

The Phenomenal Concept Strategy and a Master Argument

NAPOLEON M. MABAQUIAO, JR.
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
nmabaquiao@yahoo.com

Abstract. The phenomenal concept strategy (PCS) is widely regarded as the most promising physicalist defence against the so-called *epistemic arguments*—the anti-physicalist arguments that establish an ontological gap between physical and phenomenal facts on the basis of the occurrence of epistemic gaps in our descriptions of these facts. The PCS tries to undercut the force of the epistemic arguments by attributing the occurrence of the epistemic gaps to the special character of phenomenal concepts—the concepts by means of which we think about our phenomenal experiences. In this essay, the author examines David Chalmers' master argument against the PCS and the objections raised against this argument by Peter Carruthers, Bénédicte Veillet and Katalin Balog in defending the PCS. While the author finds these objections to be successful defences of the PCS, the author shares Balog's belief that in this regard, the debate between the physicalists and anti-physicalists is a stalemate.

Keywords and phrases: phenomenal concepts, epistemic arguments, master argument, physicalism, epistemic gaps, phenomenal concept strategy

Introduction

Various arguments challenge the view of *physicalism* that the fundamental facts that make up reality are solely of the physical type. Foremost among these arguments are those that show that there are gaps, called *epistemic gaps*, between our physical descriptions (descriptions of physical facts) and phenomenal descriptions (descriptions of phenomenal facts) and that these gaps are necessarily brought about by a corresponding gap in the realm of facts, in particular by an *ontological gap* between physical facts and phenomenal facts. The idea behind such arguments, which we shall refer to as the *epistemic arguments*, is that if there is an ontological gap between physical facts and phenomenal facts, then neither type of facts is derivable from or reducible to the other type, and therefore both types of facts are equally fundamental. If so, then physicalism is false.

There are two basic ways by which physicalism can be defended from the epistemic arguments. One is to deny that there really are these epistemic gaps; the other is to accept the reality of these gaps but reject the idea that they are necessarily brought about by an ontological gap. The most promising execution of the latter argument is referred to by Dan Stoljar (2005) as the *phenomenal*

concept strategy (henceforth, the PCS). This strategy preserves the intuition that we have these epistemic gaps in our descriptions of physical and phenomenal facts but attributes the occurrence of these gaps to the peculiar nature of phenomenal concepts—referring to the concepts by which we think about our phenomenal experiences.

In this paper, the author focuses on the PCS as a way of defending physicalism from the epistemic arguments. The author analyses an argument that claims that this strategy, in any form or version, is bound to fail. The author is referring to David Chalmers' famous master argument (2007), which has generated critical reactions from proponents of physicalism and the PCS. In particular, the author examines whether this argument is defensible from the objections raised against it by Peter Carruthers and Bénédicte Veillet (2007) and Katalin Balog (2011) and, consequently, whether Carruthers, Veillet and Balog, who are all proponents of the PCS, are successful in their defence of the PCS against the master argument. The author divides the discussion into three sections. In the first section, the epistemic arguments are introduced. Next, the author explicates the notion of phenomenal concepts, discusses how the PCS is intended to work and presents the main outlines of Chalmers' master argument. After that, the author examines the objections raised by Carruthers, Veillet and Balog against the master argument in defence of the PCS. On the whole, the author finds these objections successful in defending the PCS. However, the author concurs with Balog that in this regard, the debate between the physicalists and non-physicalists is a stalemate.

The Epistemic Arguments

The epistemic arguments are intended to show that physicalism is false. Before examination is made on how these arguments work in rejecting physicalism, let us first be clarified what is meant by "physicalism" and the aspect or aspects of physicalism to which the epistemic arguments are addressed. To begin with, physicalism is part of a larger philosophical problem that arises from our desire to understand the nature of reality. There have been various approaches to this problem; one is to determine whether the fundamental facts that make up reality are physical, mental or both. By physical facts, we generally mean the types of facts typically exemplified by the facts that the table is brown, the sun has risen and the author has just read a paper at a conference. Conversely, mental or phenomenal facts refer to the types of facts typically exemplified by the facts that my stomach aches, the author believes that it is going to rain, and the author feels good and relaxed while listening to the fugues of Bach.¹

In light of this approach, there are three contending ontological or metaphysical views, namely, *physicalism* or *materialism*, which claims that the fundamental

facts of reality are physical; *mentalism* or *idealism*, which claims that the fundamental facts of reality are mental or phenomenal; and *dualism*, which claims that the fundamental facts of reality can be divided into the physical and the mental. At present, the metaphysical debate or, as some would prefer to put it, the "ontology war" is between physicalism and dualism, that is, whether on the fundamental level of reality there are only physical facts, or there are phenomenal facts in addition to physical facts. Idealism, or the rejection of physical facts, which was previously supported by scholars such as Berkeley, is no longer a viable option.

Physicalism, upon which the scientific worldview is premised, is argued on various grounds, one of which is its coherence with the principle of parsimony—that it tries to explain natural phenomena with a minimum number of concepts and posited entities. Another ground is that the objects that it accepts as real are directly accessible to our five senses and hence are things that we can know objectively and verify. These grounds can be areas of dispute among metaphysicians, but the epistemic arguments are not addressed to them. The epistemic arguments are addressed to a principle of physicalism that has been called, following Frank Jackson (see Balog 2011, 3), the *Physicalist Entailment Thesis*, according to which a complete physical truth metaphysically necessitates or entails by metaphysical necessity all other conceivable types of facts, including phenomenal facts. A simpler way of putting this thesis is that if we know all of the truths about physical facts, then we can derive or deduce from these truths all of the truths about other types of facts. Using a familiar example, if we know all of the physical truths about colour vision, or the physics of colours, we can derive phenomenal truths about perceiving colours from these physical truths, such as what it feels like to see certain colours. In this regard, our knowledge of phenomenal truths is a priori in that we get to know them prior to our actual experience of seeing colours.

How do the epistemic arguments work? Here is the main line of reasoning. First, these arguments claim that there are gaps in our descriptions of physical facts and our descriptions of phenomenal facts. Such gaps are called *epistemic gaps*, and they come in three forms: *the knowledge gap*, *the explanatory gap* and *the conceptual gap*. Second, the arguments claim that these epistemic gaps are brought about by a corresponding gap, called an *ontological gap*, between physical facts and phenomenal facts. The idea is that if there is an ontological gap between physical facts and phenomenal facts, then phenomenal facts are not metaphysically necessitated by or derivable from physical facts, and if so, then phenomenal facts are as fundamental as physical facts; hence, physicalism is false. The logical structure of the epistemic arguments actually takes the form of a *modus tollens*: if physicalism is true, then the physicalist entailment thesis is

true; but the physicalist entailment is false (due to the epistemic gaps), therefore, physicalism is false.

We now examine the three forms of epistemic gaps. First, the knowledge gap states that knowing all of the physical facts about conscious experiences does not enable us to know what it is like to undergo these experiences. This gap essentially represents Frank Jackson's knowledge argument (see Jackson 2003; 2008). According to this argument, if a person, say Mary, knows all of the physical facts about seeing the colour red prior to actually seeing it, Mary still would not know what it is like to see the colour red. It is only upon actually seeing the colour red for the first time that she will know what it feels like to actually see the colour red. Thus, there is a gap between her knowledge of all of the physical facts about seeing the colour red and her knowledge of the phenomenal fact of what it is like to see the colour red. According to this argument, such a gap exists only because there is an ontological gap between physical facts and phenomenal facts.

Second, the explanatory gap states that a completely physical explanation of how brain states function does not enable us to explain the phenomenal character of these states; e.g., why in a certain brain state we feel dizzy or excited (see Levine 1983). Finally, the conceptual or conceivability gap states that the conceivability of a world physically identical to ours but phenomenally different—either because our world's phenomenal facts are *absent* or are *inverted* in this hypothetical but possible world—leads to an *explanatory gap* such that phenomenal facts, in this case, cannot be explained in terms of physical facts. The conceivability gap, as shall be observed, ties in with the explanatory gap; the conceivability gap simply presents a different explanation for why there is an explanatory gap between physical facts and phenomenal facts.

The conceptual gap forms the basis of the conceivability arguments involving zombies and inverted qualia. The basic reasoning behind the zombie argument (see Chalmers 1996) is that if we say that B is explainable in terms of A, then it should be that we cannot conceive of a situation wherein there is A but there is no B. For instance, if water is explainable in terms of H₂O, then it should be that we cannot conceive of a situation wherein there is H₂O and there is no water. In the case of the physicalist claim that consciousness or phenomenal facts are explainable in terms of certain physical facts, the question is whether it is conceivable that these physical facts obtain but there is no consciousness. Chalmers believes that a world where all of the physical facts obtain but there is no consciousness (the *zombie world*) is conceivable or, on the level of individual persons, that it is conceivable that the author has a physical duplicate that is not conscious or does not have my phenomenal states (my *zombie twin*). If so, then

consciousness or phenomenal facts are not explainable in terms of physical facts or my consciousness is not explainable in terms of my physical attributes.

In the case of inverted qualia, the basic idea is that, if it is conceivable that the author and another person have the same physical attributes but have inverted qualia or phenomenal experiences, say, what the author sees as red, he sees as blue, and what the author sees as blue, he sees as red, then our phenomenal experiences are not explainable in terms of our physical attributes. In other words, if our phenomenal experiences are explainable in terms of our physical properties, and we have the same physical properties, then we should have the same phenomenal states, and it should not be conceivable that we have inverted states. Thus, the conceivability (or possibility) of two physical duplicates having inverted phenomenal experiences implies that phenomenal states are not explainable in terms of physical properties. The case would be the same for two functional duplicates who have inverted qualia—their qualia would not be explainable in terms of their functional properties.

The PCS and Chalmers' Master Argument

There are basically two ways by which physicalists can respond to the epistemic arguments. One is to deny the existence of the epistemic gaps, for without these gaps the epistemic arguments simply cannot take hold. In denying the epistemic gaps, the ontological gap that allegedly gives rise to these epistemic gaps is automatically denied as well. This line of defence is taken by physicalists that Chalmers (2007, 169) classifies as "Type-A materialists".² One prominent physicalist who belongs to this camp is Daniel Dennett (2006). The other way is to accept the occurrence of the epistemic gaps but deny that such gaps necessarily entail an ontological gap. This line of defence is taken by physicalists that Chalmers (2007, 169) classifies as "Type-B materialists".³ Proponents of the phenomenal concept strategy (PCS), which is considered to be the most promising way of carrying out the second line of physicalist defence against the epistemic arguments (Chalmers 2007, 172), belong to this camp. This strategy refutes the claim that the epistemic gaps are necessarily entailed by an ontological gap by attributing these epistemic gaps to the special character of phenomenal concepts. What then are phenomenal concepts? What accounts for their special character? Given the special character of these concepts, how does the PCS work?

Phenomenal Concepts and the PCS

According to Balog (2011, 5), phenomenal concepts are "*concepts* in terms of which we think about qualia". Chalmers (2010, 251) defines phenomenal concepts in the context of their relationship to phenomenal beliefs as follows:

"Phenomenal beliefs always involve *phenomenal concepts*: concepts of the phenomenal character of an experience. When one believes that one is having a red experience, one deploys a phenomenal concept of a red experience". In the following, Stoljar (2005, 469) explains how a phenomenal concept differs from closely related types of concepts:

A phenomenal concept is the concept of a specific type of perceptual or sensory experience where the notion of experience is understood phenomenologically. So, for example, the phenomenal concept RED SENSATION is the concept of the specific type of sensation one gets from looking at red things such as British pillar-boxes or the Chinese flag. The concept RED SENSATION is not then the concept RED, for that concept typically qualifies objects not sensations. Nor is it the concept SENSATION THAT REPRESENTS THINGS AS RED, for there is no contradiction in the idea of a red sensation that did not represent things that way. Nor even is it the concept THE SENSATION ONE GETS FROM LOOKING AT RED THINGS, for that sensation might not have been a red sensation.

What makes these concepts special or different from other types of concepts, particularly from those of the physical type? Proponents of the PCS have different conceptions of the features that account for the special character of phenomenal concepts. For instance, in his review of these conceptions, Chalmers (2007, 172) examines the views that regard phenomenal concepts as recognitional, indexical, quotational and as distinctly different from physical concepts in terms of their conceptual roles. For our purposes, we focus on two basic conceptions. The first concerns the manner by which phenomenal concepts are constituted or formed. Accordingly, phenomenal concepts are constituted or formed through direct acquaintance with or direct experience of the phenomenal experiences that they refer to. Balog (2011, 6) explains this idea as follows:

Phenomenal concepts have a number of unique features. The sense that there is something special about phenomenal concepts is very closely connected to features of the epistemic access they afford to qualia. When we deploy phenomenal concepts introspectively to some phenomenally conscious experiences as it occurs, say a phenomenal experience of the colour blue, we are said to be *acquainted* with our experience. While philosophers have understood "acquaintance" in various ways, it is generally taken to be a unique epistemological relation that relates a person to her own mental states directly and, according to some, in a way that reveals the *essence* of the referent.

Stoljar (2005, 470–471) provides a similar explanation: "What, according to the phenomenal concept strategy, *is* the difference between phenomenal concepts and other concepts? Different versions of the strategy proceed differently... [b]ut at least for initial expository purposes, it is reasonable to see them as expressing a view concerning phenomenal concept possession I will call *the experience thesis*: ... *S* possesses the (phenomenal) concept *C* of experience *E* only if *S* has actually had experience *E*. According to the experience thesis, I have the phenomenal concept RED SENSATION, only if I've actually had a red sensation".

The second conception concerns how phenomenal concepts relate to non-phenomenal concepts. According to Carruthers and Veillet (2007, 2), "[w]hat is said to be distinctive of such concepts is that they are *conceptually isolated* from any other concepts that we possess, lacking any a priori connections with non-phenomenal concepts of any type (and in particular, lacking such connections with any physical, functional, or intentional concepts)". Being conceptually isolated, phenomenal concepts therefore cannot be derived from non-phenomenal concepts. These two features, it shall be observed, are closely related in that what makes phenomenal concepts conceptually isolated is the particular way they are constituted. More particularly, if the only way by which phenomenal concepts can be formed is through a direct experience of the phenomenal experiences that they refer to, then they cannot be formed by means of an a priori entailment from non-phenomenal concepts of any type. For instance, in the case of Mary, if it is only by means of a direct experience of the colour red that she acquires a phenomenal concept of the colour red, then her phenomenal concept of the colour red is conceptually isolated from her non-phenomenal concepts of the same colour (which constitute her complete knowledge of the physics of colour red) in that her phenomenal concept of the colour red cannot be derived from her non-phenomenal concepts of the same colour.

How does the PCS work? According to the proponents of this strategy, the epistemic gaps, contrary to the claim of the epistemic arguments, are not brought about by an ontological gap but by the peculiar nature of our phenomenal concepts. More specifically, the epistemic gaps are not due to a gap between physical facts and phenomenal facts but to a gap between physical concepts and phenomenal concepts, and this gap between physical concepts and phenomenal concepts is precisely brought about by the absence of a priori connections between these two types of facts, or by the nature of phenomenal concepts to be conceptually isolated. On this account, the reason why knowledge of what it is like to see colours from a complete physical knowledge of colour vision, why a complete physical explanation of brain states will not explain why these states come with a phenomenal character, and why our physical duplicate can be conceived to be non-conscious is that the concepts we use to refer to our phenomenal or conscious experiences are conceptually isolated. According to the

proponents of the PCS, the mere possibility that this account of how the epistemic gaps come about is correct is enough to block the inference (made by proponents of the epistemic arguments) from the epistemic gaps to an ontological gap.

The Master Argument

The PCS has been regarded as a very powerful physicalist defence against the epistemic arguments. However, Chalmers (2007) develops a master argument that shows that the PCS, in any form, is bound to fail. Speaking of the PCS, Chalmers (2007, 168) remarks, "I think that the strategy cannot succeed. On close examination, we can see that no account of phenomenal concepts is both powerful enough to explain our epistemic situation with regard to consciousness and tame enough to be explained in physical terms". Chalmers (2007, 172) lays out the general structure of the PCS as follows:

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

The psychological features that the proponents of the PCS attribute to humans, which *C* symbolises, are allegedly what bring about the special character of phenomenal concepts. These psychological features, as it were, constitute the *cognitive condition* that humans must be in⁴ for them to have these phenomenal concepts with the special character attributed to these concepts by proponents of the PCS. Balog (2011, 10) describes the argument as follows: "*C* stands for the claim that we possess phenomenal concepts with the relevant key feature (e.g., being constituted by an instance of the referent) posited by a physicalist account of phenomenal concepts". For the PCS to succeed, given that humans do possess the psychological features that *C* symbolises, it must be shown, according to Chalmers, that *C* possesses a dual nature, that, on the one hand, it is explainable in physicalist terms, and on the other, it can explain why we have the relevant epistemic gaps. The former is what makes the PCS a physicalist strategy, while the latter is what makes it a strategy of type-B materialism.

How does Chalmers attack this general structure of the PCS? Chalmers (2007, 173) examines the relationship between the two features that make up the dual

nature of C and eventually argues that they are incompatible because one necessarily eliminates the other. Referring to these two features as "(2)" and "(3)", Chalmers (ibid.) writes, "I will argue that no account can simultaneously satisfy (2) and (3). For any candidate thesis C about psychological features of human beings, then either (1) C is not physically explicable, or (2) C does not explain our epistemic situation with regard to consciousness". That is to say, for Chalmers, if C is physically explicable, then C cannot explain why we have the relevant epistemic gaps, but if C can explain these epistemic gaps, then C cannot be physically explicable.

We now present Chalmers' master argument. Given that P stands for the totality of our world's physical facts, C for the thesis that humans possess the psychological features necessary for having phenomenal concepts, and $P \ \& \ \sim C$ for a possible world where all of the physical facts obtain but not the psychological features necessary for humans to have phenomenal concepts, the master argument is stated as follows (ibid., 174):

1. If $P \ \& \ \sim C$ is conceivable, then C is not physically explicable.
 2. If $P \ \& \ \sim C$ is not conceivable, then C cannot explain our epistemic situation.
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3. Either C is not physically explicable, or C cannot explain our epistemic situation.

As an instance of a constructive dilemma, it should be observed that there is actually a hidden premise here: "Either $P \ \& \ \sim C$ is conceivable, or it is not". In this regard, the master argument, in its complete form, is actually as follows:

If $P \ \& \ \sim C$ is conceivable, then C is not physically explicable.
 If $P \ \& \ \sim C$ is not conceivable, then C cannot explain our epistemic situation.

Either $P \ \& \ \sim C$ is conceivable, or it is not.

Either C is not physically explicable, or C cannot explain our epistemic situation.

To further show the logical form of this argument:

Given:

- S : $P \ \& \ \sim C$ is conceivable
 $\sim S$: $P \ \& \ \sim C$ is not conceivable
 $\sim Q$: C is not physically explicable
 $\sim R$: C cannot explain our epistemic situation

Chalmers' Master Argument:

$$S \supset \sim Q$$

$$\sim S \supset \sim R$$

$$S \vee \sim S$$

$$\sim Q \vee \sim R$$

The dilemma, containing two horns [(1) If $P \ \& \ \sim C$ is conceivable, then C is not physically explicable; (2) If $P \ \& \ \sim C$ is not conceivable, then C cannot explain our epistemic situation], is valid. However, how does Chalmers argue for these two horns of the dilemma? More specifically, what justifies his reasoning? It is not difficult to see that the entire master argument is based on his zombie hypothesis or the conceivability reasoning concerning this hypothesis, which we discussed earlier in relation to the notion of a conceptual gap. Chalmers himself (2007, 173–174) makes this clear when he remarks, "Here the key question will be: is $P \ \& \ \sim C$ conceivable? That is, can we conceive of beings physically identical to us (in physically identical environments, if necessary) that do not have the psychological features attributed by thesis C ? One might approach this question by asking: Would zombies have the key features attributed by thesis C ? Or at least by asking: Is it conceivable that zombies lack the key features?" We elaborate on this statement when we discuss the objection of Carruthers and Veillet against the master argument because the link between the master argument and the zombie hypothesis is a crucial consideration in this objection.

In any case, the critical implication of the master argument is that the first horn shows that the PCS is inconsistent with physicalism, while the second horn shows that the PCS is inconsistent with type-B materialism. More specifically, the first horn demonstrates the failure of the PCS as a physicalist defence against the epistemic arguments, while the second horn demonstrates the failure of the PCS as a type-B materialist defence against the epistemic arguments. Insofar as the PCS is intended as both a physicalist and a type-B materialist defence against the epistemic arguments, the PCS is shown to be a failure in either horn.

Two Objections to the Master Argument

As expected, proponents of the PCS replied to Chalmers' master argument. In this section, we examine the objections raised against the master argument by Peter Carruthers and Bénédicte Veillet (2007) and Katalin Balog (2011) in defence of the PCS. Carruthers and Veillet attack the second horn of the master argument's dilemma by showing that Chalmers' explanation for it—that zombies and their conscious duplicates have different epistemic situations—is problematic, whereas Balog attacks the master argument as a whole by showing that it is not really a threat to physicalism in light of a physicalist distinction that can be made between physical and phenomenal conceptualisations of *C*. In the following sections, we examine the details of these two objections.

On the Epistemic Situation of Zombies

Carruthers and Veillet begin with the observation that the master argument equivocates between first-person and third-person phenomenal concepts, but they also show how the master argument can be reformulated to avoid this difficulty. After doing so, they proceed with their objection to the master argument. As noted above, Carruthers and Veillet object to Chalmers' explanation for the second horn of the dilemma, or why if $P \ \& \ \sim C$ is not conceivable, then *C* cannot explain our epistemic situation. Chalmers' putative explanation (2007, 178) is as follows:

4. If $P \ \& \ \sim C$ is not conceivable, then zombies satisfy *C*.
5. Zombies do not share our epistemic situation.
6. If zombies satisfy *C* but do not share our epistemic situation, then *C* cannot explain our epistemic situation.

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7. If $P \ \& \ \sim C$ is not conceivable, then *C* cannot explain our epistemic situation.

Using the case of Mary and Zombie Mary (the unconscious physical duplicate of Mary) as an illustration, Chalmers (2007, 179) further explains, "If $P \ \& \ \sim C$ is not conceivable, then Zombie Mary has the psychological features attributed by *C*, but she does not share Mary's epistemic situation. So the psychological features attributed by *C* cannot explain Mary's epistemic situation, and more generally, cannot explain our epistemic situation with respect to consciousness". To clearly understand the specific objection of Carruthers and Veillet to Chalmers' complex explanation of the second horn of the master argument's dilemma, we dissect the explanation in three parts.

First, why is it that if $P \ \& \ \sim C$ is not conceivable, then zombies also have (or instantiate) the psychological features attributed by C to humans? In other words, if $P \ \& \ \sim C$ is not conceivable, then in all possible situations where there is P (the totality of physical facts), there will always be C . Thus, because zombies are possible physical entities (or are physical entities whose existence is possible or conceivable) and as such instantiate P , then zombies too must have C .

Second, what justifies the reasoning that if Dave and Zombie Dave (the unconscious physical duplicate of Dave) have C but have different epistemic situations, then Dave's epistemic situation with respect to consciousness cannot be explained by C ? Apparently, as noted above, the reason is that the master argument is significantly linked to Chalmers' zombie argument. It should be observed that the structure of the first horn of the dilemma follows or easily fits into the general structure of Chalmers' conceivability argument pertaining to zombies, namely, if we can conceive of A but not B, then B cannot be explained by A (again, the zombie argument runs as follows: if we can conceive of an entity having all of our physical attributes but not our consciousness, then our consciousness cannot be explained by our physical attributes). Thus, if we take P as A and C as B, then we have the following argument: if we can conceive of P but not C , then C cannot be explained by P . That is, if we can conceive of the totality of physical facts obtaining but not the psychological features required for humans to have phenomenal concepts, then these psychological features cannot be explained physically.

With the second horn of the dilemma, the case is quite complex, but the link between the master argument and the zombie argument is more significant because this link not only involves the structure of its reasoning but also its content. Thus, if we take "Dave and Zombie Dave both having C " as A, while "Dave and Zombie Dave having the same epistemic situation" as B, then we have following argument: If we can conceive of Dave and Zombie Dave as both having C but not having the same epistemic situation, then Dave and Zombie Dave's respective epistemic situations cannot be explained by their possession of C . Thus, if Dave and Zombie Dave's respective epistemic situations cannot be explained by their possession of C , then Dave's epistemic situation cannot be explained by his possession of C , and therefore Chalmers' crucial premise for the second horn of the dilemma amounts to, "If zombies satisfy C but do not share our epistemic situation, then C cannot explain our epistemic situation".

Third, when are the epistemic situations of Dave and Zombie Dave different or the same? Chalmers (2007, 177) explains that "two individuals share their epistemic situation when they have corresponding beliefs, all of which have corresponding truth-value and epistemic status". By "epistemic status", he (ibid., 176) means that such beliefs are "justified or unjustified, and as cognitively

significant or insignificant". In this light, Dave and Zombie Dave have different epistemic situations because their beliefs about their phenomenal states have different truth-values and justifications. Because Dave is conscious while Zombie Dave is not, when they utter, for instance, the sentence "I am phenomenally conscious", Dave's sentence is true, while Zombie Dave's is false (ibid., 176–177).

Carruthers and Veillet challenge the third part of this explanation. According to them, it can be shown that Dave and Zombie Dave, contrary to the view of Chalmers, have the same epistemic situation. If so, then the second horn of the master argument's dilemma fails, and insofar as this horn is an integral part of the master argument, the master argument as a whole collapses. The crucial point here is Chalmers' qualification that the contents of the beliefs of two physical duplicates (Dave and Zombie Dave, for instance) do not affect the difference or similarity between the epistemic situations of these duplicates. Chalmers (2007, 177) writes:

A zombie will share the epistemic situation of a conscious being if the zombie and the conscious being have corresponding beliefs, all of which have corresponding truth values and epistemic status... It is important to note that this notion of correspondence *does not require that corresponding beliefs have the same content...* So the claim that a zombie and a conscious being share the epistemic situation *does not require that their beliefs have the same content* (author's italics).

This part of Chalmers' argument is best illustrated by Putnam's twin-earth argument regarding the case of Oscar, who lives on normal earth, and Twin Oscar, who lives on twin earth, and the only difference between normal earth and twin earth is that the chemical composition of water in normal earth is H₂O, while in twin earth it is XYZ. In this case, when Oscar and Twin Oscar utter the same sentence, "water is refreshing", their respective sentences are both true and justified in similar ways given their respective natural environments. Consequently, in regard to Chalmers, Oscar and Twin Oscar share the same epistemic situation despite the fact that the contents of their beliefs are not the same—Oscar's refers to a substance consisting of H₂O, while Twin Oscar's refers to a substance consisting of XYZ.

Carruthers and Veillet argue that on closer inspection, the case of Dave and Zombie Dave is no different from the case of Oscar and Twin Oscar. For Carruthers and Veillet, when Dave and Zombie Dave both utter the sentence, "I am phenomenally conscious"—which is the same as, "I have phenomenal states"—the contents of their beliefs are different: Dave's refers to his

phenomenal states or experiences, while Zombie Dave's refers to something else—states that have the same function as Dave's phenomenal states but not their phenomenal character. Using Chalmers' own terminology, these states of Zombie Dave can be called "schmenomenal states". Carruthers and Veillet, in particular, argue that Dave's belief about his phenomenal states (referring to his phenomenal states) is similar to Oscar's belief about water (referring to the substance consisting of H₂O), while Zombie Dave's belief about his "phenomenal states" (actually referring to his schmenomenal states) is similar to Twin Oscar's belief about "water" (or twater) (actually referring to the substance consisting of XYZ). That being the case, the utterances of Dave and Zombie Dave of the sentence, "I have phenomenal states", similar to the utterances of Oscar and Twin Oscar of the sentence, "Water is refreshing", would be both true and justified in similar ways given their respective worlds (normal world and zombie world). What this conceptualisation means is that Dave and Zombie Dave, similar to Oscar and Twin Oscar, have the same epistemic situation. Speaking of the case of Chalmers and Zombie Chalmers, Carruthers and Veillet (2007, 11–12) summarise their argument as follows:

The content of one of Chalmers' phenomenal concepts will turn out to involve a phenomenal state, whereas the content of his twin's corresponding phenomenal concept can't possibly involve such a state. According to Chalmers, it seems plausible that the content of a zombie's phenomenal concepts would be *schmenomenal* states (these would be states that have the same physical, functional and intentional properties as Chalmers' states but that aren't phenomenally conscious). The physicalist would then argue that Chalmers' and Zombie Chalmers' corresponding beliefs have the same truth-values and are justified in similar ways, but they are quite importantly *about* different things. So Chalmers and Zombie Chalmers can share the same epistemic situation after all, just as do Oscar and his twin.

It is indeed ironic that the basis of Carruthers and Veillet's rebuttal of Chalmers' argument that Dave and Zombie Dave have different epistemic situations has been supplied by Chalmers himself when he clarifies what it means for two epistemic situations to be the same. Carruthers and Veillet are correct that Chalmers committed a *tactical error* here. It seems that this tactical error occurred when Chalmers resorted to zombie talk in explaining the second horn of his dilemma. Perhaps it would have been sufficient for Chalmers to explain this horn of the dilemma by simply stating that if $P \ \& \ \sim C$ is not conceivable, then C is physically explicable; for if C is physically explicable, then C cannot explain our epistemic situation. If the psychological features necessary for our possession of phenomenal concepts can be explained in physicalist terms, then our possession

of such concepts will not engender an epistemic gap and hence cannot explain our epistemic situation with regard to consciousness. However, insofar as the master argument is grounded in the zombie argument, Chalmers must show that every aspect of the argument is consistent with the zombie argument, and Carruthers and Veillet show that Chalmers fails to do so for this particular horn of the dilemma.

Chalmers actually anticipates this type of objection raised by Carruthers and Veillet to his master argument and provides an elaborate reply (see Chalmers 2007, 184–187). However, his reply largely comes down to a charge that this objection, by attributing phenomenal states to zombies, contradicts our intuition that "when we conceive of zombies, we are not conceiving of beings whose inner life is as rich as ours, but different in character" (Chalmers 2007, 185). Chalmers thinks that the only way to preserve this intuition is to deny that zombies have these phenomenal states, thereby preserving his argument that our epistemic situation is different from that of zombies. Chalmers (2007, 185) writes, "Where we have substantial knowledge of our phenomenal inner lives, zombies have no analogous introspective knowledge..." However, to this reply of Chalmers, Carruthers and Veillet simply counter that such an intuition is not actually disregarded when we think of zombies as having phenomenal states, for these states, while serving the same functions as our phenomenal states, are still not phenomenal. They (2007, 13–14) write,

Well, in our view, zombies are still zombies in that they are not phenomenally conscious. Their perceptual states don't have phenomenal feels. In this respect, it is all dark inside. Yet they have something playing a certain role in their psychology—a role analogous to the role that phenomenal consciousness plays in ours. They have something epistemically just as good as consciousness, but they don't have anything that is phenomenally as good. And it seems that this is what matters here... Zombies are still, it seems, in quite a dreadful situation. So our intuitions about zombies are preserved.

On Two Conceptualisations of *C*

We now turn to Balog's objection to the master argument. Balog begins her analysis of the master argument by highlighting the importance of conceptualisation in examining the master argument because the argument makes use of conceivability. She (2011, 10) writes, "To get a better handle of Chalmers' argument, we need to clarify an important issue here: conceptualisation. Conceivability, in all its varieties, is a conceptual matter, and so the evaluation of Chalmers' premises will depend on what conceptualization of *C* we have in

mind". Balog then proceeds to distinguish between two conceptualisations of C that she believes are consistent with physicalism, namely,

1. C_{Phen} : C conceptualised using *phenomenal language*.
2. C_{Phys} : C conceptualised using *physical language*.

To recall, Chalmers' master argument runs as follows:

- P1. If $P \& \sim C$ is conceivable, then C is not physically explicable.
- P2. If $P \& \sim C$ is not conceivable, then C cannot explain our epistemic situation.

Either C is not physically explicable, or C cannot explain our epistemic situation.

If we consider Balog's two conceptualisations of C , Chalmers' master argument would then have the following four versions or reformulations:

Version I: C in P1 and P2 (i.e., Premises 1 and 2) as C_{Phys}

- P1. If $P \& \sim C_{Phys}$ is conceivable, then C_{Phys} is not physically explicable.
- P2. If $P \& \sim C_{Phys}$ is not conceivable, then C_{Phys} cannot explain our epistemic situation.

Either C_{Phys} is not physically explicable, or C_{Phys} cannot explain our epistemic situation.

Version II: C in P1 and P2 as C_{Phen}

- P1. If $P \& \sim C_{Phen}$ is conceivable, then C_{Phen} is not physically explicable.
- P2. If $P \& \sim C_{Phen}$ is not conceivable, then C_{Phen} cannot explain our epistemic situation.

Either C_{Phen} is not physically explicable, or C_{Phen} cannot explain our epistemic situation.

Version III: C in P1 as C_{Phys} but in P2 as C_{Phen}

- P1. If $P \& \sim C_{Phys}$ is conceivable, then C_{Phys} is not physically explicable.
 P2. If $P \& \sim C_{Phen}$ is not conceivable, then C_{Phen} cannot explain our epistemic situation.
-

Either C_{Phys} is not physically explicable, or C_{Phen} cannot explain our epistemic situation.

Version IV: C in P1 as C_{Phen} but in P2 as C_{Phys}

- P1. If $P \& \sim C_{Phen}$ is conceivable, then C_{Phen} is not physically explicable.
 P2. If $P \& \sim C_{Phys}$ is not conceivable, then C_{Phys} cannot explain our epistemic situation.
-

Either C_{Phen} is not physically explicable, or C_{Phys} cannot explain our epistemic situation.

In Balog's analysis, among these four versions of the master argument, the only meaningful version is Version IV because P1 in Versions I and III (i.e., If $P \& \sim C_{Phys}$ is conceivable, then C_{Phys} is not physically explicable), and P2 in Versions II and III (i.e., If $P \& \sim C_{Phen}$ is not conceivable, then C_{Phen} cannot explain our epistemic situation) "are vacuously true by virtue of having a false antecedent" (Balog 2011, 11). On the one hand, the antecedent of P1 in Versions I and III is false simply because $P \& \sim C_{Phys}$ is not conceivable. As Balog (ibid.) explains, "Any true fundamental physical description of the world, e.g., C_{Phys} , is implied by the full *fundamental* physical description of the world $P \dots$ " On the other hand, the antecedent of P2 in Versions II and III is false simply because $P \& \sim C_{Phen}$ is conceivable. As Balog (2012, 12) explains, "[A]nybody who accepts the conceivability of zombies... will have to accept the conceivability of 'phenomenal concept zombies' (i.e., creatures that are physically identical with us but have no phenomenal concepts)..."

By contrast, P1 and P2 in Version IV are true but not vacuously because their antecedents are true in the sense that $P \& \sim C_{Phen}$ is indeed conceivable, and $P \& \sim C_{Phys}$ is indeed not conceivable (for the reasons stated above). However, according to Balog, the conclusion of this version (Version IV), which is "Either C_{Phen} is not physically explicable, or C_{Phys} cannot explain our epistemic situation", is no threat to physicalism because,

1. while C_{Phen} is not physically explicable, C_{Phys} is; and
2. while C_{Phys} cannot explain our epistemic situation, C_{Phen} can.

Here, C is physically explicable (with respect to its conceptualisation as C_{Phys}) and can explain our epistemic situation (with respect to its conceptualisation as C_{Phen}). As no threat to physicalism, the master argument would then appear, in its meaningful form, not really as an objection to the PCS, but as a mere explanation of why we have the epistemic gaps. In Balog's own words, "Here is my answer to the Master Argument. Yes, it is correct both that C_{Phen} is not physical explicable and that C_{Phys} cannot explain our epistemic situation—but this is perfectly compatible with physicalism! What I concede here—what the Master Argument succeeds at showing—is merely the existence of epistemic gaps—not the existence of an ontological gap... P doesn't perspicuously explain C_{Phen} but it *does* perspicuously explain C_{Phys} ! Similarly, C_{Phys} doesn't perspicuously explain E , but C_{Phen} does" (Balog 2012, 17–18).

It should be noted that in these remarks by Balog, she refers to an explanation that she qualifies as *perspicuous*. To fully appreciate her arguments here, we must explore what she means. It can be gleaned from certain remarks by Balog (2012, 17–18) that what she means by an explanation being perspicuous is that it is *non-gappy*, and by a non-gappy explanation, she in turn means a type of explanation that is clear and less controversial (and hence stronger). For Balog, the remarks showing that a non-gappy explanation is a clear explanation are as follows. "It seems that for Chalmers, the connection between conceivability and explanation is straightforwardly a priori. But, as we have seen, even those who reject the connection between conceivability and explanation on general grounds (Block and Stalnaker 1999; McLaughlin 2007) have to admit that there is a *clear sense* in which C_{Phen} is not explicable by P : *the sense that connects explanation with 'non-gappiness'* (author's italics)" (Balog 2012, 17).

However, for Balog, the remarks showing that a perspicuous explanation is non-gappy and that a non-gappy explanation in turn is less controversial and hence a stronger type of explanation are as follows.

In any case, Chalmers' Master Argument, couched in terms of conceivability, can be reformulated in terms of *non-gappy explanation*:

- 1 Gap) If there is an explanatory gap between P and C , then C is not physically explicable.
- 2 Gap) If there is no explanatory gap between P and C , then C cannot explain our epistemic situation.

As before, these conditionals break down into two sub-principles depending on whether they feature C_{Phys} or C_{Phen} ... the author will call the *kind of explanation figuring in these conditionals*—tied, via conceptual necessity to non-gappyness—*perspicuous* explanation. In what follows, the author will focus on this—*less controversial, and so stronger*—formulation of Chalmers' Master Argument.

In other words, given the two conceptualisations of C identified by Balog, the explanations of Chalmers in his master argument would appear as unclear, controversial or non-perspicuous. Thus, when Chalmers states that "If P & $\sim C$ is conceivable, then C is not physically explicable", it is not clear why C cannot be explained physically because it is not clear whether what Chalmers means by C is C_{Phys} or C_{Phen} . The same is true of Chalmers' other statement, "If P & $\sim C$ is not conceivable, then C cannot explain our epistemic situation". What cannot explain our epistemic situation here, C_{Phys} or C_{Phen} ? These two statements of Chalmers are therefore gappy in that they are indeterminate as to their truth-value. To make them gappy, Balog reformulates the master argument as rendered in Version IV above. However, the consequence of this reformulation is that the master argument turns out not to be an objection to the PCS.

For Balog's objection to the master argument to be fully successful, however, she also must account for the new epistemic gaps that will arise (a) between P and C_{Phen} and (b) between C_{Phen} and C_{Phys} in a manner that will not necessitate an ontological gap. Regarding the epistemic gap that will arise between P and C_{Phen} , Balog explains that it likewise is due to the very nature of phenomenal concepts. In other words, while C explains the epistemic gap between P and consciousness, C also explains the second-level epistemic gap between P and C , and Balog believes that there is no need to posit a higher level C , thereby preventing a regress of explanation. Anticipating this type of defence of the PCS, however, Chalmers (2007, 181) charges that the type of explanation that Balog presents leads to circularity. In her response, Balog (2012, 19) does not deny the charge of circularity but rejects the implication that her explanation, or the PCS for that matter, is therefore wrong. Balog claims that the circularity in her explanation is not vicious, and in her footnote to this part of the discussion (Footnote 31), she further notes, following some commentators, that "circularity by itself doesn't make an argument defective".

With regard to the question of whether the epistemic gap that will arise between C_{Phen} and C_{Phys} will lead to an ontological gap, Balog (2012, 18) simply answers, "... C_{Phen} and C_{Phys} , according to the physicalist, express the same fact. To rebut the anti-physicalist, the proponent of the PCS merely has to argue that this is *conceivable*. If it is conceivable, then the fact that P doesn't perspicuously explain C_{Phen} doesn't a priori entail that C_{Phen} is not physical". In short, C_{Phen} and C_{Phys} are regarded merely as two different modes of presenting (in the Fregean sense) the

same *physical* fact, and according to Balog, the mere conceivability of this concept is enough to rebut the (necessary) claim that C_{Phen} and C_{Phys} refer to two different types of facts, physical and non-physical, that would then lead to an ontological gap.

Conclusion

We need to clarify here whether the issue concerning the PCS concerns the truth of physicalism or merely its viability as an ontological position. The epistemic arguments are intended to show that physicalism is false, and the PCS is intended to prove that epistemic arguments fail to do that. From the perspective of the proponents of the PCS, what the PCS intends to accomplish is not to actually prove that physicalism is true but to save the viability of physicalism from the epistemic arguments. The PCS is therefore merely a defensive argument against the epistemic arguments and not a positive argument for the truth of physicalism. As Carruthers and Veillet (2007, 17) explain, "... the phenomenal concept strategy is essentially a defensive strategy. It is a strategy that physicalists employ to show that the key anti-physicalist arguments fail. It isn't meant to make a positive case for the truth of physicalism...". In this regard, the author thinks the PCS is able to do its intended job: it has successfully shown why the epistemic arguments do not necessarily prove that physicalism is wrong. Chalmers' master argument against the PCS is a powerful one, but the author thinks Carruthers, Veillet and Balog are able to defend the PCS against the master argument quite well.

Finally, with regard to the larger debate between physicalists and non-physicalists on the fundamental nature of reality, which has motivated the epistemic arguments, the PCS, Chalmers' master argument, and the physicalist objections to the master argument, the author concurs with Balog that it is a stalemate, for as Balog (2012, 20) states, "The anti-physicalist appeals to the anti-physicalist principles, the physicalist appeals to the conceivability of a purely physical world with phenomenality. Both can show that, once granted that one core assumption, their view is consistent and can rebut challenges from the other side. Neither side can, without begging the question against the opponent, show that the other's position is untenable. Where you end up depends on what you take as your starting point".

How can one, for instance, objectively decide which of the two equally conceivable scenarios about C_{Phen} and C_{Phys} is true: one, that they refer to the same physical fact; the other, that they refer to two different types of facts—one physical and the other non-physical? In addition, how can one objectively decide which of the two equally conceivable scenarios about zombies is true⁵: one, that they do not have something analogous to the phenomenal states of humans—the

so-called *schmenomenal states*; the other, that they do have these schmenomenal states?⁶

Notes

1. Perhaps on a fine-grained level mental facts can be differentiated from phenomenal facts in the following way: mental facts are facts about mental states and conscious experiences such as the facts that the author has a belief and that the author is in pain, whereas phenomenal facts are facts about the subjective qualities of the mental states and conscious experiences that we are undergoing, such as the facts that the author feels good about thinking of a particular belief of mine and that the author feels irritated upon hearing a certain type of music. In this essay, the author is not particular about this difference, and the author regards mental facts and phenomenal facts as generally the same. One reason for this approach is that mental facts are essentially defined by their phenomenal character.
2. The author calls these types of physicalists *non-realist physicalists*, under which the author classifies the reductive and eliminative physicalists (see Mabaquiao 2012, 19–40). Physicalists belonging to this group essentially reject the idea that there is something over and above the brain's neural states or the body's behavioural dispositions.
3. The author calls these types of physicalists *realist physicalists*, under which the author classifies physicalists who regard mental states as higher-level physical states or as physical states that are higher than the brain's neural states and the body's behavioural dispositions (see Mabaquiao 2012, 19–40).
4. The author would like to thank the reviewer of this paper for noting the inaccuracy of simplifying the reference of *C* to that of phenomenal concepts per se, which the author did in the first draft of this paper.
5. In his reply to the type of objection raised by Carruthers and Veillet to his master argument, Chalmers (2007, 187) states, "*Perhaps* it is conceivable that a nonconscious duplicate could have some analogous state, schmonsciousness, of which they have analogous introspective knowledge. But it is also conceivable that a nonconscious duplicate would have no such analogous introspective knowledge. And this latter conceivability claim is all that the argument against the phenomenal concept strategy needs". However, then Carruthers and Veillet can easily reply that the former conceivability is all that the phenomenal concept strategy needs to defend itself against the master argument.
6. The author would like to express his gratitude to the reviewer of this paper for his/her sharp comments and helpful suggestions and to Dr. Jeremiah Joven Joaquin for his constructive insights on the initial version of this paper.

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