

## THEMATIC UNITY IN THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF THINKING

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*Many philosophers hold that the phenomenology of thinking (also known as cognitive phenomenology) reduces to the phenomenology of the speech, sensory imagery, emotions or feelings associated with it. But even if this reductionist claim is correct, there is still a properly cognitive dimension to the phenomenology of at least some thinking. Specifically, conceptual content makes a constitutive contribution to the phenomenology of at least some thought episodes, in that it constitutes what I call their thematic unity. Often, when a thought episode has a phenomenal character, the various associated speech, sensory imagery, emotions or feelings are often organized around a common theme, constituted by the conceptual content of one's thinking.*

### I

There has recently been increased interest in the phenomenology of thinking, or cognitive phenomenology.<sup>1</sup> The debate starts from the observation that although some thinking is unconscious, there are episodes of thinking which there is something it is like to undergo or engage in. The question is how the phenomenology of such thought episodes is to be characterized and understood. In particular, there has been much discussion of how the phenomenology of thinking relates to the perhaps more familiar phenomenology of broadly sensory or affective states.

For example, an episode of thinking that Arolla is snowy might be associated with hearing someone utter the sentence 'Arolla is snowy' or

<sup>1</sup> Contributions from the last decade include T. Bayne, 'Perception and the Reach of Phenomenal Content', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 59 (2009), pp. 385–404; P. Carruthers and B. Veillet, 'The Case Against Cognitive Phenomenology', in T. Bayne and M. Montague (eds), *Cognitive Phenomenology* (Oxford UP, forthcoming), available at [http://www.theassc.org/documents/the\\_case\\_against\\_cognitive\\_phenomenology](http://www.theassc.org/documents/the_case_against_cognitive_phenomenology); T. Horgan and J. Tienson, 'The Intentionality of Phenomenology and the Phenomenology of Intentionality', in D. Chalmers (ed.), *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford UP, 2002), pp. 520–32; D. Pitt, 'The Phenomenology of Cognition, or, What Is It Like to Think that P?', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 69 (2004), pp. 1–36; W.S. Robinson, 'Thoughts Without Distinctive Non-Imagistic Phenomenology', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 70 (2005), pp. 534–61; M. Tye, *Consciousness and Persons* (MIT Press, 2003), pp. 67–84.

another sentence which means the same, or with oneself saying such a sentence out loud or in ‘inner speech’. The thinking may also be associated with visual imagery as of falling snow, auditory imagery as of snowstorms, or other sorts of sensory imagery. Such speech and imagery are examples of broadly sensory states; at least, their phenomenology seems akin to that of sensory impressions. Further, one’s thinking that Arolla is snowy might be associated with such emotions as joy (because one is soon going there to ski) or annoyance (since one dislikes snow). The thinking may also be associated with more cognitive feelings such as a sense of fluency, of appropriateness, or of confusion. I shall group such emotions and feelings together under the heading of ‘broadly affective states’. It might be questioned to what extent a sense of confusion, say, is affective. So perhaps ‘emotional or feeling states’ would be a more apt generic label. I use ‘broadly affective’, often dropping ‘broadly’, just for its brevity.

A central question about the phenomenology of thinking has been to what extent it reduces to the phenomenology of such broadly sensory or affective states associated with it. One way of making this reductionist claim somewhat more precise is as follows:

*Reductionism*: an individuating constitutive account of the phenomenology (if any) of any episode of thinking can be given exclusively in terms of the phenomenology of some combination of the broadly sensory states (subvocal sayings, sensory imagery, and the like) or broadly affective states (emotions, cognitive feelings, and the like) associated with it.

By a ‘constitutive’ account of the phenomenology of X I mean an account of what the phenomenology of X consists in. Such an account is ‘individuating’ only if, for any Ys that are phenomenally different from Xs, it provides for a specification of what that phenomenal difference consists in. In using the phrase ‘associated with’, I do not mean to imply that there is only a loose connection between the sensory or affective states and the thought episode. In particular, its use is not meant to imply that reductionism excludes the possibility that certain sensory or affective states should be seen as parts or aspects, or even as essential parts or aspects, of the thought episode.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> On the so-called ‘no experiential parts’ (NEP) view, defended by Tye, *Consciousness and Persons*, among others, a conscious subject has at most one phenomenally conscious episode at any given time; no such episode has parts that themselves are phenomenally conscious episodes. (NEP) theorists are, however, prepared to distinguish different aspects of a single conscious episode, say, the properties it has *qua* episode of hearing such and such *versus* the properties it has *qua* experience of imagining so and so. Talk of sensory or affective states as associated with a phenomenally conscious thought episode can then be accommodated within the (NEP) framework by conceiving of the former as aspects of the latter. Below, I sometimes talk simply of parts and wholes of conscious episodes. Again a (NEP)-friendly reinterpretation of such talk could be provided, although I often leave this tacit.

It bears stressing that reductionism, as defined here, does not rule out that a *causal* as opposed to a *constitutive* account of the phenomenology of thinking needs to invoke certain more specifically cognitive elements. It is plausible to think, for example, that it can sometimes make a causal difference to the phenomenology of thinking whether a thought involves a cognitive attitude of supposing or of rejecting. My definition of reductionism allows reductionists to agree.<sup>3</sup> Although few writers on cognitive phenomenology explicitly discuss reductionism in exactly the terms in which I have formulated it, Tye, Robinson and Carruthers and Velliet can plausibly be classified as arguing for reductionism in my sense, and Siewert and Pitt as arguing against.<sup>4</sup> Siewert (pp. 277–8) contends, for example, that some wholly affectless, imageless, not yet articulated thoughts have a phenomenology, a claim incompatible with reductionism on a reasonable interpretation of the latter.

This paper aims neither to refute nor to defend reductionism. I shall argue, however, that even if reductionism is correct, the anti-reductionists who insist on a cognitive contribution to the phenomenology of thinking are nevertheless right to do so. Specifically, I shall argue that the conceptual content of thinking makes a contribution to the phenomenology of at least some thought episodes, by constituting what I call their ‘thematic unity’. In slightly more precise terms,

TUT. The *thematic unity thesis*: there are episodes of thinking such that we cannot give an individuating constitutive account of their phenomenology without noting a thematic unity among the cognitive, sensory or affective states associated with it, where this thematic unity is constituted by the conceptual content of the thinking.

By ‘conceptual content’ I understand content which without further conceptualization we can entertain in thinking and reflecting. The key, less familiar expression in this thesis is of course that of ‘thematic unity’. The idea is this. Consider a thought episode which has a phenomenology and is associated with a variety of sensory or affective states, such as speech, subvocalizations, imagery, emotions or feelings. (I assume any thought episode is trivially associated with a cognitive state, *viz* that of thinking the relevant conceptual content.) Such an episode has thematic unity if and only if there is a common theme for the various associated cognitive, sensory or affective states – if and only if these states somehow deal with, or revolve around, the same subject-matter or putative fact. In saying here that these states have a common theme, I mean to be saying not only that there is a common subject-matter at which each of them is directed (where this claim could be

<sup>3</sup> I here follow Carruthers and Velliet.

<sup>4</sup> C. Siewert, *The Significance of Consciousness* (Princeton UP, 1998).

taken in the spirit of an interesting generalization about the states evident only on reflection). I also mean that the very commonality of the subject-matter is a feature of the thought episode's phenomenology. For example, suppose you are thinking that Arolla is snowy, where this is associated with visual imagery as of snow, subvocalizations of 'Arolla is snowy', and a sense of joy about Arolla's snowiness. The imagery, subvocalizations and sense of joy are all directed at snow. Moreover, they are in some sense concerned with snow not (only) individually but jointly. Intuitively, it is a feature of the phenomenology of the episode that what one finds joyous is the same thing as one imagines and speaks to oneself of. In any case, the claim that the thought episode has thematic unity is the claim that it exhibits such unity.<sup>5</sup>

(TUT) also speaks of thematic unity as being 'constituted' by the conceptual content of an episode of thinking. This is just to say that the conceptual content, or some part of that content, is the subject-matter or theme around which the sensory or affective states revolve. For example, in the episode of thinking that Arolla is snowy, the common theme of snow is clearly part of the conceptual content of the thinking.

Further examples of thematic unity, along with contrasting examples of its absence, will be examined in the next section, which sets out the positive case for (TUT). §III briefly compares and contrasts the notion of thematic unity with two other notions of unity that have figured in recent discussion of phenomenal consciousness, *viz* 'phenomenal unity' and 'objectual unity'. The ensuing sections respond to objections to the case for (TUT).

Before proceeding to the defence of (TUT), however, it will be useful to ask how this thesis relates to some of the main views taken on cognitive phenomenology. On the one hand, it is more moderate than certain theses which have been defended by enthusiasts for an irreducibly cognitive phenomenology. Pitt (p. 5), for example, following Siewert and Horgan and Tienson, defends the following bold claim:

- P. Each type of conscious thought – each state of consciously thinking that  $p$ , for all thinkable contents  $p$  – has a proprietary, distinctive, individuating phenomenology.

As Pitt explains, the phenomenology of a conscious thought is 'proprietary'

<sup>5</sup> It is possible to have a conscious thought which is thematically unified with a range of concurrent sensory or affective states while at the same time having a wholly unrelated sensory or affective state, such as a minor itch. Arguably, it is also possible to have two concurrent thoughts each of which is thematically unified with an ensemble of sensory or affective states, but not with each other or with any item in the other's ensemble. (TUT) should be read so that episodes of the sort (TUT) says exists may exhibit either of these possibilities. One may do this by reading 'associated with' in a sense such that concurrence is insufficient for it. Or one may do it by inserting a tacit 'some of' in front of 'the cognitive, sensory or affective states associated with it'. Either option is fine for my purposes.

iff it is different from that of any other sort of conscious mental state; ‘distinctive’ iff different from that of any other conscious thought; ‘individuating’ iff the content of the thought constitutively depends on its phenomenology. (TUT) is consistent with denying that the phenomenology of conscious thought has any of these three properties; indeed, it is consistent with denying that each type of conscious thought has a phenomenology at all. Connectedly, (TUT) is consistent with denying Siewert’s contention (pp. 277–8) that wholly affectless, imageless, not yet articulated thoughts can have a phenomenal character. However, (TUT) is not so moderate as to be compatible with any position that has been held in this area, as I shall show.

It may be observed first that although (TUT) is consistent with reductionism, it logically interacts with it in notable ways. If reductionism is correct, the conceptual content of a thought episode of the sort which (TUT) says exists must make a constitutive contribution to the phenomenology of some combination of its associated sensory or affective states. To put it roughly, if reductionism is right, one gets the phenomenology of the thought episode out of the phenomenology of its associated sensory and affective states only because the conceptual content of one’s thinking goes into making the latter phenomenology what it is. If, on the other hand, reductionism is not correct, we are at liberty to suppose that the conceptual content makes a constitutive contribution to an irreducibly non-sensory, non-affective cognitive phenomenology had by the thinking (perhaps in addition to making such a contribution to the phenomenology of some of its associated sensory or affective states).

This brings out that although (TUT) is consistent with reductionism, it is not compatible with the conjunction of reductionism and a generalization of another phenomenological claim which has had several defenders, particularly among reductionists. The claim I have in mind concerns sense experience. It says that an individuating constitutive account of the phenomenology of any sense experience can be given exclusively in terms of its non-conceptual content or other non-conceptual features, without mentioning the conceptual content (if any) of the experience or of perceptual judgements associated with it. The view may be illustrated in terms of Jastrow’s famous duck–rabbit contrast. It here implies that *either* there is, strictly speaking, no phenomenal difference between seeing a figure as a duck, *versus* seeing it as a rabbit, or, more likely, we can give an account of what this difference consists in without insisting that the concept of a duck, or, as the case may be, of a rabbit, is drawn into application. I shall call this view ‘perceptual non-conceptualism’.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Perceptual non-conceptualism is defended in Tye, *Ten Problems of Consciousness* (MIT Press, 1995), pp. 137–43, and by Carruthers and Velliet; it is criticized by Bayne.

My formulation (and labelling) of perceptual non-conceptualism should, in a more extended treatment, be qualified to allow for a ‘conceptualist’ view like that defended by McDowell.<sup>7</sup> This view denies that sense experience has non-conceptual content, maintaining that even the most fine-grained, low-level sensory content of experience is conceptualized. Such conceptualists do however allow that the low-level sensory content of experience differs from the content of most ordinary thinking, in that the former is thoroughly demonstrative and the latter typically is not. They are thus free (but not required) to take the view that an individuating constitutive account of the phenomenology of sense experience can be given solely in terms of its fine-grained *demonstrative* content (and, perhaps, attitudinal features of the experience), without mentioning any *non-demonstrative* conceptual content. This would be the analogue of perceptual non-conceptualism within such a framework. The arguments to follow could be emended to allow for such a conceptualist framework, but to save words I leave this implicit.

Perceptual non-conceptualism might be generalized to all broadly sensory or affective states, thus:

*Sensory–affective non-conceptualism*: an individuating constitutive account of the phenomenology of any broadly sensory or affective state can be given exclusively in terms of the non-conceptual content and other non-conceptual features of the state; no note needs to be taken of the conceptual content (if any) of the state or of judgements associated with it.

A number of reductionists, including Tye and Carruthers and Velliet, defend sensory-affective non-conceptualism.<sup>8</sup> It is now useful to define a view I shall call *hardline* reductionism:

*Hardline reductionism*: reductionism and sensory-affective non-conceptualism are both true.

On plausible background assumptions, this view entails that one can give an individuating constitutive account of the phenomenology of any thought episode just in terms of the non-conceptual content and other non-conceptual features of the associated sensory or affective states.<sup>9</sup> Such an account will take no note of a thematic unity constituted by the conceptual

<sup>7</sup> J. McDowell, *Mind and World* (Harvard UP, 1994), pp. 46–65.

<sup>8</sup> A minor qualification is needed here. Tye argues that a mental state is phenomenally conscious only if it is ‘poised’, i.e., only if it is ready and available to have an impact on belief-fixating concept-applying systems. Carruthers and Velliet would probably accept a similar condition. To ensure that sensory-affective non-conceptualism is consistent with this poisedness requirement, the qualification ‘(apart from whatever is entailed by noting that the state is poised)’ may be taken to be tacitly added at the end of my formulation.

<sup>9</sup> The background assumptions include the supposition that the relevant constitution relation is transitive.

content of the episode of thinking. Yet doing so is, according to (TUT), necessary for an individuating constitutive account of at least some such episodes. So (TUT) is incompatible with hardline reductionism.

## II

(TUT) is best supported in terms of comparisons.

*The story of Thoughtful:* as Thoughtful sits at his desk one morning, a friend comes in, saying ‘Have you heard? A BA plane has just crash-landed at Heathrow.’ Oh gosh, Thoughtful thinks to himself, a BA plane has just crash-landed at Heathrow. As he does so, he subvocally repeats his friend’s words to himself (letting the thought sink in, as one might say). He is naturally surprised to hear this news. His latent fear of flying is reactivated in a surge of anxiety about his upcoming BA flight into Heathrow. He is tormented by unpleasant visual imagery as of a BA plane lying broken in pieces on the grass beside the Heathrow runway.

*The story of Thoughtless:* Thoughtless sits in a qualitatively identical office; his friend comes in and says just the same words. Although Thoughtless has enough of a sense of English to parse the sentence uttered, he is in no position to understand what it means. His position *vis à vis* the sentence is like the position of most fluent English speakers *vis à vis* the sentence ‘The rhodomontade of ululating funambulists is never idoneous’ (the example is due to Pitt, p. 28). Nevertheless, he subvocally repeats his friend’s words to himself. For some reason, he has a reaction of surprise at something or other, and a latent fear of something or other flashes up as a surge of anxiety in his mind. He has visual imagery as of segments of an approximately cylindrically shaped body irregularly placed on a green flat surface with a greyish rectangular field. He finds, for some reason, this imagery unpleasant. The phenomenology of his sensory experiences, his subvocal sayings, his visual imagery, his feeling of surprise and his surge of anxiety are as similar as they can be to their counterparts in Thoughtful’s case, consistently with the absence in his case of any thought of planes, crashes, airports or Heathrow, none of which flows through his mind.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that I do not say the phenomenology of these sensory and affective states are the *same* as in Thoughtful’s case. Someone who denies sensory-affective non-conceptualism may deny that such sameness is possible, since Thoughtless does not grasp Thoughtful’s thought.

Does what it is like to be Thoughtful differ from what it is like to be Thoughtless? It is natural, and plausible, to think so. It is characteristic, phenomenologically, of Thoughtful's case that his surprise, his fears, his mutterings to himself and his sensory imagery all circle around the thought that a BA plane has crash-landed at Heathrow. The words he subvocally says to himself are heard as clothing this thought – not, for example, the thought that a PA plainly has just been cack-handed in the heat of a row. He undergoes a surge of anxiety about his upcoming BA flight into Heathrow; his surge of anxiety is not, say, about his upcoming performance review, nor is it the sort of 'undirected' or 'generalized' anxiety which was such a central concern to the existentialists. His imagery is imagery as of a gruesome air crash at Heathrow, and is unpleasant at least largely for that reason. It is not imagery of, for example, pieces of a toy partially disassembled on a large modelling table. If it had been, Thoughtful would not have found it at all unpleasant.<sup>11</sup>

Further, the fact that the noted sensory experiences, imagery and emotions are each in some sense directed at airliners and crashes is not (only) an interesting generalization about these states apparent on reflection, perhaps from the point of view of an external theorist. It is, it seems, an aspect of Thoughtful's phenomenology that the properties visually imagined are the properties of the same sort of event – a plane crash – as the words are experienced as speaking of, and as is experienced as surprising and frightening. In other words, it seems to be a feature of Thoughtful's phenomenology that there is a unifying theme, constituted by his thought that a BA plane has crash-landed at Heathrow, for the array of sensory and emotional reactions which go into his thought episode.

Thoughtless *ex hypothesi* never grasps any thought about flying, planes, airports, crashes or Heathrow. Whatever his imagery, subvocalizations, emotions and feelings are about, they are not about that. Indeed, it is hard to see why they need be thematically related at all. All we know is that they occur at pretty much the same time, in the mind of the same person. Clearly, it is possible for people to be anxious about one thing while they

<sup>11</sup> Perhaps someone might object that this phenomenological description begs the question against sensory-affective non-conceptualism. The passage is however only intended to give an indication, in intuitively attractive everyday terms, of what it is like to undergo the sort of thought episode Thoughtful has. If the passage succeeds in this aim, it is a challenge for sensory-affective non-conceptualists to provide a redescription of these phenomenological facts consistently with their view. Some attempts at this will be examined in §VI. Compare with the duck/rabbit contrast in visual phenomenology: it should not be construed as begging the question against perceptual non-conceptualism to say that there is a phenomenological difference between seeing a figure as a duck and seeing it as a rabbit. Rather, it is a challenge for perceptual non-conceptualists to provide a redescription of this putative phenomenal difference consistently with their view.



talk to themselves about another wholly unrelated thing and entertain imagery about yet a third thing wholly unrelated to either. There is no reason to assume, for example, that Thoughtless' anxiety is about whatever is said in uttering the words he does not understand. For all I have said, his surge of anxiety may be of the 'undirected', existentialist sort. I shall suppose, then, that Thoughtless' sensory and affective states are about completely unrelated things (to the extent that they are about anything at all).<sup>12</sup> Then it is not an aspect of Thoughtless' phenomenology that what is visually imagined as being so is the same sort of event, or indeed has anything to do with, what is found surprising, or what is found anxiety-evoking, or what the words uttered are speaking of. This is, it seems to me, a noteworthy difference between his phenomenology and Thoughtful's (though not necessarily the only phenomenal difference).

Suppose we agree that there is a phenomenal difference between Thoughtful and Thoughtless. Does acknowledgement of the thematic unity of Thoughtful's episode, constituted by his conceptual content, matter only to a non-constitutive, causal account of this phenomenal difference? It does not. It enters as part of the description of what it is like to have a thought episode of the sort Thoughtful has, and how this differs from what it is like to have an episode of the kind Thoughtless has. It does not enter (only) into a description of what causes the difference. It is hard to see how one could capture what the phenomenal difference between them consists in without noting the thematic unity in Thoughtful's case.<sup>13</sup> His thought episode seems, then, a good candidate for being of the kind (TUT) says exists.

The verdict may be reinforced by an intra-subjective comparison. Suppose you find yourself looking at a scene where a human figure, turned away from you, can be discerned somewhat indistinctly in the distance, in a greyish haze. The figure is somehow shaking. There is a loud, persistent noise, with a slightly irregular rhythm. Through the noise you can make out a voice saying 'La dame, qui utilise un marteau-piqueur, tourbillonne un nuage de poussière'. You can hear the sentence is French, but although you have enough knowledge of the language to make out its structure, its meaning is not apparent to you. You have a feeling of unease and anxiety about something or other, as you are silently repeating the French words to yourself. It all makes no sense to you; in particular, you have no sense that the various goings-on you are experiencing have anything to do with one another.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> As I shall show in §IV, this supposition is not strictly required by the story of Thoughtless as it stands. Here it might be treated as a further stipulation about him.

<sup>13</sup> I shall consider in §VI below hardline reductionist attempts to account for the intuition that there is phenomenal difference here without bringing in conceptual content.

<sup>14</sup> For a rough indication of the state of mind one might be in here, consider some of the puzzling scenes in David Lynch's films, notably in *Inland Empire*.

Suddenly, something clicks. You realize that what the voice is saying (and the meaning of the words you are repeating to yourself) is that the woman, operating a pneumatic drill, is stirring up a cloud of dust. You realize that the figure you are making out is that of a woman; that her shaking movements are those of someone operating a pneumatic drill; that the persistent noise is the noise of such a drill; that the 'haze' is the dust thrown up by the drilling. You remain anxious and fearful. Your anxiety is, however, now manifestly anxiety about the close and piercing presence of a pneumatic drill hammering away, machinery that you have always for some obscure reason found deeply unsettling.

In a variant of this progression, visual imagery as of a scene containing a human figure in the distance, etc., might take the place of the visual perceptual experience, and auditory imagery as of a loud noise and a voice uttering the French words might take the place of auditory perceptual experience. For my purposes, it does not matter whether one considers the imagistic or the former perceptual version of the progression. In either version, I shall call the first stage 'Clueless', and the second stage, after 'something has clicked', 'Clued-In'.<sup>15</sup>

Again it is plausible to think that there is a phenomenal difference between the Clueless and Clued-In stage. At the latter, one's sensory, linguistic and affective reactions are organized around the common theme of a woman operating a pneumatic drill. It seems to be part of one's phenomenology, then, that the pattern of noise one hears is the noise of the same thing as is causing the movements of the figure one sees, the same thing as one finds so unsettling, and about which the voice is speaking. No such co-ordination is present in the experiences making up the Clueless stage of the mental episode. This seems to be a noteworthy difference between the phenomenology of one's mental episode at the Clueless *versus* the Clued-In stage. It is hard to see how to account for what the phenomenological difference consists in without noting the thematic unity present at the Clued-In stage, constituted by one's thought about the woman operating the pneumatic drill. Clued-In's episode seems, then, to be another good candidate for being of the sort that (TUT) says exists.

### III

In recent discussions of phenomenal consciousness, several notions of unity have been invoked. It may be helpful briefly to compare and contrast

<sup>15</sup> I shall sometimes use 'Clueless' and 'Clued-In' as names of the respective time slices of the same experiencing subject.

thematic unity with two of these in particular. The first is the basic and venerable concept of the unity of consciousness. This refers to the putative feature of one's conscious experiences, at a moment in time, that they are all aspects of, or 'subsumed' by, a single total experience one has at that time (unless, of course, they are identical with that total experience). Suppose I feel a pain in my foot just as I hear a loud bang to my right. There is not only something it is like for me to feel the pain and something it is like for me to hear the bang; there is also something it is like for me to be in both states at once – to hear the bang as I am feeling the pain. This central notion of unity is what Bayne and Chalmers call 'subsumptive phenomenal unity' and Tye simply 'phenomenal unity'.<sup>16</sup> Its centrality to phenomenal consciousness is reflected in the great difficulty of imagining the experiences of a given subject to be phenomenally *dis*unified at a time. Arguably, such disunification happens at most in split brain cases and other severe abnormalities. Phenomenal unity, then, is insufficient for thematic unity. It may be normal for phenomenally conscious thought episodes to be thematically unified, but it is not particularly hard to imagine its absence, as the cases of Thoughtless and Clueless show. On the other hand, thematic unity in a thought episode requires phenomenal unity among the sensory, affective and cognitive states that are thematically unified.

The second notion of unity, to which the notion of thematic unity is more closely related, is what Bayne and Chalmers (pp. 24–7) dub 'objectual unity'. This is exemplified by the ordinary perceptual experience of objects, as when I witness a blue car driving past. I then have visual experience of something blue, something car-shaped, and something moving past, and auditory experience of something making a certain noise as it moves past. Furthermore, the thing that I experience as having the shape is the same thing as I experience as making the noise, and so on, *viz* the car. In addition, and crucially, I experience the shape, colour, movement and noise-making as the properties of the same thing. As Bayne and Chalmers (p. 25) write,

two experiences can be experiences of the same object without being objectually unified. I might see a car's shape and hear its noise, without anything in my conscious state tying the noise to the car (perhaps I perceive the noise as behind me, due to an odd environmental effect). If so, the experiences are not objectually unified.

Thematic unity can on occasion take the form of objectual unity. In Thoughtful's case, his visual imagery as of a horrific crash at Heathrow, his hearing the words 'A BA plane has just crash-landed at Heathrow' as speaking of Heathrow, and his surge of anxiety about his upcoming flight into Heathrow are objectually unified in being experienced as directed

<sup>16</sup> T. Bayne and D. Chalmers, 'What is the Unity of Consciousness?', in A. Cleeremans (ed.), *The Unity of Consciousness* (Oxford UP, 2003), pp. 23–48; Tye, *Consciousness and Persons*.

(among other things) at a certain common object, *viz* Heathrow. The thematic unity of his thinking consists, in part, in this objectual unity. But not all thematic unity takes the form of objectual unity – at least, it does not unless the notion of ‘object’ is taken far more abstractly than what is natural when objectual unity is taken paradigmatically to be exemplified by perceptual experience of ‘moderate-sized specimens of dry goods’, to use Austin’s phrase. The common subject-matter that constitutes thematic unity may involve properties, relations and propositions, not only objects in any narrow sense. It is better to see the notion of thematic unity as a generalization of the notion of objectual unity, where the common topic at which phenomenally conscious states are jointly directed are not limited to objects, and where the states so directed are not limited to perceptual experiences.

#### IV

Someone may grant that thematic unity can be a feature of the phenomenology of thinking, but question why it should be supposed that such unity is ever constituted by conceptual content. After all, some or perhaps even all of the perceptual experiences, sensory imagery, emotions and feelings described in the cases above have non-conceptual content. Could not non-conceptual content constitute the thematic unity in an episode of thinking?

It should be noted first that (TUT) is not committed to denying that the thematic unity of some mental episodes may be constituted by their non-conceptual content. However, it is not plausible to suppose that the phenomenal import of thematic unity is exhausted by such cases. As a matter of psychological fact, the non-conceptual content of our sensory and affective states does not have sufficient reach and flexibility for this alone to play the thematically unifying role. For example, the non-conceptual content of vision is plausibly limited to the representation of shape, colour, movement and kindred ‘low-level’ visual properties. It is very hard to see how Thoughtful’s respective sensory and affective states could exhibit a thematic unity solely in virtue of their non-conceptual content. Shapes and colours are non-conceptually represented by his visual imagery, on the one hand, and prosodic properties of utterances are non-conceptually represented by his auditory experiences, on the other. There seems to be nothing about these two sets of properties which could ground the idea that the visual imagery deals with the same theme as the auditory experience. Further, the thematic unity in both Thoughtful’s and Clued-In’s cases involve, among other things, the interpretation of speech. The things imagined and feared are experienced as being the same sorts of things as are

spoken of. It is widely agreed that the interpretation of speech trades on conceptual content.

Perhaps it will be objected that I am unduly restrictive here about the reach of non-conceptual content. Could it not be that the non-conceptual content of perception, for instance, represents more than simple, low-level sensory properties of the sort indicated? Perhaps even grasping the content of speech could be, to a significant extent, a matter of entertaining non-conceptual content? This is not the place to pursue these tricky issues. Suffice it to say that if the reach of non-conceptual content is expanded in this way, sensory-affective non-conceptualism becomes a much less restrictive, distinctive and, arguably, interesting phenomenological claim. Hardline reductionists thus have an incentive to stick to a fairly restrictive view of the reach of non-conceptual content, in order not to dilute their position unduly.

Another objection to contrast-based arguments for (TUT) questions the suggestion, which might seem implicit in them, that an individuating constitutive account of Thoughtful or Clued-In must mention the *particular* conceptual content they respectively entertain. The objection may be developed in terms of a further twist that can be added to the story of Thoughtless as initially presented. As it stands, there is nothing in that story to suggest that his sensory and affective responses have a common theme. At the same time, the story does not strictly rule it out either. Suppose in addition that even though Thoughtless does not have any thought about planes, crashes or Heathrow, he thinks about somewhat similar things. For example, suppose he has just unwittingly arrived here from 'Variant Earth', a planet superficially like Earth where there is no Heathrow, no aeroplanes, and where (for some reason) nothing ever strictly speaking crashes. Nevertheless there are certain things there, namely vanes, vashes and Veathrow, that in some respects look like planes, crashes and Heathrow respectively, and are spoken of with words that sound just like the words we use to speak of the latter. It so happens that the features of vanes, vane-vashes and Veathrow to which Thoughtless has been exposed are just those in which they look just like planes, plane-crashes and Heathrow. Although the newly arrived Thoughtless does not understand the sentence 'A BA plane has just crash-landed at Heathrow' when he hears it, he does not hear it as *nonsense*: he hears it as meaning that a BA vane has just vashed at Veathrow. This thought serves as a unifying theme for his sensory and emotional reactions, just as Thoughtful's does. In that case, would not what it is like to be Thoughtless be the same as what it is like to be Thoughtful? If so, it might seem that an individuating account of the latter's phenomenology need not mention that he entertains a thought about *planes*.

At most, it needs to mention that he entertains a thought about *either* planes or vanes or ... (I leave open exactly how to complete the disjunction).

This objection brings out an ambiguity in the formulation of (TUT), here repeated:

TUT. There are episodes of thinking such that we cannot give an individuating constitutive account of their phenomenology without noting a thematic unity among the cognitive, sensory or affective states associated with it, where this thematic unity is constituted by the conceptual content of the thinking.

The ambiguity centres on the phrase 'noting a thematic unity'. Does this involve noting the *particular* theme, i.e., the particular conceptual content, which is the common subject-matter for these states, or does it only involve noting that *there is some* theme or *other* which is a common subject-matter for them? I shall call the former the 'strong' interpretation and the latter the 'weak'.

The current objection challenges the strong reading only. For it does not challenge the idea that Thoughtful and Variant-Earth (VE) Thoughtless are both phenomenally different from Thoughtless\*, a figure to whom the original story of Thoughtless applies along with the stipulation that his sensory and affective states are not directed at a common theme. There is, then, the option of backing down to the weak interpretation. I am not sure it should be taken. A less concessive response to the objection would be to invoke a distinction between wide and narrow conceptual content, arguing that VE Thoughtless and Thoughtful entertain the same narrow content, that the themes which are the common subject-matter of the states are on the level of narrow content, and so that VE Thoughtless' and Thoughtful's episodes revolve around the same theme. A phenomenal sameness would then be just what one should expect.<sup>17</sup> An alternative, also less concessive, response would be to deny that VE Thoughtless is phenomenally just like Thoughtful. Could not the fact that it is *Heathrow*, in particular, and *plane crashes*, and nothing other than plane crashes, that Thoughtful's train of thought revolves around be part of what makes it, phenomenally, as it is?<sup>18</sup> At the

<sup>17</sup> Such a distinction between wide and narrow content is vital to Pitt's defence (p. 6) of (P), cited above, in as much as (P) is supposed to hold only with respect to narrow content.

<sup>18</sup> Some philosophers of perception argue that the particular object one sees may be a constitutive part of the phenomenology of one's visual experience: see, e.g., J. Campbell, *Reference and Consciousness* (Oxford UP, 2002), pp. 114–31; M.G.F. Martin, 'Particular Thoughts and Singular Thought', in A. O'Hear (ed.), *Logic, Thought, and Language* (Cambridge UP, 2002), pp. 173–214, at p. 198. If you and I look at different objects, our phenomenologies may thereby differ, however similar we otherwise may be. Perhaps a corresponding case can be made for the claim that such particularity also shows up in the phenomenology of thought. Pursuing this question is however beyond the scope of the present paper.

same time, it is to be conceded that the case I have set out, proceeding as it does from comparisons of Thoughtful with Thoughtless, and Clued-In with Clueless, where Thoughtless and Clueless are supposed to lack *any* common theme for their sensory and affective states, provides at best incidental support for anything beyond weak (TUT). To go beyond weak (TUT) requires comparing thought episodes both of which are thematically unified, but around different themes, a project that must await another occasion. I here only insist on the weak interpretation.

## V

The last section addressed the question whether 'Thoughtless' and 'Clueless' sensory and affective states, as described, must be taken to be directed at unrelated things (to the extent that they are directed at anything at all). I now turn to the blunt objection that even if 'Thoughtless' and 'Clueless' sensory and affective states are unrelated, there simply is no phenomenological difference between them and 'Thoughtful' and 'Clued-In' respectively. This objection strikes me as quite implausible. Familiarly, it is difficult to *argue* that it is. To a large extent, all one can do in this area is to put forward one's view of the matter for consideration, in the hope that it will resonate with the initially impartial reader. At least, I believe opponents of (TUT) would be wiser to put forward a less blunt objection. In particular, they might argue that if there is a phenomenological difference between the members of the pairs, it consists in something other than a difference in conceptually constituted thematic unity. I shall not try to answer this objection in full generality. I shall address it only as advanced by a hardline reductionist, since those who are not hardline reductionists have little reason to object to (TUT) to begin with. In the next section, I shall critically examine some specific proposals, drawn from recent hardline reductionist writings, as to what difference (other than one in conceptual thematic unity) may account for the intuitive phenomenal contrast between the members of the pairs.

Here I shall question a commitment of the hardline reductionist, *viz* to what I call a 'fuse-and-conjoin step'. The commitment is most readily brought out in terms of the Thoughtful/Thoughtless comparison. It is uncontroversial that the sensory or affective states attributed to Thoughtless do not individually suffice for Thoughtful's phenomenology. For example, suffering a surge of anxiety does not on its own provide Thoughtful's phenomenology. Nevertheless, according to the hardline reductionist, it is possible to reconstruct Thoughtful's phenomenology by fusing enough

sensory or affective states together,<sup>19</sup> the phenomenology of none of which (by the hardline reductionist's lights) constitutively involves any conceptual content; furthermore (the hardline reductionist is committed to thinking), this reconstruction is possible without assuming the mental episode that results from the fusion to have an intentional content which is not entailed by the conjunction of the contents of the states that go into the fusion. To claim that such a reconstruction is possible is to allow what I am calling a 'fuse-and-conjoin step'.

The reason why the hardline reductionist is committed to this emerges if one considers what could ground the attribution to the 'overall' fused state of an intentional content which is not entailed by the conjunction of the contents of the parts. As far as I can see, the only plausible basis for such an attribution is the claim that it is an aspect of the phenomenology of the resultant episode that it represents certain *interrelations* between ingredients of the contents of the parts, interrelations not deducible from the conjunction of the contents of the parts. This basis is not however available to hardline reductionists. For, as I said in the last section, any plausible candidate for such an integrative content in the cases I have considered is a conceptual content, which hardline reductionists think they can do without in their reconstruction.

Fuse-and-conjoin steps are risky, however. With respect to several aspects of phenomenal consciousness, such steps lead to error. Objectual unity, discussed above, is one example. One cannot reconstruct the objectual unity of a visual experience of a sponge by conceiving of it as a fusion of a colour experience of something yellow with a shape experience of something parallelepiped, without attributing to the fusion a content beyond what is entailed by the conjunction of the contents of these parts. Conjoining the contents of the colour and the shape experience only entails that there is something yellow present, and something rhomboid present, not that there is a yellow, rhomboid thing present. The point holds also across sensory modalities. Suppose you are holding the sponge in your hand, feeling its wetness, and hearing the squishy sound it makes on being squeezed, as you look at it. The phenomenology of your experience of the sponge cannot be reconstructed by fusing together your tactile experience of something wet here and auditory experience of something squishing here with the visual experience, without attributing to the fusion a content not entailed by the

<sup>19</sup> By 'fusing' phenomenal states together, I mean assuming that they are had by a single subject, at a time, in such a way that the phenomenal unity relation holds between them, i.e., in such a way that they are aspects of or subsumed by a single conscious state of the subject. See A. Brook and P. Raymont, 'The Unity of Consciousness' (2009), in E.N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2009/entries/consciousness-unity/>, §6.2, for an account of how this fusing talk can be interpreted so as to be consistent with a 'no experiential parts' view of consciousness.



conjunction of the contents of these parts. Again the conjunction only gives you that there is something rhomboid and yellow here, something wet here, and something squishing here, whereas it is an aspect of your phenomenology that it is one and the same thing that has this range of properties.<sup>20</sup>

*Gestalt* phenomena provide another example. Suppose you are facing a screen showing a square array of nine dots, three by three. Nine parts or aspects of your visual experience of the array can be distinguished, each of which takes in one dot only, and represents its shape, hue and egocentric location. The question is whether we can see the phenomenology of your visual experience of the array as the result of fusing together these nine experiences, without hypothesizing any content beyond what is entailed by conjoining the contents of these parts. We cannot. There is a phenomenal difference between seeing the array of dots as three rows and seeing it as three columns. Fusing together the part-experiences and conjoining their contents only gives us that there is such and such a dot at that place, such and such a dot at this place, and so on. It does not capture the higher-level *Gestalt* that (for example) these three dots form a column – an aspect of the phenomenology of the experience of the array.

The fact that objectual unity or *Gestalt* phenomena are obstacles to certain fuse-and-conjoin steps does not entail, of course, that the *particular* step to which the hardline reductionist is committed, in order to reconstruct Thoughtful's phenomenology, also fails. After all, some fuse-and-conjoin steps may be unobjectionable. For example, when one looks at a uniformly white wall, one can perhaps reconstruct, by such a step, the phenomenology of one's total visual experience from experiences corresponding respectively to the left and the right half of the visual field. Nevertheless, reflection on the noted obstacles to fuse-and-conjoin steps should at least cause some hesitation over the fuse-and-conjoin step the hardline reductionist is committed to taking. To put it roughly, objectual unity and *Gestalt* phenomena show that it can happen that certain phenomenal wholes have, as an aspect of their phenomenology, an integrative content, in which elements from the contents of the parts are interrelated in ways not deducible from conjoining the contents of these parts. I take it to be independently plausible, at least *prima facie*, that this *does* happen with the phenomenal whole formed by

<sup>20</sup> On some views, perceptual experiences may have singular (as opposed to existentially quantified) contents: see, e.g., Martin, p. 198. The argument of this paragraph can be run also on the supposition that each of the modality-specific experiences has singular content, concerning the sponge. Even so, fusing these experiences and conjoining their contents does not guarantee the cross-modal objectual unity of the experience of the sponge. For suppose the visual experience says, as it were, that *this* is yellow while the tactile experience says, as it were, that *that* is wet. It does not follow logically or obviously from the conjunction of these two contents that any one thing is both yellow and wet. This is so even if, in the case at hand, the relevant tokens of 'this' and 'that' refer to the same thing.

perceptual, imagistic, emotional and cognitive-feeling reactions associated with conscious thinking, when these are thematically unified. Why should the *prima facie* judgement here be explained away, when there is no need to do this for the perceptual cases? If the answer is simply that when it comes to the thematic unity of thinking, the integrative content is conceptual content, I do not see why the conceptual/non-conceptual distinction should make such a difference at this point.

Recently, Carruthers and Velliet (§3) have sought to establish that the distinction does make such a difference, developing an interesting argument for the general claim that the conceptual content cannot even partially be constitutive of the phenomenology of conscious states. Their argument, summarily stated, is this. Suppose the conceptual content of a conscious state *s* were constitutive of *s*'s having phenomenal property P. Then our phenomenal concepts of Pness, i.e., the concepts used in direct introspective recognition of a state of mind as P, would conceive it as involving the relevant content. But then it would be contradictory to entertain the following supposition: a P state (conceived via the phenomenal concept) has the phenomenology it has, but a different content. In other words, to hold phenomenology fixed while inverting content would not be so much as conceivable in terms of the phenomenal concept. Yet such conceivability is, in this case, the only way to secure an explanatory gap between a physical/functional description of the state and a conception of it via the phenomenal concept. In turn, the existence of such a gap is a necessary condition for the phenomenal concept to pick out a genuinely phenomenal property. Thus, contrary to supposition, P is not a phenomenal property.

Responding in full to this complex argument is beyond the scope of the present paper. I must rest content with noting that I find it hard to see how it fails to generalize to *non*-conceptual content. On grounds of the putative transparency of experience, I take it to be plausible that our phenomenal concept of what it is like to experience a certain hue, say, conceives of it as an experience of *that* [demonstratively presented] hue. This is so whether or not the representation of the hue in the perceptual experience itself is conceptual or non-conceptual. Thus it is contradictory to entertain the following supposition: this experience (conceived via the phenomenal concept) has the phenomenology it has, but another content, i.e., is not an experience of *that* hue. It seems, then, that Carruthers and Velliet are committed to holding that not even non-conceptual content can be constitutive of phenomenology – not, at least, in the case of perceptual experience, where it is plausibly assumed to have such a role. I am therefore not persuaded that Carruthers and Velliet have given any reason to doubt the very possibility of conceptual content having a constitutive significance for phenomenology.

## VI

The last section expressed doubt about the general project of reconstructing Thoughtful's phenomenology, by a fuse-and-conjoin step, from states the phenomenology of none of which involves grasping any conceptual content. I shall now consider some specific proposals as to how such a reconstructionist strategy might be implemented. As I have stressed, it is implausible that the description of Thoughtless as it stands amounts to a reconstruction of Thoughtful's phenomenology. For it is intuitively plausible that there is a phenomenal difference between these cases. Yet perhaps this intuition trades on the tacit and unselfconscious presumption that some other sensory or affective difference holds between the cases, where the phenomenology of the latter are constitutively independent of grasping any conceptual content? Reductionists or sensory-affective non-conceptualists have pointed to kinaesthetic imagery, patterns of attention, and certain cognitive feelings of confusion or coherence, as features of conscious episodes that are liable to be mistaken for a constitutive phenomenal contribution of conceptual content. Perhaps presumed differences in these respects lie behind our judgement of a phenomenal difference? If so, then adding attribution of such properties to my description of Thoughtless may turn it into a reconstruction of Thoughtful's phenomenology.

To look first at kinaesthetic imagery, in his defence of reductionism, Robinson (pp. 551–2) notes that visual imagery is, to put it roughly, subject to interpretation. To take Wittgenstein's example, there is a difference between imagery as of a man walking up a hill and imagery as of a man sliding down the hill, even if, were one to make a drawing of what one's imagery portrays, the drawings would be physically identical. Robinson allows that there can be a phenomenal difference here. He proposes that an account of it need not be in terms of conceptual content, but instead in terms of a difference in the kinaesthetic imagery which goes with each interpretation. Roughly, taking the man to be walking up the hill goes with kinaesthetic imagery appropriate to oneself walking upwards.

I find it hard to see how this proposal could generalize to all cases where there is a putative phenomenal difference depending on how sensory imagery is 'taken'. What difference in kinaesthetic imagery would correspond to the difference between imagery as of a plane crash and imagery as of a partially disassembled toy aeroplane on a modelling table? Secondly, could it not be that the kinaesthetic imagery itself is subject to interpretation, in broadly the same way as visual imagery? After all, the same bodily

movements may harbour different meanings on different occasions. A wave of the hand may be a goodbye or a mosquito repellent. So it might seem that focusing on kinaesthetic imagery just pushes the problem one step back. Thirdly, kinaesthetic imagery cannot plausibly account for the rich possibilities of thematic unity. Even if sensory imagery goes with kinaesthetic imagery of some sort, it is hardly plausible to think that, say, our interpretation of speech goes with matching imagery – to suppose, that is, that we have a kinaesthetic image corresponding to all the different phrases which we can understand, and which can ground thematic unity.

A second sort of tacitly presumed difference between Thoughtless/Clueless and Thoughtful/Clued-In may be in their patterns of attention. Such alleged differences have been central to perceptual non-conceptualist accounts of the contrast between seeing a figure as a duck and seeing it as a rabbit (see, e.g., Carruthers and Velliet). Invoking a notion of attention can be helpful for a hardline reductionist at this juncture only if that notion is not itself constitutively conceptual. Yet some notions of attention are thoroughly conceptual, as when one says ‘Let’s now attend to the cost-cutting agenda’. Attentional differences of this sort – say, in that only Thoughtful attends to plane crashes and their horrors – do not help the hardline reductionist.

A notion of attention which is more strictly tied to perception, where it refers to something that works very roughly like a ‘highlighter’ in the perceptual field, has a better claim not to be even partially constituted (as opposed to causally influenced) by conceptual thought about the things attended to. Operating, then, with this notion of attention, and considering the progression from Clueless to Clued-In, it is plausible that arriving at the Clued-In stage tends to go with a shift in the pattern of attention. When one grasps the thought about the pneumatic drill, certain patterns in the noise one hears may be more deeply processed and hence more saliently perceived. Arguably, the same goes for certain patterns in the dust one sees, and certain acoustic patterns in the words one hears. Anyone who is implicitly familiar with such attention-driven changes may be liable to presume that the transition from Clueless to Clued-In goes along with sensory changes of that kind. However, this still falls short of a credible complete account of what the phenomenal difference between them consists in. Changes in perceptual attention do not begin to address the inclination to think that the more saliently perceived patterns in the dust are also experienced as being *related to the same thing* as causes the more saliently perceived patterns in the sound, which, in turn, is experienced as being the same thing as is unsettling and that is spoken of by the words whose acoustic properties one more saliently perceives.

A third sort of tacitly presumed differences between the members of my two pairs may be in certain cognitive feelings of confusion or coherence. Such feelings have been invoked by hardline reductionists to account for the difference between hearing a sentence with, and without, understanding – a difference that may hold even when one perceives its syntax in both cases (see, e.g., Carruthers and Velliet). The description of Thoughtless' frame of mind, as contrasted with the preceding description of Thoughtful, creates the impression that his is a confusing motley of states. No doubt one would expect Thoughtless to find it so too. Could it be that a tacitly assumed sense of confusion, on the part of Thoughtless only, accounts for the intuition that his case phenomenally differs from Thoughtful's? Alternatively, could a tacitly presumed sense of coherence, or what psychologist sometimes call 'fluency', on the part of Thoughtful only, account for that intuition?

I think not. Although Thoughtless' mix of mental states is confusing, in the sense that it should provoke, and is disposed to provoke, confusion, it is common for people not to be confused by things that are confusing in this sense. I could stipulate that Thoughtless is not confused. This stipulation does little, I submit, to extinguish the intuition that his case is phenomenally different from Thoughtful's. Further, an account of the phenomenal contrast in terms of such cognitive feelings faces a dilemma. Assume it is an aspect of the phenomenology of Thoughtless' confusion that it is confusion about what the speech he hears, the imagery he entertains, the emotions he feels, and so on, all have to do with one another. Then the absence of thematic unity is, in effect, part of his phenomenology. Also, it is only by virtue of a certain conceptual content that his confusion can be confusion about such things. On this horn of the dilemma, then, conceptual content makes a constitutive contribution to the phenomenology of the confusion. That makes the first horn unavailable to a hardline reductionist.

Assume, on the other hand, that it is no aspect of the phenomenology of Thoughtless' confusion that it is confusion about such and such things. I could then stipulate that Thoughtful throughout also has a lingering sense of confusion about a logistical puzzle he was exploring before his friend came in and told him about the crash. This small addition to the story of Thoughtful does little, it seems to me, to extinguish the intuition that his case is phenomenally different from Thoughtless'. If one found it compelling that there was a phenomenal difference, on reading the stories as they stand, it would seem odd to retract the judgement on being offered the additional information that Thoughtful, by the way, has a lingering confusion about a certain logistical puzzle. Yet on this horn of the dilemma nothing prevents the assumption that Thoughtful's sense of confusion here is phenomenally just like the confusion allegedly presumed on Thoughtless' part. Thus

adding this confusion to Thoughtful should even out the phenomenal difference which, on the present hardline reductionist proposal, obtained before the addition. But this seems implausible. Essentially the same dilemma arises for the suggestion that a presumed sense of coherence, on the part of Thoughtful only, accounts for the intuition that there is such a phenomenal difference.

I have now considered extensions of three central proposals which hardline reductionists have offered to explain away apparent conceptualization features of the phenomenology of sensory imagery, perceptual experience, or speech perception. None helps much to explain away apparent conceptualization features associated with thematic unity in thought episodes. Perhaps hardline reductionists will come up with more promising proposals when they set about addressing the latter directly. At least, the above suggests that they are facing a live and importantly different challenge over thematic unity.

## VII

If conceptual content makes any constitutive contribution to the phenomenology of thinking, it plausibly makes the contribution entailed by the thematic unity thesis (TUT). Enthusiasts for a distinctively cognitive phenomenology should have no objection to the thesis. For those who are less enthusiastic, or are sympathetic towards reductionism, but nevertheless feel there is something right about the idea that the phenomenology of thinking may have a conceptual shape, the thesis marks a spot to dig in one's heels and stop the slide towards hardline reductionism.<sup>21</sup>

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