

What if We *Seem to Seem* and Not *Seem*? Estimating the Unreasonable Price of Illusionism

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Abstract. With its strategic consideration of phenomenal consciousness illusorily seeming to us, illusionism claims to deny phenomenality and thereby obviate the hard problem of consciousness. The problem with illusionism, however, is that, although its thesis appears persuasively simple, it strikes as absurd insofar as the phenomenal illusions themselves also *seem* as much as phenomenality, keeping no fundamental differences between the two. In short, it reinforces the same phenomenon/issue, i.e., phenomenality, that it claims to deny/avoid. This single absurdity is reflective of its self-refuting nature, and it alone is enough for a rejection of illusionism. However, does illusionism have any reasonable justification to defend itself in the face of the experientially undeniable reality of phenomenal consciousness? This paper attempts to find out if there is any such illusionist justification.

Keywords: illusionism, illusion, phenomenal consciousness, phenomenality, phenomenal realism

O jeigu mums *atrodo, kad atrodo, o ne atrodo?* Apie per didelę iliuzionizmo kainą

Santrauka. Pasitelkęs savo strateginę nuostatą, kad mūsų fenomenaliai sąmonei regisi iliuziškai, iliuzionizmas siekia paneigti fenomenalumą ir tokiu būdu išvengti sudėtingos sąmonės problemos. Tačiau iškyla su iliuzionizmu susijusi problema: nors jo tezė ir skamba įtikinamai paprastai, tačiau jis netikėtai pasirodo esąs tiek pat absurdiškas kaip ir fenomenaliosios iliuzijos, kurios *atrodo* esančios tokios pat, kaip ir fenomenalumas. Taip nebelineka esminių skirtumų tarp šių dviejų kategorijų. Trumpai tariant, iliuzionizmas sustiprina tą patį reiškinį / problemą, tai yra fenomenalumą, kurį sakėsi galįs paneigti ar jo išvengti. Šis išskirtinis absurdas atsispindi save paneigiančioje iliuzionizmo prigimtyje. Vien jo pakanka iliuzionizmui atmesti. Tačiau ar iliuzionizmas turi kokią nors protu pagrįstą savęs pateisinimą, kad galėtų apsiginti susidūręs su patiriamai nepaneigiama fenomenalios sąmonės realybe? Šiuo straipsniu siekiama nustatyti, ar iliuzionizmas turi kokią nors tokio pobūdžio savęs pateisinimą.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: iliuzionizmas, iliuzija, fenomenali sąmonė, fenomenalumas, fenomenalus realizmas

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1. Introduction

The articulation of the *hard problem* of consciousness (Chalmers 1995) highlights the problematic nature of phenomenal consciousness. It is that phenomenal consciousness, or phenomenality, seems to slip out of our feasible scientific ways of explaining ordinary natural phenomena. Neither our introspective domain of user consciousness,¹ where we acknowledge and engage with our consciousness, reveals anything regarding the underlying mechanism or about its physical nature, nor could we seem to understand how the seemingly ineffable, subjective, qualitative aspect of consciousness could be acknowledged, let alone understood by the paradigmatically opposite objective, quantitative approach, methods and analyses. There seems to be an explanatory gap between how we experience our consciousness and how it is described/explained.

Throughout the history of philosophy and science of consciousness, many hypotheses about its nature have been advanced, each of which motivates different explanatory approaches towards consciousness or their denial. In the league of such hypotheses, illusionism (Frankish 2017) is one of the latest, and it is central to this paper.

Illusionism is a simple hypothesis that claims phenomenal consciousness to be illusory and, thereby, non-existent. In its attempt to resolve the issue of phenomenality, it denies there being any phenomenal representation in experience yet accepts its illusory representation. To elaborate this, illusionism proposes a narrative of introspective misrepresentation involving relevant elements.

Now, centred around illusionism, the twofold aim of this paper is to (i) critically evaluate the central considerations and justifications of illusionism, and thereby (ii) develop arguments for defending phenomenal realism.

To meet these mentioned aims, the paper attempts to analyse and advance clarifications on:

- (i) The real problem of phenomenal consciousness;
- (ii) The nature of phenomenal representation;
- (iii) The ontology of illusion;
- (iv) The ontology of conscious experience;
- (v) The alleged anomalous nature of phenomenality.

The paper is divided into four sections. Section Two introduces the illusionist research programme, by presenting its arguments and justifications. In section Three, a critical evaluation of these illusionist arguments is provided, alongside clarifications on relevant matters, leading to the development of arguments for phenomenal realism. Section Four concludes the paper formally.

¹ The notion of *user consciousness* can be said to be developed on the basis of the notion of *user illusion* as presented in Dennett (1991), and it could be understood as the specific domain/dimension of consciousness where such illusions present themselves or appear, or as the very ground that embodies such illusions.

2. Illusionism: phenomenal consciousness is an illusion

Illusionism is a theoretical approach to consciousness in general and, particularly, a research programme (Frankish 2017) about phenomenal consciousness motivated by *eliminativism*. Eliminativism is a theoretical framework in consciousness studies which seeks to explain consciousness by eliminating a few aspects of it that are acknowledged via our first-personal, subjective access to consciousness. In this connection, it is to be noted that eliminativism in general, or even illusionism, does not have any problem with the phenomenon of consciousness insofar as it is understood functionally. Eliminativism is deeply rooted in its conviction that our folk psychological, i.e., our pre-theoretical, everyday understanding of consciousness, is not only an incomplete representation but a total misrepresentation (Churchland 1988). Hence, they must be eliminated for a proper understanding of consciousness.

Illusionism, as mentioned above, is a philosophical position about phenomenal consciousness. Phenomenal consciousness is ordinarily understood as *experience* (Block 1995), experiential properties (Block 2002), and other similar conceptual adumbrations and is best and paradigmatically captured with all its peculiarities in its “*what-it-is-like(ness)*” (cf. Nagel 1974) illustration. The what-it-is-likeness exposition portrays it as states of awareness filled with *qualitative feels* (Chalmers 1996) exclusive to each individual’s subjective experiences. This phenomenal consciousness is how experiences *seem* (Blackmore 2017; Dennett 1988) to us. Now, the philosophical positions that treat this phenomenal aspect, so understood, as real, such positions are phenomenal realist positions.

This phenomenality is central to the conceptualisation of the *hard problem of consciousness* (Chalmers 1995). The phenomenality and the hard problem are inseparably interrelated in the sense that an apprehension of phenomenal consciousness necessarily involves an apprehension of the hard problem or vice versa. Now, the hard problem of consciousness is the problem of explaining why the relevant functions underlying conscious experience are accompanied by experience (Chalmers 1995, 1996).

Now, phenomenal consciousness, so understood, is declared to be *illusory/an illusion* by illusionism (Frankish 2017: 11), inasmuch as it is a matter of *our systematic misrepresentation* of our *conscious experience as having phenomenal properties* (*ibid.*: 14). Here, illusory or being an illusion is understood as something that does not exist but still appears/seems to exist. In this sense, in declaring it illusory, illusionism intends to claim that there is no felt aspect/seemings.

Provided the mentioned central thesis of illusionism, its central problem is *the illusion problem* (*ibid.*: 12), which is the problem of explaining the (alleged) illusion of phenomenality in terms of understanding or explaining the processes that “*produce*” (*ibid.*: 13) them. Illusionism claims to “*replace*” (*ibid.*: 37) the hard problem with the illusion problem since there is no phenomenality, and all that needs explanation is its illusion. That is to say, if there is no phenomenality, then, correspondingly, there is no need to articulate/address/resolve any problem (i.e., the hard problem) around it. Hence, illusionism shrugs

off the onus of explaining how phenomenality emerges from its supposed physical basis/processes by denying phenomenality.

2.1. *Illusionist arguments*

Illusionism's core claim that phenomenal consciousness is illusory could be elaborated as our experience being misrepresented as phenomenal or being characterised by phenomenal properties. A careful understanding of this claim highlights the central importance of the notion of misrepresentation vis-à-vis phenomenal consciousness in the illusionist hypothesis. It is so central to illusionism that the illusionist hypothesis can be called a misrepresentational account of phenomenal consciousness. This account primarily involves three elements, namely, (i) phenomenal properties, (ii) introspection, and (iii) the representational nature of the phenomenal domain or the introspective mechanism. Each of these elements is linked to the illusionist hypothesis via their respective relation to phenomenal consciousness. To explain further, phenomenal properties are alleged as the object of misrepresentation, i.e., that which appears due to the misrepresentation. Introspection is alleged to be the mechanism that is involved in the generation of misrepresentation. Whereas, the representational nature of the relevant mechanism that acknowledges phenomenality serves as the necessary condition for it involving the possibility of misrepresentations. Illusionism strategically demonstrates how each of the relevant elements themselves lacks a substantial basis for a realist treatment, and, thereby, it establishes that phenomenal consciousness, too, lacks such a basis since its reality depends on the reality of such elements. And this, in turn, justifies the illusionist hypothesis. The following subsections will offer the illusionist justifications involving its analysis of the mentioned elements.

2.1.1. *Phenomenal properties*

According to illusionism, the phenomenal misrepresentation of conscious experience involves a projection of it having or being characterised by phenomenal properties. Hence, for illusionism, the rejection of phenomenal properties becomes indispensable insofar as, firstly, phenomenal consciousness is understood in terms of phenomenal properties, and, secondly, illusionism commits itself to deny phenomenal consciousness. So, what are phenomenal properties? Phenomenal properties are a bunch of features/characteristics that are considered to be inherently associated with phenomenal consciousness. These are qualitativeness, the felt aspect, the feels. These features refer to the qualities of experience, e.g., the *greenishness* of an experience involving the colour green, the *throbs* of a throbbing pain, the *sharp stabs* of hunger pangs, etc. Now, the qualities of experience, as conventionally considered, are matters of exclusive individual experience. This particular fact, then, brings us down to identifying another feature of phenomenal properties, namely, being subjective or exclusive to each experiencing subject. Now, these subjective experiences are experienced due to the functioning of introspection. Hence, we arrive at

another feature, namely, introspectability, i.e., the feature that enables it to be introspected (or accessed via introspection).

Now, phenomenal properties, understood in terms of these aspects, are claimed by illusionism as *anomalous* (Frankish 2017). Being anomalous, or anomalousness, is further associated with properties like *ineffability*, *intrinsicity*, being *private*, and *immediate apprehensibility* (*ibid.*: 13). Such properties are dubbed as *problematic features* (*ibid.*: 15) as they are believed to render phenomenal consciousness “*radical inexplicability*” (*ibid.*: 12). This inexplicability, here, is to be understood in the specific sense of being unexplainable within the *established scientific worldview* (*ibid.*: 12). Considering this inexplicability of phenomenal properties, illusionism prefers *abductively inferring* (*ibid.*: 28) it to be illusory or non-existent.

Keeping aside such negative characterisations, let us focus on the positive detailing of the enumerated features of phenomenal properties before exploring their illusionist treatment. The subjectivity of consciousness, as mentioned above, is closely understood in terms of the experience of experiential qualities, i.e., qualitiveness. The very point of subjectivity is built based on there being qualitative elements of one’s experience. Now, this qualitiveness (of phenomenality), as already mentioned, is acknowledged via introspection (introspectability). Considering such points, illusionism’s central focus remains on rejecting these two features of phenomenality: qualitiveness and introspectability.

The *Qualitiveness* feature is what makes consciousness phenomenal. It is the feels of any phenomenally conscious experience, our access to which is exclusively enabled by introspection. Introspection, on the other hand, is understood as the activity of *looking inward into one’s own mind* (James 1890), or as a *means* for knowing one’s mental states (Schwitzgebel 2019). This qualitiveness of phenomenal experience is refuted by the claim that qualities/properties that are matters to introspective access, do not have the qualitiveness feature (Frankish 2017: 15). On the other hand, the introspectability of phenomenal experience is rejected with the import of the concept of *zero qualia* (Frankish 2012) which are envisaged as such properties of experience that *dispose us to judge* (Frankish 2012: 669) that phenomenality is introspectable, while, in reality, there is nothing as such since there is no phenomenality in the first place (to be introspected).

Reconceptualising (Frankish 2017: 21) phenomenal properties as *quasi-phenomenal properties* (Frankish 2017) is another illusionist strategy to deny phenomenal properties. According to Frankish (2017), quasi-phenomenal properties are described as non-phenomenal, physical properties misrepresented as phenomenal by introspection. Such a reconceptualisation leaves nothing substantially characteristic of phenomenal consciousness, and hence, it is denied in the process.

In another strategy, illusionism suggests understanding phenomenal properties as *intentional objects* (Frankish 2017: 27, 29, 30). Intentional objects are objects that our conscious thoughts are directed towards or are about. Such consideration leads us to identify phenomenal properties with the ones that belong to their intentional counterparts. This strategy suggests understanding phenomenal properties in terms of the properties of relevant intentional objects since we mistake such properties for phenomenal ones.

2.1.2. *Introspection and representation*

The illusionist analyses of introspection and representation go hand in hand insofar as introspection is understood as a representational mechanism. It is, in fact, owing to its representational nature, that introspection's credibility in yielding an accurate representation of our sensory states is challenged.

We have already discussed introspection and its role before. Now, the primary allegation against introspection is carried out in terms of claiming introspective awareness to be "*partial and distorted*" (Frankish 2017: 14), which, in turn, results in yielding an equally partial and distorted representation, and, hence, to be exact, a misrepresentation of our "*sensory states*" (*ibid.*: 36) and of "*experience*" (*ibid.*: 18, 23). This misrepresentation, as mentioned, involves a representation of the relevant phenomena as phenomenal while they are purported rather to be quasi-phenomenal, which are, in turn, "*complex physical features*" (*ibid.*: 18) and essentially "*physico-functional and (more importantly) non-phenomenal (properties)*" (Kammerer 2021: 849).

The justification for this claim (that there is an introspective misrepresentation) is systematically deduced from a series of considerations about introspection, starting from the one about *it* (a) being (a) or functioning on the representational mechanism and the rest following necessarily from it. Any representational system is functioning based on the distinction between the to-be-represented (object of representation) and the represented (representation). In the context of introspection, the phenomenal properties are introspectively represented, and the introspective mechanism functions as the mediator (being the process/mechanism that conducts/operates the representation). This analysis brings us to identifying the (b) mediate (Frankish 2017) nature of any representational mechanism. Now, being mediate necessitates the possibility of involving mistakes, which, when thought of in the context of a representational system, takes the form of misrepresentation. However, this possibility could be avoided if the system is equipped with an accuracy-determining mechanism. Now, introspection, being a purely first-personal, subjective mechanism, can be authenticated or verified only by an internal, i.e., introspective monitorial mechanism, which introspective mechanism is claimed to lack. Also, paradoxically, having an accuracy-determining mechanism is not enough to evade the possibility of inaccuracy as long as such a mechanism is purely internal. This, then, brings us to identifying its (c) inaccuracy feature, which, in turn, reinforces its misrepresentational possibility.

3. A phenomenal response

The previous section presented various illusionist reasons for the claim that phenomenal consciousness is an illusion. In the light of such exploration, the present section will critically evaluate the illusionist considerations, thereby defending phenomenal realism.

3.1. On (mis-)representation

For the rendition of phenomenal illusion, illusionism credits primarily the functioning of a systematic introspective misrepresentation. It strategically exploits (a) the representational nature of the introspective mechanism/phenomenal domain, and, subsequently, (b) it involving a possibility of misrepresentation to prove its claim.

Whether phenomenality is a matter of some misrepresentation could be found easily either by checking if the expected objects of representation are introspectively representable or if the introspective representational mechanism involves any possibility of error.

For this, the following questions need to be addressed:

- (a) Representation of what is under consideration?
- (b) Misrepresentation of what is under consideration?
- (c) In what sense are such representations termed as misrepresentations?
- (d) What are the mis-representers/representers of the illusion?

Answers to such questions would divulge several shortcomings of the illusionist hypothesis, thereby calling for its revision.

As we know, *deviance* from a representation creates a misrepresentation. Hence, it is crucial to know that representation of what is expected to appear as the representation (i.e., correct/accurate representation) but which, due to some anomaly at play, does not appear. Now, although illusionism suggests the phenomenon to be represented is conscious experience, nonetheless, it strategically uses a modified understanding of it to its advantage, which understands it as *real neural events* (Frankish 2017: 16). This in itself is a major question-begging act that calls for an immediate revocation of illusionism.

It is of importance to note that, while we talk about the relevant sort of representation/misrepresentation in the present context, it is the first personal dimension of introspective access, which should be understood as the ground for the actual representation or where the alleged misrepresentation appears. For the sake of *topic-neutrality* (Chalmers 2018a), or in order not to beg the question, it is preferable not to call it the domain of phenomenal consciousness. This domain should be understood as the user consciousness domain.

Now, if conscious experience is understood as or in terms of neural events, then, because we have no conscious/cognitive/user access to neural domain and events, it (neural events) can possibly never be represented in our user consciousness domain, let alone be misrepresented. Considering this point, it seems implausible and unlikely to have a representation of the neural events in the user consciousness domain since there is no such logical possibility. This implies, then, the impossibility of the neural misrepresentation there. Also, neural representations are generally understood as patterns of neural activities in response to or against specific stimuli, which could be observed objectively via different means, e.g., fMRI, etc. However, this is not how representational contents are encountered in user awareness. While we access our conscious experience in our introspective dimension, we do not directly experience any such patterns but the experiences (themselves).

In another illusionist possibility, *intentional objects* (Frankish 2017) are identified as actual objects of representation. Such a consideration traces its origin in the core intuition of representational and transparency theories which consider phenomenality as nothing over and above the properties of relevant intentional objects and, hence, fully explainable in terms of their intentional counterparts and their respective properties. In such narratives, misrepresentation involves mistaking intentional objects or their properties as/for phenomenal consciousness/properties.

In another illusionist strategy, our experiences are understood as *sensory states* which are, in turn, understood ontologically in terms of *quasi-phenomenal properties* (Frankish 2017). In other words, these quasi-phenomenal properties are hinted to be actual objects of representation here.

The question is then whether these are at all the actual objects of representation. It is important to understand that all such considerations follow necessarily from the portrayal and selling of a particular understanding of representation, which is nonetheless not undisputed. This illusionist concept of representation has close ties with the *externalist understanding of content* (Putnam 1975; Burge 1979) and is developed along the lines of *representationalism* (Brown 2022), which regards phenomenal consciousness to be constitutively dependent on its intentional counterparts. Combining traits of both the mentioned positions, it (a) regards representations as always the representations of external things, a.k.a., intentional objects; or (b) shows a tendency to understand phenomenal representation completely in terms of intentionality. Such theoretical preferences necessarily culminate into creating a very narrow understanding of representation that could neither acknowledge narrow content as representationally (as understood strictly in the representationalist sense) potent contents as independent of their intentional counterparts, nor could it, subsequently, conceive of representation in purely phenomenal terms. So, this would always endorse an understanding of phenomenal consciousness in terms of something (else) non-phenomenal and acknowledge representation in a way that would definitionally involve a possibility of representational error. A narrow content, i.e., a content of a mental state that is termed as ‘narrow’, is a mental content that is determinable solely by intrinsic properties (Brown 2022) of a mental state. Such properties are, in turn, termed ‘intrinsic’ because they are independent of the external (to mind/consciousness) influence.

It is important to note that, in the above passage, a conflation of narrow content and phenomenality is done, albeit not unintentionally. Firstly, as I conceived, it follows as a reaction to the illusionist understanding of representation that combines externalism about the content and representationalism. Secondly, phenomenal consciousness/properties/content could be understood as narrow content in an *internalist sense* (Kriegel 2002), insofar as the phenomenal contents are *supervenient* on the local *intrinsic* properties of the subject (*ibid.*: 180). However, the upshot of understanding phenomenal content/property/consciousness as narrow content is rather scowled at as *qualitativism*, i.e., the theoretical suggestion that mental contents depend on qualitative properties (Chalmers 2018b).

Also, even if, for argument’s sake, we consider the intentional account, as mentioned above, to be true, it still has to face criticism owing to its inability to account for certain

specific phenomenal states, e.g., a pain state, which does not exhibit any intentional attitude or aboutness feature as such.

On the other hand, regarding the introspective misrepresentational account, which itself is already shown to be based on a disputed and gerrymandered understanding of representation, the allegation of generating a misrepresentation of our sensory states could be rebutted by appealing to the distinction between introspection and interoception and their respective different roles in our cognitive system. It is of importance to note that it is not the introspective mechanism, but rather interoception or the interoceptive mechanism, and, partially, the proprioception or proprioceptive mechanism that are responsible for yielding reports about sensory states. Introspection, as mentioned above, is a means for knowing one's own mental states and is the only access provider to our phenomenal domain. It is true that even the sensory states do have the phenomenal character, which, in turn, are provided access to by introspection. But, it does not imply that the introspective mechanism generates the sensory reports. In the present context, the debate is rather around the appearance of phenomenality and not about the sensory states; hence, accusing introspective awareness of misrepresenting the sensory states is rather irrelevant.

Also, even if, for argument's sake, we consider that introspection generates only a partial and distorted representation of experience, it still logically implies that in its delivery of the representation of phenomenality, it is, at least, partially correct. And, if so, then how justified is the rejection of this partial truth about experience?

Now, let us take up the second and the third questions together and try to answer them. As already suggested and clarified from the discussions above, it is the misrepresentation of phenomenality that is being discussed. However, considering the clarifications advanced throughout the above passages, misrepresentation should rather be corrected as representation; hence, there remains no need to answer the third question.

Let us now take up the fourth and final question. The fourth question asks what is to be held responsible for yielding this alleged misrepresentation. Considering the clarifications mentioned earlier which conclude the alleged misrepresentation of phenomenality as a rather simple representation, answering the final question seems pointless. However, let us pursue it for argument's sake. As far as the illusionist account goes, it is the introspection or the introspective mechanism that is primarily held accountable for yielding the misrepresentation of phenomenality. However, for illusionism, which indirectly indulges in the rejection of the very possibility of introspection via the rejection of the introspectability of phenomenal properties, introspection remains no option to hold responsible for the phenomenal misrepresentation. If there are no introspectable properties, i.e., if there is no introspectability in experience, then it is beyond intelligibility why there would be any introspection at all whose only purported job is to provide access to the introspectable elements of conscious experience. And, without there being any possibility of introspection, it is unreasonable to talk of it being responsible for creating the misrepresentation/illusion of phenomenality.

So, the notion of representation that illusionism associates with or imagines phenomenal representation as and subsequently concludes it to be misrepresentational on account

of, is entirely unrelated to and unlikely of it, and the actual phenomenal representation, when properly understood, can be seen to involve no possibility of misrepresentation at all (Nida-Rümelin 2017: 167), since, unlike other sorts of representations, phenomenal representation is immediate. Its immediacy could be understood in terms of *acquaintance* (Chalmers 2010), which is described as “a basic sort of epistemic relation between a (conscious) subject and a property (of its experience)” (Chalmers 2010: 287). And so far as the relation of acquaintance is concerned, it guarantees a pure immediacy in the relation under consideration. The phenomenal representational system’s immediacy derives from the fact that it involves a purely experiential process involving only experiential elements (experience itself, the act of experiencing, and the qualities of experience) and nothing external to experience. Acknowledgement of such an immediacy is echoed in Searle (1997: 112) as he remarked that an experiential occurrence of seeming to have an experience is indeed having that experience. It is, then, only when phenomenal representation is mistakenly understood in the gerrymandered sense as intended by illusionism that all the questions about misrepresentation arise.

So, as planned, we have checked out both trajectories through which it could be found whether or not phenomenal properties are matters of misrepresentation. As a result, we could neither find any possibility of representing the expected/purported elements in/through the relevant mechanism or dimension, nor could we find that phenomenal representation inherently involves the possibility of error.

3.2. *On seemingness*

Illusionism’s uneasiness with the seemingness or phenomenality is visible to the fullest degree, and, hence, its refutation is central to the illusionist project. Now, this seemingness, which does not seem to be effaced by any ordinary means, is sidestepped by illusionism with its proclaimed substitution/replacement of the hard problem with the illusion problem.

To keep things simple, the difference between the hard problem and the illusion problem could be seen in their respective articulations, as mentioned below.

Hard problem: Why do experiences have seemings?

Illusion problem: Why do experiences seem to have seemings?

We can see that articulating the illusion problem involves deploying two contradictory senses of ‘seem(ing)’, one of which refers to a veridical process, while the other refers to an illusory one, thereby leading to some ambiguity. Considering this, we are led into a bizarre possibility where the *phenomenal seeming* (PS) is illusory, but the one that reveals PS as a mere seeming and nothing actual, real is not so. The ‘seem to seem’ way of articulating the problem may succeed at illusionising phenomenal consciousness. However, it suffers from a logical incoherence in its formulation, hence, it is questionable itself.

Also, the central illusionist thesis implies that seemingness is the mark of illusions or of being illusory. Now, if so, then we do not know why or for what reason the divulgence of phenomenal seeming as illusory done by the second order seeming should be trusted upon either, which – in itself – is another seeming. It is important to mention that the

primary seeming, i.e., PS, which was intended to be obliterated with the hope that doing so would help de-escalate the problem of phenomenality or substitute the hard problem, is rather retained in the debate scenario insofar as it is replaced by yet another ‘seeming’ and thereby rather reiterated and thereby reinstated on yet another level. Hence, the illusion problem can barely be claimed to be successful at eliminating the seemingness of experience, which it resolves to evade.

Another line of argument involving the seeming component comes from the point of the ontology of illusion. An illusion is an illusion since it has seeming. How else can an illusion be known then? Such seemings may not seem like how the relevant objects of representations are ordinarily expected to seem like, and perhaps that is why they are termed illusory. But, there is no doubt that illusions do have seemingness in the sense that they seem to us. In other words, “*illusions require seemings*” (Prinz 2017: 193). If there is no seeming, then there could be no illusion. Now, illusionism, which denies the seemings/seemingness while maintaining that there are real (phenomenal) illusions, necessarily contradicts its central thesis.

Also, the very possibility of the phenomenon of illusions, which illusionism claims phenomenal consciousness to be (and denies it thereby), depends on the very reality of the phenomenal seemings. Had there been nothing as the seeming dimension (i.e., phenomenality) in our conscious experience, there would have arisen no question regarding the possibility of phenomena like illusions. An illusion is something to which there is nothing corresponding in reality, but it still is what seems to us in our experience. And, without there being no phenomenal dimension to *carry* such seemings, there would be no possibility of illusions as whatever that seems to us. In this sense, the possibility of illusions presupposes the reality of the phenomenal seems, and, hence, attempting to explain phenomenal seemings in terms of illusions commits the fallacy of circularity. Moreover, illusionism claims to genuinely regard these phenomenal illusions as real (Frankish 2017). However, it is difficult to understand that, in whatever other sense, it can be real, other than being so phenomenally.

More importantly, considering phenomenal consciousness as seeming cannot call for any treatment of the same as being unreal. It rather calls for a realistic treatment of phenomenal consciousness. Understanding this point requires an understanding of the very ontology of consciousness (Searle 1997). The ontology of consciousness is such that the reality of consciousness/conscious experience is couched in their seemingness/appearance. Pertaining to consciousness/conscious experience, the *is/seems gap* (Strawson 2012) seems rather irrelevant (Strawson 2012) since they exist as they seem/appear to be. Their appearance is their reality (Searle 1997) – or vice versa; their seemingness – or their being seeming – is their reality. In short, then, their reality is based on their seemingness/appearance. Now, if so, then how can its illusory nature, at the same time, be founded in its seemingness/appearance, which already houses its reality? This particular point regarding founding the illusory nature of phenomenal consciousness on the foundation of their seemingness/appearance is one prominent evidence of illusionism’s mistaken view of phenomenal consciousness, which pushes illusionism towards collapsing into phenomenal realism.

Lastly, even though illusionism rejects phenomenal representations, understood as real seemings of experience, it claims to acknowledge the representations of phenomenality, understood as illusions. However, so far as both illustrations of phenomenality are understood in terms of their representational aspect, i.e., their appearances, the distinction between them seems rather baseless. For a phenomenal realist, there is no difference between phenomenal representations and representations of phenomenality, as both equally claim for the reality of phenomenal consciousness (given that neither of the ‘representations’, as mentioned here, is understood in the representationalist sense, but actually as seemings/appearances). But, for illusionists, to whom these are different, insofar as the former is declared as problematic, while the latter is not, it is a central task to explain in what respects these two are different from one another, without begging the question under consideration. Also, if, other than this unjustified allegation/consideration of the phenomenal appearances being illusory, there is no fundamental difference between (i) the appearance/seemings/representations of phenomenality that is/are at the heart of the hard problem and which the phenomenal realists (but not illusionists) are concerned with; and (ii) the one that illusionism is resolved to explain. Then the promised (by illusionism) “*replacement*” (Frankish 2017: 37) of the hard problem can barely be said to have ever been successfully done. This replacement is rather crucial for illusionism since it is already fully *aware* (Frankish 2016: 13; Kammerer 2021: 845) of the practical problems/limitations of dealing with phenomenality in the conventional physico-functional terms, and which it tends to avoid. However, without such a replacement ever being implemented, illusionism remains vulnerable to, or confined within, the same problems or limitations, respectively, that the conventional physico-functionalism regarding phenomenality is facing.

3.3. *On anomalousness*

Another illusionist motivation for considering phenomenal consciousness to be illusory comes from its treatment of phenomenal properties as *anomalous* (Frankish 2017) in the sense of *being radically inexplicable within our established scientific worldview* (Frankish 2017). Owing to that, phenomenal properties and phenomenal consciousness, thereby, are abductively inferred to be illusory. However, close attention to the technicality in the sense of being anomalous reveals that a consideration of being anomalous is rather dependent on and hence limited to our presently available scientific knowledge, which is, however, subject to revision based on prospective relevant findings as well as further advancements in the scientific enterprise. Consequently, being anomalous in the context of phenomenal consciousness (or elsewhere) should not be understood as an inherent feature of the object under consideration or a fundamental metaphysical fact about reality. Any attempt at the absolute treatment of a contingent fact, and, correspondingly, any attempt at drawing absolute conclusions on such bases, like that of concluding phenomenal consciousness being anomalous based on the limitation of the available scientific worldview and other explanatory toolkits, would only invite the burden of *the hornswoggle problem* (Churchland 1996). That is to say, we encounter the burden of committing the fallacy of *argumentum ad ignorantiam*.

This highlights the point that the anomalous illusionist argument is more of a modal argument, i.e., illusionism being “*possibly true*” (Nida-Rümelin 2017: 160). Therefore, it stands nowhere next to the appealing force of phenomenal realism, which is “*apparently obvious*” (Chalmers 2018a: 53). Unlike illusionism, that consciousness/conscious experience has an undeniable phenomenal aspect is no theoretical import but rather a “*fundamental given natural fact*” (Strawson 2006: 4) beyond all possible doubts. Moreover, the possibility of illusionism being true has been systematically rejected for various reasons as mentioned earlier in this section.

3.4. *Illusion meta-problem strategy and further problems*

As observed by Kammerer (2021), the undeniable obviousness of phenomenal illusion (allegedly), which serves as the fundamental basis for any realist treatment of or arguments for phenomenality, goes hand in hand with the apparent “*absurdity*”/“*counter-intuitive(ness)*” (*ibid.*: 845) of the illusionist hypothesis. As he further explains, the phenomenal illusion “*persistently seems to exist in a robust way*” (Kammerer 2021: 848), which in turn causes our intuitive resistance to accepting the illusionist hypothesis. Considering this obvious connection between the two, Kammerer (2021) concludes that addressing/resolving the *illusion problem* (Frankish 2016) is not enough for a full-blown defence of illusionism and that illusionism must also explain this *apparent “absurdity”* (Kammerer 2021: 845) of illusionism or account for the particular “*peculiar strength*” (Kammerer 2021: 849) of the phenomenal illusion. With this intent, Kammerer formulates the illusion meta-problem whose target is to explain the purported absurdity of illusionism or the obviousness of phenomenal illusion. In this regard, Kammerer (2021) then proposes his TCE² Theory, which is claimed to explain how “*phenomenal introspection works*” (Kammerer 2021: 852) that is (according to this theory) directly responsible for the apparent obviousness of phenomenality or the intuitive resistance to illusionist hypothesis. Explanation of this, according to this theory, solves the illusion meta-problem. This particular illusionist move can be called the illusion meta-problem strategy, which is quite a powerful illusionist move insofar as it explains how we are functionally programmed in such a way that we are constitutionally disposed never to grasp (neither even intuitively, nor with the aid of relevant theoretical findings) our phenomenal illusions being essentially illusory.

Now, the problem with this particular strategy is that, even though for argument’s sake, we consider that it quite accurately and effectively explains its target (which this paper does not intend to assess at all), i.e., the robustness and persistence of phenomenal illusion (and, thereby, the absurdity of illusionism, as per the mentioned stipulation) that resists its apprehension as being illusory, it can barely be said to explain anything about why such phenomenal appearances are illusory in the first place. The phenomenal illusion, if we call it so, is strong (it is a point that even phenomenal realists would accept, except for considering such strong appearances to be illusions), undoubtedly, but why are they illusions in the first place? Even the very *illusion problem* (Frankish 2016), which the

² TCE stands for *Theoretically determined Concepts of Epistemologically special states*.

illusion meta-problem aims to supplement and thereby strengthen illusionism, explains nothing about why the phenomenal appearances are illusory. It just simply assumes (without any reason though) them being illusory, and then sets out to explain how such illusions “*arise*” (Frankish 2016: 37). It is true that illusionism, which follows a functionalist explanatory framework, is more likely to argue that, since such a phenomenon (without any realist or illusionist characterisation) exhibits a functional underscore, it is an out-and-out functional phenomenon in its utmost essence, and therefore it is illusory to conceive of it in any extra(over-and-above)-functional, i.e., phenomenal (specifically), sense. But, then this takes us back to square one regarding the very debate about whether or not phenomenal appearances can be characterised entirely in functional terms, and then we realise that an argument of the mentioned sort advances no reason but begs the question. Illusionism just casually attaches the tag of being illusory/(an) illusion to the phenomenal appearances to its advantage, and it does nothing to vindicate such labelling. And insofar as this labelling is not justified, the illusionist strategy to handle the issue of explaining the phenomenal appearances is as much subject to criticism as the regular physico-functionalism about phenomenality is, which illusionism is otherwise fully *cognizant* (Frankish 2016: 13; Kammerer 2021: 845) of, as already remarked above. The fact is that illusionism cannot prove phenomenality to be illusory either without begging the question, or without postulating the very phenomenality (i.e., seeming) that it is resolved to deny. Either way, it fails to defend itself consistently.

Moreover, illusionism must explain why, although almost every human phenomenon, e.g., cognitive skills such as mathematical calculation, can be analysed down to the relevant physico-functionality, it is only phenomenality that is termed as illusory – yet nothing else is.

4. Conclusion

Ultimately, it becomes apparent that the illusionist account rests heavily on so many flawed conceptions of or misunderstandings about phenomenal consciousness and related relevant elements. In fact, illusionism makes sense only when the apparently obvious fundamental facts about phenomenal consciousness are rejected. However, in the light of the re-considerations made throughout the paper of illusionist considerations and the clarifications and arguments advanced in the previous section, we cannot seem to find any reason to be convinced of the illusionist hypothesis.

We have seen how the misrepresentational account of phenomenal representation strategically uses a gerrymandered notion of representation to illusionism’s advantage and consequently understands phenomenal representation in terms of, which is rather entirely unlikely of phenomenal representation. We have seen the ambiguity in the sense of ‘seeming’ as employed by illusionism in its attempt at illusionising phenomenality, and also its inability to understand the essentiality of seeming for the possibility of illusions. We have seen how the proclaimed substitution of the hard problem was never done. These are sufficient reasons to be disillusioned with illusionism. Moreover, as we have seen, there

is no illusionist explanation available for why the phenomenal appearances are illusory at all. It is more of an unjustified working assumption.

Now, let us draw a conclusion of this paper by addressing the titular question. *What if we seem to seem and not seem?* The articulation necessarily follows from the illusionist thesis that denies there being any phenomenal seeming yet accepts it seeming to us illusorily. It is with this articulation that illusionism claims to avoid the problem of phenomenality and to address the one about its illusion. However, on the very footing of the seeming of the illusion, phenomenality stands ever so more firmly for an unavoidable consideration.

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