential states rather than invoking in any sense the phenomenological tradition or methods employed by the classic phenomenologists.

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