

Heterophenomenology Debunked

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Abstract

What is analyzed in this paper is of fundamental importance to the viability of Dennett's works on mind and consciousness. Dennett uses the heterophenomenology method as the basis to ground his thoughts on subjectivity and phenomenal experiences. It is argued here that Dennett's formulation of heterophenomenology fails to provide the founding framework with which to ground studies on consciousness and qualia. Analysis in the paper has important import on the rest of his theory of consciousness and mind, for without credible philosophical underpinnings, his reasoning on consciousness and mind at large is not likely to amount to much.

Introduction

The theory of heterophenomenology is Dennett's brainchild¹ on consciousness and one of his most important. Heterophenomenology is the basis on which much of Dennett's undertaking on consciousness is constructed, informed and built upon. This methodological standpoint bears a distinctly Dennettian stamp on *the* right approach to the study of mind and consciousness. The issues addressed here are of paramount importance to Dennett's intellectual onslaught on the questions of subjectivity and consciousness. This paper seeks to investigate this critical aspect of Dennett's theory to see how well it stands up to scrutiny. Prior to the analysis, however, Dennett's philosophy of heterophenomenology is briefly outlined to facilitate arguments in the ensuing sections.

Heterophenomenology

Understanding Dennett's *tour de force* on consciousness, *Consciousness Explained* (Dennett, 1991b), requires mastery of Dennett's theory of heterophenomenology. It is in fact the crux of *Consciousness Explained*, for major arguments in the book stand or fall with the cogency of this construct. In a nutshell, heterophenomenology is a third person approach to the study of consciousness and mind (Dennett, 2001d: 230; Dennett, 1998: 356, 366; Dennett, 2003: 19). Consistent with his generally third person recourse to the mind, and "[b]eing a philosopher of firm physicalist conviction" (Dennett, 1978: 312), he proposes a *neutral* and *objective* method that does justice to the study of consciousness scientifically.² Heterophenomenology is in fact the culmination of claims that he is "as scientific a realist as one could find" (Dennett, 1993a: 210; Dennett, 1982; Dennett, 1991b: 66-78, 461).³ As far as Dennett is concerned, first person

¹At least in coining the term and the way it is conceptualized to study subjectivity.

² Dennett consistently emphasizes the *neutrality* (agnostic) of his method (see especially Dennett, 2001c). Dennett's (2001c) debate with Chalmers on the issue is important. Dennett himself referred the reader to the debate via his website in Dennett (2003). More in subsequent sections.

³ Dennett has presented a heterophenomenological method which he claims does "justice in detail to the best work in cognitive science, and lays the foundation for the future by dissolving certain pseudo-problems that have infected the imaginations of theorists" (Dennett, 1993e: 57). In fact, he proclaims "that heterophenomenology is nothing other than the scientific method applied to the phenomena of consciousness...for scientific study. I did not invent the

accounts are generally unreliable, dubious and plagued with inconsistencies (Dennett, 1991b: 65-70). Hence, we ought to be cautious and assume as little as possible in the undertaking to unravel the mysteries of mental phenomena.

Mental phenomenon is notorious for its insusceptibility to investigations. However, this should not be taken to signify that they are insusceptible to *scientific* scrutiny altogether (Dennett, 1991b: 71). In fact, Dennett's heterophenomenology is postulated precisely to bridge this seemingly unbridgeable lacuna, to see if there is an objective basis to ground claims commonly associated with the first person states,⁴ where data for empirical study of consciousness could be constructed via concrete and objective scientific methods. On the one hand, Dennett's heterophenomenology necessitates the subjects to receive instructions from the experimenters (in terms of inputs) (see Dennett, 1991b: 74), where the subjects provide responses via verbal feedbacks (in terms of outputs), which are later converted to transcripts that are as faithful as possible to all that transpired (Dennett, 1991b: 74-76; Dennett, 1982: 160-161). Texts constructed are hence purported to be sincere, true and reliable accounts of the subjects.

Meanwhile, *intentional stance* is invoked in the interpretation of texts as well as in the designing of experiments (Dennett, 1991b: 76-78; Dennett, 2003: 20). Ultimately, the subjects are given the privilege to correct drafts before any transcribed texts are rendered final (Dennett, 1991b: 96; Dennett, 1982: 161, 174). In other words, strict precautions are taken to ensure that, as far as possible, the final text reflects correctly whatever is to be accounted for in the subject's phenomenological world. Hence, heterophenomenology allows the characterization of the subject's experiences in *neutral* and *uncontroversial* terms – scientifically that is!

It is nonetheless important to emphasize that ultimately, the reality of phenomenology is ratified only if one can simultaneously discover corresponding correlation of neural states that support these phenomenal states. Basically, the central claim of heterophenomenology lies in the following:

...if we were to find real goings-on in people's brain that had enough of the 'defining' properties of the items that populate their heterophenomenological worlds, we could reasonably propose that we had discovered what they were really talking about...if we discovered that the real goings-on bore only a minor resemblance to the heterophenomenological items, we could reasonably declare that people were just mistaken in the beliefs...(Dennett, 1991b: 85; see also p. 81, 98, 407).

Hence, central to Dennett's formulation of the theory, the subject's supposed avowals of phenomenal reality are justified insofar as there exist ways to map phenomenal items to brain events. Since no such mappings are forthcoming, phenomenological claims are vacuous at best (illusory in other words). Parallel to this, Dennett employs the analogue of Shakey (robot of sorts that performs simple mechanical functions) to show that humans are not immune to the sort of confabulations that Shakey succumbs to (Dennett, 1991b: 94; Dennett, 1982: 172-173) when humans stake their claims on phenomenological reality.

Accordingly, Dennett construes the heterophenomenology texts (and hence the denizens of the heterophenomenology world) as a world of theorist's fiction (Dennett, 1991b: 78-81; Dennett, 2003: 20). Borrowing from literary theory, Dennett suggests that we interpret the heterophenomenology world the way we interpret works of fiction. We read

heterophenomenological method; I just codified, more self-consciously and carefully than before, the ground rules already tacitly endorsed by the leading researchers" (Dennett, 1993e: 50; Dennett, 2001c: 3).

⁴ In other words, he is attempting to employ a scientifically legitimate method to study consciousness that would do justice to our rich array of phenomenal experiences.

heterophenomenology texts as we read novels. Hence, phenomenological items are real, the way facts and characters are in novels. In fact, to Dennett, phenomenal experiences are nothing more than the dispositional properties of judgment (see especially Dennett, 1991b: 459 – 460). Sensational or phenomenal quality of ‘what it is like to be something’ is seen as the dispositional properties of information processing states. In other words, Dennett takes them to be the idiosyncratic and inherent disposition to react to incoming stimuli (Dennett, 1990: 528-529, 535; Dennett, 1991b: 371-375, 387-389; Dennett, 1991a; Dennett, 1998: 142-147).

Corresponding to the above, Dennett contends that there is no phenomenal reality beyond content (Dennett, 1993b: 921; Dennett, 2001d: 232-235; Dennett, 1995b).⁵ We have fallen into the trap of supposing that there is a difference between something seeming pink and thinking (or judging) that something is pink. In fact, there is no difference. There is nothing seeming pink beyond judgment (Dennett, 1991b: 134, 364).⁶ Conscious experience is hence construed in intentional and cognitive terms, for it “has no properties that are special in *any* of the ways qualia have been supposed to be special” (Dennett, 1990: 520). Dennett’s conviction in this is unmistakable. “If the distinction between consciousness and unconsciousness has nothing to do with anything sophisticated like judgment, what else could it involve?” (Dennett, 1998: 348). It is hence erroneous to suppose that there exist some extraneous qualitative properties over and above content (Dennett, 1993c: 891; Dennett, 1998: 141-147; Dennett, 1991b: 369-411). This, in part, is borne out by his strategy of developing a theory of content that in turn serves as the basis for the subsequent theorizing on consciousness (Dennett, 1969: xiv-xv; Dennett, 1978: x; Dennett, 1991b: 457-458; Dennett, 1998: 355-356).

Very simply, to him, heterophenomenology is *the* empirical method to study consciousness. However, there is nothing novel about it, because on his account, it is merely the application of the standard scientific repertoire to the study of mental phenomena (see Dennett, 1982; Dennett, 1991b: 70-72; Dennett, 1993a: 211; Dennett, 2001c: 3, 11; Dennett, 1993d: 153; 1993c: 890; Dennett, 2003: 22). To recapitulate, heterophenomenology as “a way of interpreting behavior” (Dennett, 1991b: 95) is in fact “a reasoned, objective extrapolation from *patterns discernible in the behavior* of subjects, including especially their text-producing or communicative *behavior*, and as such, it is about precisely the higher-level dispositions, both cognitive and emotional, that convince us that our fellow human beings are conscious” (Dennett, 2001d: 231, emphasis added).

Heterophenomenology is the key to Dennett’s inexorable and systematic program to quine qualia - to banish qualia from the phenomenological garden in which we are supposedly ensnared. And what needs to be underlined is Dennett’s contention that heterophenomenology is *the* only viable and respectable method to study mental phenomena (see, for instance, Dennett, 1994a: 566n87; Dennett, 2001c: 3, 9, 11);⁷ hence, phenomena that is not susceptible to heterophenomenological probe or fail to be verified or confirmed by the method, would not exist.⁸

⁵ “I must grant, though, that at first sight, my theory’s domain of direct, immediate consciousness seems catastrophically underpopulated: there are no colours, images, sounds, gestalts, mental acts, feeling tones or other Proustian *objets trouves* to delight the inner eye; only featureless – even wordless – conditional-intentions-to say-that-p for us to be intimately acquainted with” (Dennett, 1979: 97).

⁶ “I am left defending the view that such judgments *exhaust* our immediate consciousness, that our individual streams of consciousness consist of nothing but such propositional episodes, or better: that such streams of consciousness, composed exclusively of such propositional episodes...” (Dennett, 1979: 95; Dennett, 1978: 165).

⁷ As in fact he challenges Chalmers, for instance, to “name a single experiment (in good repute) which in any way violates or transcends the heterophenomenological method” (Dennett, 2001c: 11; see also Dennett, 2003: 28).

⁸ Dennett’s commitment here is clear, for instance, in a passage, it is claimed that “[a]s heterophenomenologists, our task is to take this text, interpret it, and then relate the objects of the

Heterophenomenology: A Foundationless Foundation?

In this part of the paper, Dennett's third person vantage point in investigating mental phenomena via the heterophenomenological method is scrutinized. In dubbing his method heterophenomenology or the "third-person approach to consciousness" (Dennett, 2001d: 230), Dennett consistently emphasizes and reiterates the *neutrality* (and hence the objectivity) of his approach (Dennett, 1991b: 71-72, 83, 85, 95, 98; Dennett, 2001c: 2, 4, 6-7, 10; Dennett, 2003: 27-29). Hence, let us make this the point of departure for analysis. As pointed out before (in the beginning section), neutrality or agnosticism (Dennett, 2001c: 3, 9) is a vital property associated with the third person approach from which emanates objectivity (in observations and analyses). But let us analyze how far this neutrality supposition (in relation to Dennett's heterophenomenology) is vindicated.

Prima facie, the neutrality of the heterophenomenology method appears flawed because it leaves out those that do not have verbal capacities for communication (the mute, babies and children, and also the mentally retarded). Certainly, we would wish to extend the heterophenomenological investigations to creatures most would regard as conscious and hence possess some forms of phenomenology. However, due to their lack of verbal capacities, at least not the kind humans could apprehend, their phenomenology (if there is any) is altogether *beyond* heterophenomenology. Hence, the method would not do justice to this class of creatures lacking proper communication abilities – the capability to discourse in language understood by the experimenters. We then risk committing anthropocentric bias, for the investigations would primarily be confined to creatures one could communicate with, namely humans. This contention is designated 'H₁.'

Notwithstanding the above, Dennett does, however, concede that heterophenomenology without text is possible, as in the case of animals (Dennett, 1991b: 446-447; Dennett, 2001d: 230; Dennett, 2001c: 3).⁹ To compensate for the muteness of these creatures (at least in the eyes of humans), Dennett suggests that we *imagine* what it is like to be a bat or any other creature without language, based on their structural and physiological make up (Dennett, 1991b: 441-447). Let us thereby dub this 'H₂.'

However, even setting aside the question as to the efficacy of this exercise that capitalizes on imaginations, by far this only serves to undercut Dennett's proclamation of neutrality (or agnosticism). Obviously, the hallmark of neutrality is its characteristic impartiality. If we are to begin imagining the phenomenological world of the bats, the neutrality in question would doubtlessly be tampered. We would certainly be infusing the bat's heterophenomenological world with exceedingly personal and idiosyncratic interpretations. Consider, for instance, "[w]hen we imagine what it is like to be a languageless creature, we start, naturally, from our own experience, and most of what then springs to mind has to be adjusted (mainly downward)" (Dennett, 1991b: 447).

resulting heterophenomenological world of Dennett to the events going on in Dennett's brain at the time" (Dennett, 1991b: 407). Also, more recently, replying to Goldman's query, "I have pointed out that they trust their S's introspective reports to be fine accounts of how it seems to them – with regard to every phenomenon in all modalities...They 'trust' their S's only after they've discovered, independently, that their statements, interpreted as assertions about objective, third-person-accessible processes going on in their brains, are reliable. In other words, they only 'rely on' S's statements when they have confirmed that they can be usefully interpreted as ordinary reliable reports of objective properties" (Dennett, 2001c: 9).

⁹ "I have not yet seen an argument made by a philosopher to the effect that we cannot, with the aid of science, establish facts about animal minds with the same degree of moral certainty that satisfies us in the case of our own species" (Dennett, 1998: 339).

Whence objectivity then?¹⁰ Dennett has certainly not provided a convincing and illustrative example as to how this maneuver should (and could) be accomplished. Hence, it appears that Dennett could only generalize his heterophenomenological method to non-verbal subjects at a heavy price – i.e., at the cost of its impartiality! However, one way or another, this places the theory in an unenviable position. Generalizing ‘H₁,’ the way it is in ‘H₂’ leads to undesirable consequences, whilst not generalizing leaves the theory no less hampered, as is the case of ‘H₁.’

The above notwithstanding, other issues also threaten to incapacitate Dennett’s theory. Above all, Dennett maintains that the text must be supplied with intentional interpretations. So, for instance, “[f]rom the recorded verbal utterances, we get transcripts, from which in turn we devise *interpretations* of the subject’s speech acts, which we thus get to treat as expressions of their *beliefs*, on all topics. Thus, using the intentional stance, we construct therefrom the subject’s heterophenomenological world. We move, that is, from raw data to interpreted data” (Dennett, 2001c: 2, emphasis added; Dennett, 2003: 21).

Textual interpretations are notably a subjective tool of exegesis, presumably employed when there is no single determinate or concrete way to pin down an interpretation. Insofar as Dennett’s method relies on interpretations, the contamination of subjectivity arising from one’s own personal idiosyncrasy in the course of the interpreting process is inevitable. This only undermines Dennett’s claim of neutrality. This is fortified by Dennett’s likening of heterophenomenology to the study of novels and fiction. Surely, interpretations of these literary creations are far from the standards alluded to in science which extols objectivity.

Meanwhile, as the aforementioned passage makes clear, ultimately the transcribed text is to be set in the vernacular of the intentional stance in order to construct a heterophenomenological world,¹¹ for it is the subject’s *beliefs* about their subjective experiences that constitute the central data, not the experiences themselves (Dennett, 2001c: 7; Dennett, 1991b: 76-77; Dennett, 1982: 161-162; Dennett, 2003: 23). Says Dennett, “using the intentional stance, we construct therefrom the subject’s heterophenomenological world” (Dennett, 2001c: 2; see also Dennett, 2003: 20). But intentional stance is surely a non-neutral tool to analyze the mind. For it

¹⁰Dennett has elsewhere claimed that “thanks in large measure to language – so different from that of any other species that to call the other varieties consciousness is to court confusion” (Densmore & Dennett, 1999: 759). Besides, “[w]e naturalists think that consciousness, like locomotion or predation, is something that comes in different varieties, with some shared functional properties, but many differences due to different evolutionary histories and circumstances” (Dennett, 2001b: 38). If, indeed, the consciousness of other species is so unlike ours, then to imagine their consciousness based on our own experiences would have little meaning. It cannot be anything more than arbitrary. Consider the extent of difficulty involved in imagining the inner world of a snake. “It seems that a snake does not have a central representation of a mouse but relies solely on transduced information. The snake exploits three different sensory systems in relation to prey, like a mouse. To strike the mouse, the snake uses its visual system (or thermal sensors). When struck, the mouse normally does not die immediately, but runs away for some distance. To locate the mouse, once the prey has been struck, the snake uses its sense of smell. The search behavior is exclusively wired to this modality. Even if the mouse happens to die right in front of the eyes of the snake, it will still follow the small trace of the mouse in order to find it. This unimodality is particularly evident in snakes like boas and pythons, where the prey often is held fast in the coils of the snake’s body, when it e.g. hangs from a branch. Despite the fact that the snake must have ample proprioceptive information about the location of the prey it holds, it searches stochastically for it, all around, only with the help of the olfactory sense organs” (Sjolander, 1993: 3; cited in Dennett, 1994a: 548).

¹¹Note, for instance, Dennett says that “[h]eterophenomenology exhausts the intentional stance theory of consciousness” (Dennett, 1994a: 527). And more pointedly, he also speaks of the “welcome – indeed, indispensable – power of adopting the intentional stance as scientific tactic in heterophenomenology, the objective science of consciousness” (Dennett, 1995a: 356n7).

is itself a perspective (theory or hypothesis) with heavily coloured presumptions and distinctive commitments as to the ultimate nature of mental states.¹² How then could one possibly safeguard the impartiality and neutrality of the method - to probe mental phenomena - when the nature of the said entity is already presupposed from the very outset?¹³

The theoretical baggage it carries undercuts the very foundation of agnosticism the method claims to uphold. Dennett may be justified in employing intentional stance to construct the subject's heterophenomenological worlds (Dennett, 2003: 20), but this could not possibly be free from personal prejudices (predilection or penchant whatsoever) of the person taking the stance, notwithstanding the fact that the theory is controversial and is hardly widely accepted. Hence, his claim that "[a] hallmark of the method is its cageyness, its *metaphysical minimalism*; it begins by cautiously saying nothing at all about what consciousness might be, or even where it might be found" (Dennett, 1982: 159) surely understates the theoretical and metaphysical commitments of the method.

The indeterminacy of interpretations underlying intentional stance serves to underscore the point, for one important attribute of intentional stance is the concordant indeterminacy and impreciseness in its interpretations. There is no principled way one could fix a stable interpretation. It appears dubious then (and this certainly stands very much opposed to the crux of neutrality and objectivity Dennett claims his method to espouse) how one is still able to single out a *stable* interpretation under such conditions (Dennett, 1991b: 77-78; Dennett, 1982: 162),¹⁴ for even interpretations of novels or fiction, which Dennett takes to be analogous to the heterophenomenological interpretations (Dennett, 1982: 163-167; Dennett, 1991b: 78-81), are more than likely to produce multiple versions. Besides, as Carr aptly notes,

Dennett betrays his non-neutrality by mislabelling the subjectively experienced world a fiction. To be consistent he might have considered the Feenomanists' description of the anthropologists' world: they might consider it a 'fictional' world because their beloved Feenoman, and all his works, were absent from it. But if they were

¹² As interpreted data contain "a catalogue of the subjects' convictions, beliefs, attitudes, emotional reactions" (Dennett, 2001c: 2), this "subsequent assessment as expression of belief about a subject's 'private' subjective state" (Dennett, 2001c: 2) is achieved by adopting the intentional stance. As Dennett makes clear, "we use precisely the principles of the intentional stance to settle what it is reasonable to postulate regarding the subject's beliefs and desires" (Dennett, 2001c: 4).

¹³ As Dennett points out: "The reliance on an intentional interpretation of the subjects is in any event an ineliminable part of such experiments, both in the interpretation of the data, and in the prior process of *experimental design* [for example in preparing and debriefing subjects; see Dennett, 2001c: 4]" (Dennett, 1982: 162, emphasis added).

¹⁴ According to Dennett: "Steps can be taken, and are routinely taken, to remove sources of ambiguity and uncertainty in the experimental situation, so that one intentional interpretation of the text...is overwhelmingly dictated - has no plausible rivals" (Dennett, 1982: 162). However, Dennett has not shown how exactly a *stable* interpretation could be achieved. Consider the following: "[M]y view is that propositional attitude claims are so idealized that it is often impossible to say which approximation, if any, to use" (Dennett, 1994a: 525). "I also maintain that when these objective patterns fall short of perfection, as they always must, there will be uninterpretable gaps; it is always possible in principle for rival intentional stance interpretations of those patterns to tie for first place, so that no further fact could settle what the intentional system in question really believed" (Dennett, 1987: 40). In disputes concerning the principle of interpretation, Dennett contends that "the opposition between Projection and Rationalizations at most a matter of emphasis... quandaries that are resolvable - to the extent that they are - only by resort to normative considerations: we should project only what is best of ourselves, but *what counts as best under the circumstances is itself a matter of interpretation*" (Dennett, 1987: 344). How could one still iron out a stable version in spite of the above is bewildering, to say the least!

good phenomenologists they would realize that to the anthropologists this was the real, not the fictional, world, and they should neutrally describe it as such (Carr, 1998: 337).

In other words, the conclusion of Dennett's theory is already presupposed from the start when the denizens of the heterophenomenological world are postulated as fictional (Dennett, 2003: 20; Dennett, 1991b: 79, 81, 98; Dennett, 1982: 166; Dennett, 1994b: 179). This surely runs counter to the claim of heterophenomenology as the *ultra-cautious* methodological approach to the investigations of mind (Dennett, 1991b: 327)!

Could Heterophenomenology Say What is Real?

Ultimately, Dennett's heterophenomenological method also has deep repercussions on the question of perceptual reality, to which we now turn. Dennett concludes that "the objects of heterophenomenology are mere theorist's fictions" (Dennett, 1982: 178).

The method describes a world, the subject's heterophenomenological world, in which are found various objects (intentional objects)... Mr. Pickwick is a fictional object, and so are the objects described, named, mentioned by the heterophenomenologist... Heterophenomenological objects are, like centers of gravity or the Equator, *abstracta*, not *concreta*. They are not idle fantasies but hardworking theorists' fictions (Dennett, 1991b: 95-96).

Dennett is here employing the same yardstick he employs in intentional stance. Phenomena claimed to exist but without corresponding viable mapping of sorts to the brain would be like building castles in the air, ultimately amounting to nothing. Specifically, as quoted earlier in the paper,

...if we discovered that the real goings-on bore only a minor resemblance to the heterophenomenological items, we could reasonably declare that people were just mistaken in the beliefs they expressed...(Dennett, 1991b: 85; see also p. 98, Dennett, 2001c: 5, 9).

The phenomenal garden is made to vanish by appealing to this hard physicalist criterion.¹⁵ Anything that violates or does not correspond to this standard has no place in the Dennettian world of reality. Indeed, "[p]ostulating special inner qualities that are not only private and intrinsically valuable, but also unconfirmable and uninvestigable, is just obscurantism" (Dennett, 1991b: 450).

By using the Shakey allegory, Dennett contends that part of the justifications for the fictional attributions of the subject's verbal reports is "that they confabulate; they make up likely sounding tales without realizing they are doing it; they fill in the gaps, guess, speculate, mistake theorizing for observing. They are, then, unwitting creators of fiction" (Dennett, 1982: 173).¹⁶

¹⁵ Dennett in responding to Siewert's analyses has this to say, "Siewert sees that there is an ominous stability (ominous by his lights) to my position, and he diagnoses its dependence on an epistemological position of mine he calls 'third person absolutism.' As one who thinks absolutism of any sort is (almost!) always wrong, I heartily dislike the bloodcurdling connotations of this epithet, but I think he's got my epistemological position clear" (Dennett, 1993d: 153).

¹⁶ Arguably, however, to what extent Shakey's utterances are fictional depends very much on the way they are designed. There is no reason why they cannot be designed to say things that conform largely to the processes that govern their functioning (this may be more demanding technically, but it is surely not insurmountable). In spite of his repeated emphasis on neutrality of

This specifically Dennettian conception of subjectivity raises some thorny issues that bear down on Dennett's views, ultimately forcing them into an awkward position. Dennett may be justified to claim that if someone asserts that, for instance, she perceives a purple cow, she is more than likely to come under an illusion, as indeed, "Raskolnikov's dark brown hair, like the purple flank of the cow you imagine, does not exist" (Dennett, 1982: 179). So be it with phenomenal stuff. But what if someone says that 'I see an apple on the desk?'¹⁷ This is certainly a lawful utterance, some sort of verbal report. Is this another confabulation? How do we know? Now, if we appeal to Dennett's heterophenomenology to decide the issue, what could we know and how could we decide? As observed, Dennett denies the existence of phenomenal entities because there are no real goings-on in the brain found correspond to these entities. But what about the credible perception of an apple under normal conditions? At the present state of knowledge, it is far from clear if there is anything in the brain that could be indubitably singled out as *the* real goings-on corresponding to the perception of an apple either. So, by force of the argument, on Dennett's contention, ought we similarly conclude that the subject is hallucinating and the perception illusory?

If this is allowed on Dennett's account, it would open the floodgates for a whole lot of undesirable consequences that would render Dennett's theory objectionable. First of all, the sciences depend on perceptions as the gateway for empirical data (especially sight, see for instance Dennett, 1991b: 55-56).¹⁸ Yet, as of now, we are unable to identify them as real goings-on in the brain, the way Dennett conceives it (as quoted above). This, in turn, suggests that perceptions, on Dennett's account, are themselves confabulations. And if they are illusory, how could science be real and truth possible?¹⁹ How could anything be real at all if this is the standard Dennett alludes to for we could hardly identify real goings-on in the brain that correspond to mental phenomena familiar to us, including those most indispensable to science, e.g., logic, reasoning, mathematics and so on. Suffice to point out that his theory would also necessitate verbal utterances between the heterophenomenological subjects and experimenters counted as confabulation, not to mention interpretations that Dennett sees as crucial to his method. So, hoisted by its own petard, the theory backfires, as in the final analysis, it is in danger of ending up with nothing concrete, though reality is what motivated its search in the first place.

This is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the case of consciousness. Dennett claims that consciousness is real (Dennett, 1988: 134-135; Dennett, 1990: 520). If Dennett's contention in which "[e]very event in the world has effects" (Westbury & Dennett, 2000: 12) is to be taken seriously, then by strict application of Dennett's heterophenomenological criterion, consciousness is not real, because more than anything else, it is no less hard to ground real goings-on in the brain that correspond to or resemble consciousness. If real goings-on are what ultimately matter, this would most likely leave us unable to say, when we perceive something, whether we are really hallucinating (due to some sort of mental disease) or actually perceiving

heterophenomenology, apparently, Dennett is not sufficiently impartial in this! Hence, it *seems* Dennett is driven more by the end conclusion he wishes to draw, thereby becoming insufficiently mindful of other equally legitimate alternatives that speak against his convictions. Shakey's confabulative utterances are certainly not necessary.

¹⁷ Assuming indeed there really is, physically, an apple before her.

¹⁸ Note that Dennett in fact believes that "all varieties of perception – indeed all varieties of thought or mental activity – are accomplished in the brain by parallel, multitrack processes of interpretation and elaboration of *sensory* inputs" (Dennett, 1991b: 111, emphasis added).

¹⁹ Let's see what importance truth holds for Dennett. "We alone can be wracked with doubt, and we alone have been provoked by that epistemic itch to seek a remedy: better truth-seeking methods... we invented measuring, and arithmetic, and maps, and writing. These communicative and recording innovations come with a built-in ideal: truth. The point of asking questions is to find true answers; the point of measuring is to measure accurately; the point of making maps is to find your way to your destination... In short, the goal of truth goes without saying, in every human culture" (Dennett, 2001a: 99).

something real. There is nothing wrong to set high standards, if anything, it certainly helps root out mediocrity. But, ultimately, if the high benchmark leaves one unable to tell the difference between confabulations (hallucinating) and real perceptions, then, though Dennett may claim that his theory of heterophenomenology is the *objective science of consciousness* (Dennett, 1995a: 356n7), if in the end it leaves us unable to say that we are conscious, then the theory (or the demanding standard of objectivity), for what is worth, is probably too exacting and idealistic that not many things seem capable at the end of fulfilling it.

Conclusion

The heterophenomenology method is integral to Dennett's entire formulation of consciousness theory. Needless to say, if the preceding analyses of Dennett's contrivances of the heterophenomenology hold up, the rest of his discussion on consciousness is not likely to amount to much even if they are found credible. It does not deliver the promises Dennett hopes it would.

Heterophenomenology is the beginning of a science of consciousness, not the end. It is the organization of the data, a catalogue of what must be explained, not itself an explanation of a theory...And in maintaining this *neutrality*, it is actually doing justice to the first-person perspective...(Dennett, 2003: 27, emphasis added)

Winning by philosophical footwork what ought to be won by empirical demonstration has, as Bertrand Russell famously remarked, all the advantages of theft over honest toil. A more constructive approach recognizes the *neutrality* of heterophenomenology and accepts the challenge of demonstrating, empirically, in its terms, that there are marvels of consciousness that cannot be captured by conservative theories (Dennett, 2003: 30, emphasis added).

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