

# CASULLO ON EXPERIENTIAL JUSTIFICATION

R.M. FARLEY

ABSTRACT: In *A Priori Justification*, Albert Casullo argues that extant attempts to explicate experiential justification—by stipulation, introspection, conceptual analysis, thought experimentation, and/or appeal to intuitions about hypothetical cases—are unsuccessful. He draws the following conclusion: “armchair methods” such as these are inadequate to the task. Instead, empirical methods should be used to investigate the distinction between experiential and non-experiential justification and to address questions concerning the nature, extent, and existence of the a priori. In this essay, I show that Casullo has not refuted armchair explications of experiential justification, in particular those that appeal to introspectively accessible phenomenology. I do this by presenting a phenomenal theory of experiential justification that (a) has a significant degree of initial plausibility and (b) survives Casullo’s general attack on such theories. As a result, a premise in the central argument for Casullo’s signature proposal concerning the a priori is undermined.

KEYWORDS: rationalism, a priori justification, experiential justification, armchair philosophy, conceptual analysis, phenomenal properties, Albert Casullo

## 1. Introduction

Are any beliefs justified a priori? This central epistemological question is often thought to reduce to the question of whether any beliefs are non-experientially justified. To answer the latter question, however, it seems that we must be able to distinguish non-experiential justification from its experiential counterpart. And to do that, we need an explication of experiential justification.

In the important book *A Priori Justification*, Albert Casullo argues that extant attempts to explicate experiential justification—whether by stipulation, introspection, conceptual analysis, thought experimentation, and/or appeal to intuitions about hypothetical cases—are unsuccessful.<sup>1</sup> He draws the following pessimistic conclusion: these methods (hereafter “armchair methods”) just aren’t suitable for the task. Instead, Casullo claims, *empirical* methods should be used to investigate the distinction between experiential and non-experiential justification

---

<sup>1</sup> Albert Casullo, *A Priori Justification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 147-185.

R.M. Farley

and to address questions concerning the nature, extent, and/or existence of a priori justification. He writes:

I argue that [no extant proposals for articulating the relevant concept of experience by use of armchair methods] succeeds, and I propose viewing "experience" as a putative natural kind term whose extension is fixed by reference to the cognitive processes associated with the five senses. Whether those processes have important common properties, and, if so, what they are, are questions to be settled by empirical studies of human cognition. In short, uncovering the nature of experience is a matter for empirical, rather than a priori, investigation.<sup>2</sup>

It follows that, since the a priori/a posteriori distinction rests upon an account of the nature of experience (in the relevant sense), if the latter is a matter for largely or exclusively empirical investigation, then the same should hold true for the a priori/a posteriori distinction.<sup>3</sup>

The preceding argument can be reconstructed as an instance of *modus ponens*:

- (1) If armchair methods cannot provide an adequate account of experiential justification, then we should largely or exclusively employ empirical methods to investigate the a priori/a posteriori distinction.
- (2) Armchair methods cannot provide an adequate account of experiential justification.
- (3) Thus, we should largely or exclusively employ empirical methods to investigate the a priori/a posteriori distinction.

In what follows, I rebut premise (2) of Casullo's argument. I do this by showing that he has not decisively refuted explications of experiential justification that appeal to introspectively accessible phenomenology (hereafter "phenomenal theories"). It should be emphasized that Casullo's signature contribution to contemporary literature on the a priori is his development and defense of (3). Thus,

---

<sup>2</sup> Casullo, *A Priori Justification*, 148.

<sup>3</sup> Casullo's writings suggest, at times, that he thinks the a priori, construed as a general research topic, should *only* be investigated using empirical methods. But I'm not sure whether the writings that I discuss here imply methodological exclusivism. This depends, in part, on (a) how the a priori *qua* research topic is understood and (b) how empirical methods are distinguished from armchair methods. And this brief essay is no place to take up these difficult questions. For this reason, I formulate Casullo's first premise using the disjunction "largely or exclusively." Note, too, that even the non-exclusivist conclusion that we should *largely* employ empirical methods to investigate the a priori is both novel and provocative.

if, as I contend, the primary argument Casullo deploys in support of (3) has a false premise, this is a significant result.

I proceed by three steps. First, I propose a *prima facie* plausible phenomenal theory. Second, I introduce Casullo's critique of phenomenal theories and show that the theory I propose survives it. Third, I consider an alternative way of interpreting Casullo's critique of phenomenal theories. I then argue that it too fails. As a result, a central plank of Casullo's platform in *A Priori Justification*—namely, a premise of the primary argument for his most original and provocative claim about the a priori—is undermined.

## 2. A Phenomenal Theory of Experiential Justification

In this section, I put forward an account of experiential justification that is based upon the role that introspectively accessible phenomenological properties play in securing justified belief. This account has a significant degree of initial plausibility insofar as it (a) captures and articulates a notion of experiential justification that is common to epistemological discourse and (b) yields a promising distinction between a priori and a posteriori justifications that correctly classifies most of the paradigm cases of each. Although I do not claim that my account is beyond correction, I am confident that it is not vulnerable to Casullo's attack on phenomenal theories of experiential justification.

I begin with a stipulative definition of experience:

**(EXP):** For any mental state  $m$ ,  $m$  is an experiential state *iff*  $m$  has phenomenal character.<sup>4</sup>

David Chalmers describes the phenomenal character of an experience as “what it is like to have that experience.”<sup>5</sup> He continues: “Two perceptual experiences share their phenomenal character if what it is like to have one is the same as what it is like to have the other. We can say that in such a case, the

---

<sup>4</sup> Although (EXP) is introduced as a stipulative definition, it can be justified by reflection on paradigm experiential states, such as those associated with the five standard sensory modalities. For the sake of expository economy, I leave this task to the reader. I should note, in addition, that something close to this definition is *de rigor* among philosophers who work on knowledge, mind, and perception. For example, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Siegel writes “It is definitional of experiences... that they have some phenomenal character, or more briefly, some phenomenology.” See: Susanna Siegel, “The Contents of Perception,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/perception-contents/>, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> David Chalmers, “Perception and the Fall from Eden,” in *Perceptual Experience*, ed. Tamar Gendler and John Hawthorne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 50.

experiences instantiate the same phenomenal properties.”<sup>6</sup> Phenomenal properties are, in turn, qualitative properties like redness, painfulness, and sweetness. They are constitutive of what it’s like to be in a particular mental state.<sup>7</sup>

Although it’s tempting to characterize experiential justification as simply “justification that is provided by experiential states,” this proposal should be rejected. For there can be cases in which an experiential state justifies a belief but does so independently of its phenomenal character. Suppose, for instance, that whenever you grasp a basic arithmetical truth, the mental state through which you grasp this truth presents it to you as a sentence token constructed from bright green characters. You are thus aware of an accompanying phenomenal greenness whenever you grasp that  $28 + 12 = 40$ . From your own first-person point of view, your grasp of the arithmetical proposition is concurrent with your apprehension of phenomenal greenness; indeed, both are constitutive of a single mental state. Since the state in question has phenomenal character, it’s an experiential state. Even so, since its color phenomenology is unrelated to arithmetical truth, it’s quite unlikely that this state provides *experiential* justification for your belief that  $28 + 12 = 40$ .<sup>8</sup>

Given the preceding example, we should conclude that an experience *e*’s phenomenal character must play a role in its justifying belief *b* when the justification it provides (with respect to *b*) is experiential. Here is a more precise rendering of this proposal:

---

<sup>6</sup> Chalmers, “Perception,” 50.

<sup>7</sup> There are multiple mental state types that have phenomenal character, including visual states, auditory states, tactile states, gustatory states, olfactory states, emotional states, memorial states, and imagination states. Some philosophers have proposed that other common mental state types, such as occurrent beliefs and desires, have phenomenal character. See, for instance: David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); H.H. Price, “Some Considerations about Belief,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 35 (1934–1935): 229–252; Galen Strawson, *Mental Reality (second edition)* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010). Michael Tye and other representationalists deny that the states in question have phenomenal character; see, for reference, Tye’s *Ten Problems of Consciousness*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995). I take no definite stance on the matter. Nevertheless, it is clear enough that (EXP) need not yield the dubious classificatory result that *all* mental states are experiences. Unconscious, subconscious, and dispositional mental states are, presumably, bereft of phenomenal character and thus are not classified as experiential states by (EXP).

<sup>8</sup> In his memoir, Daniel Tammet, a synesthetic mathematical savant, reports “seeing numbers as shapes, colors, textures, and motions.” This gives my example some purchase. Since Tammet reports that the number five sounds like a thunder clap, his thoughts about that number are, presumably, experiences. Yet, surely, when he thinks about the sum of five and five the accompanying phenomenal character does not play a role in justifying his belief that it is ten. For reference see: Daniel Tammet, *Born on a Blue Day* (New York: The Free Press, 2006), 2.

**(EJ):** For any mental state  $m$  and any belief  $b$ ,  $m$  is an experiential justifier for  $b$  iff  $m$  is an experiential state that justifies  $b$  in virtue of its phenomenal character. If  $m$  is an experiential justifier for  $b$ , then  $m$  can provide experiential justification for  $b$ .

To illustrate, suppose Sven has a visual experience as of a black cat on the banister. His experience (a) instantiates the property of phenomenal blackness and in virtue of doing so (b) provides *prima facie* experiential justification for the belief that something black is on the banister. For if something black were on the banister, then, were Sven to look toward the banister, he'd have an experience with just that sort of phenomenal character.

The in-virtue-of relation that is central to (EJ) can be unpacked in multiple ways. The task of specifying and endorsing any particular way—i.e., the project of developing a general theory of experiential justification—is beyond the scope of this essay.<sup>9</sup> I therefore leave the in-virtue-of relation at the intuitive level. For present purposes, the key point is that  $m$  provides experiential justification for  $b$  iff  $m$ 's power to justify  $b$  depends upon its phenomenal character.

One strong reason to endorse (EJ) is that it yields, as should any satisfactory account of experiential justification, an illuminating and sensible characterization of the a priori/a posteriori distinction. To see this, consider the following rather uncontroversial definitions of a posteriori and a priori justification:

**A Posteriori Justification:** For any belief  $b$ ,  $b$  is justified a posteriori iff (i)  $b$  is immediately experientially justified or (ii)  $b$  is justifiably inferred from beliefs at least one of which is immediately experientially justified.<sup>10</sup>

**A Priori Justification:** For any belief  $b$ ,  $b$  is justified a priori iff (i)  $b$  is immediately but non-experientially justified or (ii)  $b$  is justifiably inferred from beliefs all of which are immediately but non-experientially justified.

When combined with (EJ), the above definitions yield:

**A Posteriori Justification2:** For any belief  $b$  and justifier  $j$ ,  $b$  is justified a posteriori iff (i)  $b$  is immediately justified by  $j$  in virtue of  $j$ 's phenomenal character or (ii)

---

<sup>9</sup> To be clear, the project of developing a general theory of experiential justification includes the project of explaining, in detail, *how* perception justifies belief. This is one of epistemology's central explanatory aims. It should go without saying that I cannot offer a comprehensive discussion of this topic in a short essay with a rather different aim; i.e., developing and defending an account of what experiential justification *is* (rather than explaining how and why experiential justifiers are justificatory.)

<sup>10</sup> The concept of immediate justification is here understood as justification that is non-inferential, where non-inferential justification is justification that does not derive from a subject's doxastic states.

can be justifiably inferred from at least one belief that is so justified.

**A Priori Justification<sub>2</sub>:** For any belief *b* and justifier *j*, *b* is justified a priori iff (i) *b* is immediately justified by *j* in virtue of something other than *j*'s phenomenal character or (ii) is justifiably inferred from beliefs all of which are so justified.

Now, suppose it visually appears to Bill that there's red bird in the tree. It's reasonable to think that (a) this visual appearance justifies Bill in believing that there's a red bird in the tree and (b) the justification it provides, in this instance, is a posteriori. Indeed, this appears to be a paradigm case of a posteriori justification. Given (a), **A Posteriori Justification<sub>2</sub>** predicts and explains (b). This is because Bill's visual appearance wouldn't be able to justify the relevant belief if it didn't instantiate the property of phenomenal redness. Thus, the visual appearance's capacity to justify Bill's belief depends upon its phenomenal character. The justification it provides is thereby a posteriori.

Now suppose Abby has the intuition that everything that has a shape has a size. It's reasonable to think that (a) this intuition justifies Abby in believing that everything that has a shape has a size and (b) the justification it provides in this instance is a priori.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, this appears to be a paradigm case of a priori justification. Given (a), **A Priori Justification<sub>2</sub>** predicts and explains (b). This is because, even if we assume Abby's intuition has phenomenal character (including the kind of phenomenal character that would enable her to introspectively identify it as an intuition) it would still justify the belief in question if it had a *different* phenomenal character (or no phenomenal character at all).<sup>12</sup> Indeed, we can vary the intuition's phenomenal character without modifying its content and, by extension, its justificatory powers.

---

<sup>11</sup> I hold that intuitions are intellectual seemings. One influential characterization of intellectual seemings is found in: George Bealer, "A Theory of the A Priori," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 81 (2000):1-30. Another is found in: Michael Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). A more recent account is found in Elijah Chudnoff, *Intuition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). For present purposes, I withhold judgment on the matter of which characterization of intellectual seemings is the most promising.

<sup>12</sup> Assume that intuitions have a certain kind of phenomenal character that enables a subject to introspectively identify them as intuitions. Even so, in ordinary circumstances, one suspects that intuitions justify beliefs without being introspectively identified as intuitions. For instance, Abby's intuition justifies the belief in question even when she doesn't engage in any active reflection of the sort that would yield judgments like "I am having the intuition that  $\delta$ " or "This thought about  $\delta$  is an intuition." For accounts of intuitions that make similar assumptions about their phenomenal character, see: Laurence Bonjour, *In Defense of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 100-110 and Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 105-106.

To see this, suppose that when Abby has the intuition in question she also becomes aware of a buzzing sound. Indeed, her awareness of the sound is partly constitutive of her intuition that everything that has a shape has a size. Even so, if the auditory properties of Abby's intuition were altogether absent, it would still have the power to justify her belief that everything that has a shape has a size. In this instance, then, the intuition's capacity to justify Abby's belief is independent of its phenomenal character. The justification it provides is therefore a priori. This result, together with the one in the paragraph before last, shows that (EJ) can be used to fix the a priori/a posteriori distinction in a way that is consistent with paradigm cases of a priori and a posteriori justified belief. And, contra Casullo, (EJ) is the product of and is supported by armchair methods; e.g., thought experimentation and reflection on hypothetical cases.

### 3. Casullo's Challenge to Phenomenal Theories

Casullo maintains that phenomenal theories of experiential justification are uniformly inadequate. He writes:

... for the [distinction between experiential and non-experiential states/justifiers] to be marked at the phenomenological level, there must be some general phenomenological feature that is (a) exemplified in the phenomenological states associated with all the various types of sense experience, and (b) is also exemplified in the phenomenological states associated with all the other forms of experience alleged to be incompatible with a priori justification. It is dubious that either condition obtains.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Casullo, *A Priori Justification*, 150. In both this passage and the chapter from which it is drawn, Casullo primarily focuses on critiquing extant accounts of *experience* rather than accounts of experiential justification. Even so, his ultimate focus is squarely on the distinction between experiential and non-experiential justification. Indeed, Casullo begins the chapter in question by claiming (*op. cit.*, 148) that if "that distinction is not coherent, the traditional debate over the a priori is rooted in conceptual confusion. Hence, we now turn to the question of whether there is a coherent concept of non-experiential justification." Given this focus, it is not surprising that Casullo moves back and forth between discussing experiential states and experiential justification. And it is not surprising that he proposes *epistemic* conditions on the concept of experience, such as the second condition in the passage quoted above. Ultimately, Casullo is committed to the view that if we cannot distinguish between experiential and non-experiential states, then we cannot draw a distinction between experiential and non-experiential justification. But as (EJ) shows, this view is unfounded. Even if *all* occurrent mental states are experiences, in the sense that they have phenomenal character, (EJ) can be used to differentiate between experiential and non-experiential justification. Thus, (EJ) provides the sort of distinction between experiential and non-experiential justification that Casullo takes to be a necessary pre-condition for making sense of the a priori.

In this passage, Casullo proposes two adequacy conditions on phenomenal theories. First, a generality condition: to identify states  $m_1$  and  $m_2$  as (potential) experiential justifiers, we must be able to identify a general phenomenological feature they share. Second, the phenomenological feature in question must be possessed by justifiers other than sense experiences (e.g. testimonial and memorial justifiers) that are widely thought to provide a posteriori (rather than a priori) justification.<sup>14</sup> He then argues that these conditions are not satisfied by extant phenomenal theories and unlikely to be satisfied by any successor theories.

Casullo notes, correctly, that there are no general phenomenal properties common to all sense-experiential states (and, by extension, sense-experiential justifiers). For instance, the phenomenal character of visual experiences is quite different from the phenomenal character of auditory experiences. Indeed, there do not appear to be any phenomenal properties that the two kinds of sensory states share (with each other or any other kind of sense-experiential state). As a result of this, Casullo infers that no phenomenal theory will meet his generality condition.<sup>15</sup>

This conclusion is premature. (EJ) is a phenomenal theory that marks the distinction between experiential and non-experiential justification, but it does not do so by appeal to any common phenomenal property shared by all paradigm experiential states. Instead, (EJ) appeals to the bare instantiation of justification-enabling phenomenal properties. The theory presupposes that experiential states possess the second-order property of *having phenomenal character* in addition to instantiating the particular first-order phenomenal properties that enable

---

<sup>14</sup> This condition is motivated by remarks from Plantinga, *Warrant*, 91. Plantinga claims that memorial and testimonial justification cannot be a priori; this position is no doubt shared by other friends of the a priori.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, Casullo, *A Priori Justification*, 150: “[concerning] experiences associated with the five senses... we readily distinguish between, say, auditory and visual experiences on the basis of differences in their phenomenological character. The fact that these different forms of experience (in the broad sense) have a unique phenomenological character is not sufficient to ensure that the difference between experiential (in the narrow sense) and non-experiential states can be marked in terms of differences in their phenomenological character.” He continues (*op. cit.*), “Roderick Chisholm, for example, characterizes the states associated with the five senses in terms of *sensible characteristics*. Sensible characteristics, in turn, comprise the “proper objects,” which are unique to each of the senses, along with the “common sensibles,” which are common to all the senses. Chisholm illustrates the proper objects of each of the senses by providing examples of visual characteristics, auditory characteristics, and so on. The common sensibles are also illustrated by examples such as rest, number, figure, and magnitude. Hence, in the final analysis, Chisholm fails to provide a general characterization of the concept of a sensible characteristic. He fails to identify some general phenomenological feature common to sense experience in its various forms.”

individual state tokens to serve as experiential justifications for specific beliefs. Possession of the second-order property is the general phenomenological feature these states have in common such that they are experiences. It's what facilitates their falling within a single classificatory category. Moreover, instantiation of the relevant first-order properties is what enables token experiential states to provide experiential justification. Thus, the general phenomenological feature that experiential justifiers share is the second-order property of *having justificatory powers in virtue of their phenomenal character*. In view of the above, it is safe to say that (EJ) is a phenomenal theory that meets Casullo's (well-motivated) first condition.

Casullo's second condition, by contrast, is not well motivated. This is because, aside from the core condition of being non-experiential in character, there aren't any necessary conditions on a priori justifiers—conditions of the sort that would decisively prohibit memorial and testimonial justifiers from being a priori—that have been uniformly endorsed by advocates of the a priori. Indeed, a review of the recent literature reveals that a variety of different and sometimes incompatible conditions on a priori justification have been proposed.<sup>16</sup>

For instance, Kitcher claims that if *b* is justified a priori, then its justification is *infallible*.<sup>17</sup> Swinburne claims that if *b* is justified a priori, then it is *necessarily true*.<sup>18</sup> Ewing claims that if *b* is justified a priori, then it is *self-evident*.<sup>19</sup> By contrast, Kaplan calls attention to the belief that *I am here now*, arguing that it can be justified a priori despite the fact that its content is contingent and its provenance is introspection.<sup>20</sup> And Burge contends that testimony can provide a priori entitlement.<sup>21</sup> What the views of these philosophers have in common is a conception of a priori justification as experience-independent justification. Beyond this minimalist conception of a priori justification, however, there appears to be little consensus about whether there are additional conditions on the a priori and, if so, how they should be articulated.

---

<sup>16</sup> In support of this point see Casullo's own review of the literature in *A Priori Justification*, 9–32.

<sup>17</sup> Philip Kitcher, *The Nature of Mathematical Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>18</sup> R.G. Swinburne, "Analyticity, Necessity, and Apriority," *Mind* 84, 334 (1975): 225–243.

<sup>19</sup> A. C. Ewing, *The Fundamental Questions of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1951), 26–52.

<sup>20</sup> David Kaplan, "Demonstratives: An Essay on the Semantics, Logic, Metaphysics, and Epistemology of Demonstratives and Other Indexicals," in *Themes from Kaplan*, eds. Joseph Almog, John Perry, and Howard Wettstein (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 481–614.

<sup>21</sup> Tyler Burge, "Content Preservation," *The Philosophical Review* 102, 4 (1993): 457–488.

Given this rather significant absence of consensus, it's hard to see why we should follow Casullo in presupposing that an acceptable phenomenal theory must classify as experiential those justifiers—in particular testimonial and memorial justifiers—that *some* philosophers have “alleged to be incompatible with a priori justification.” Perhaps the most sensible way of drawing the distinction between experiential and non-experiential justification just cannot accommodate the complete set of views held by some of the leading champions of the a priori. So much the worse, then, for them!

In conjunction with this point, it should be acknowledged that beliefs about color incompatibilities might be cited as counterexamples to (EJ). This because many philosophers think that the belief that *nothing can be red all over and green all over at the same time* is a paradigm case of a priori justified belief.<sup>22</sup> Since, however, this belief concerns phenomenal properties like red and green, one might conclude that any mental state that justifies it will only do so in virtue of its phenomenal character. If that's the case, then, given the classificatory scheme that results from (EJ), the belief that nothing can be red all over and green all over at the same time will, surprisingly, be justified a posteriori. And this outcome might be thought to undermine the claim that (EJ) fixes the a priori/a posteriori distinction in an acceptable way.

Although the force of this objection should be recognized, there is a straightforward *tu quoque* defense that rests on the observation that color incompatibility claims are very odd. They are alleged to be necessary truths.<sup>23</sup> Yet they appear to be expressed by synthetic sentences and to concern relations between phenomenal properties, acquaintance with which results from particular visual experiences of contingent empirical entities and events.<sup>24</sup> This quizzical conjunction of attributes, however, is precisely why color incompatibilities are philosophically interesting: they are not very easily captured by a number of otherwise promising classificatory schemas. Indeed, Dale Jacquette makes the provocative claim that Wittgenstein's abandonment of the semantic program of the *Tractatus* was the result of his “dissatisfaction with its...implications for the color incompatibility problem.”<sup>25</sup> Jerrold Katz makes the even more provocative claim

---

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance: Bonjour, *In Defense of Pure Reason*, 2; Quassim Cassam, *The Possibility of Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 196-210.

<sup>23</sup> One popular source for this allegation is: D. F. Pears, “Incompatibilities of Colours,” in *Logic and Language (second series)*, ed. Antony Flew (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), 112-122.

<sup>24</sup> For an early defense of the syntheticity of color incompatibility claims see: Arthur Pap, “Are All Necessary Propositions Analytic?” *Philosophical Review* 50, 4 (1949): 299-320.

<sup>25</sup> Dale Jacquette, *Wittgenstein's Thought in Transition* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1998), 185.

that “The three movements in which most analytic philosophy of this century has been done, Wittgenstein’s late philosophy, Rudolf Carnap’s neo-Humean empiricism, and W.V. Quine’s neo-Millian empiricism, were each, in large measure, responses to the [color incompatibility] problem.”<sup>26</sup> Unsurprisingly, then, there has emerged a large body of literature that attempts to make sense of the star-crossed semantic, epistemic, and modal properties of color incompatibility claims.<sup>27</sup> And given the significant classificatory challenges found in that literature, I should think that if an otherwise plausible theory of the a priori assigns a posteriori status to beliefs about color incompatibilities, this hardly suffices for outright rejection of the theory.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Jerrold Katz, “The Problem in Twentieth Century Philosophy,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 95, 11 (1998): 549

<sup>27</sup> For a strong bibliography and an overview of many significant twentieth century papers on color incompatibilities, see: R. G. A. Dolby, “Philosophy and the *Incompatibility of Colours*,” *Analysis* 34 (1973): 8-16.

<sup>28</sup> I should also note that there is at least some basis for thinking that claims about color incompatibilities are analytic. For a classic defense of this view, see: Hilary Putnam, “Reds, Greens, and Logical Analysis,” *The Philosophical Review* 65, 2 (1956): 206-217. For a qualified defense, see: Katz, “The Problem,” 574-575. More recently, Brian Kierland has argued, with some force, that *nothing can be red all over and green all over at the same time* is either analytic or contingent (contra the view that it is necessary but not analytic). For reference see: Brian Kierland, “Necessity and Color Incompatibility,” *Disputatio* 31, 4 (2011): 235-237. If these philosophers are correct and color incompatibility claims *are* (in some sense) analytic, then it’s unlikely that beliefs about them are justified by appeal to the phenomenal character of the justifying mental state. I don’t purport to offer an account of how beliefs with contents expressed by analytic sentences are justified. But presumably such beliefs are about logical relations between concepts and/or meanings. And neither concepts nor meanings are colored. Thus, it’s hard to see how color phenomenology would have any direct role to play in justifying beliefs concerning logical relations between concepts and/or meanings.

Now, suppose that claims about color incompatibilities are synthetic. If so, then there’s some basis for thinking that they are about universals; i.e., that *nothing can be red all over and green all over at the same time* ultimately makes a claim about the incompatibility of the properties redness and greenness *qua* universals. Although it’s tempting to think claims about redness and greenness are going to be justified in virtue of the phenomenal character of their justifiers, this temptation can (and perhaps should) be resisted. For one thing, if we say that, for instance, redness is itself a red entity, we invite Plato’s Third Man to lecture us about the danger of explanatory regresses. If, however, we deny that redness is a red entity, then it’s rather difficult to see how red color phenomenology would play a direct role in justifying beliefs about redness (though having experiences with red phenomenal character is perhaps a necessary precondition for *forming* beliefs about redness). Alternatively, if we insist that redness is red, despite the potential explanatory regress, it’s still difficult to see how red color phenomenology would play a direct role in justifying beliefs about redness *qua* universal. This is because any mental state that

Suppose that, despite the concerns expressed above, we accept Casullo's second condition. The point of the second condition is, it seems, to prevent testimonial and memorial justifiers from being categorized as a priori. Thus, it should be noted that there is a reasonable basis for thinking that (EJ) classifies (most familiar) testimonial and memorial justifiers as experiential. Assume, with a number of prominent philosophers, that memory and testimony are *preservative* sources of justification; i.e., they maintain and transmit previously acquired justification rather than generating new justification.<sup>29</sup> On this view, when a testimonial or memorial justifier is anchored by an experiential generative justifier, the justification it provides is also experiential. We should therefore expect a priori and a posteriori status to track generative justifiers rather than preservative justifiers. If that's correct, then (EJ) will classify as a posteriori any testimonial and memorial justifiers that transmit (or preserve) experiential justification, even if their justificatory powers are independent of their immediate phenomenal character. This, in turn, should moderate the concern that a phenomenal theory such as (EJ) would yield untenable classificatory results.<sup>30</sup>

---

has redness as part of its phenomenal character will instantiate a specific shade (or shades) of red. But the obviousness and immediacy of *nothing can be red all over and green all over at the same time* suggests it's not justified by considering the incompatibility of this particular shade of red with that particular shade of green and then making an inductive inference. Perhaps, instead, we immediately grasp, however inchoately, that *nothing can be red all over and green all over at the same time* is an instance of the more general claim that any two determinates of a determinable exclude one another (e.g., that being ten pounds excludes being twelve pounds). This proposal is hinted at, though not fully developed in: W.D. Hart, *The Evolution of Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 40. In a related context, Mares notes that "we do sometimes see that certain concepts have logical relations to one another and this does not require further propositional thought...just an ability (that is innate or learned) to see certain logical connections." For reference see: Edwin Mares, *A Priori* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 48-49. If the above is correct, then maybe color incompatibility beliefs are justified in virtue of our grasping that their contents exemplify a relation between determinates and determinables *in general* rather than a relation between color properties in particular. It would then seem, however, that color phenomenology is epistemically superfluous with respect to the positive epistemic status of *nothing can be red all over and green all over at the same time*.

<sup>29</sup> See, for instance: Robert Audi, *Epistemology: a Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, (New York: Routledge, 2011), 131-153; Michael Dummett, "Testimony and Memory," in *Knowing from Words*, eds. Bimal Matilal and Arindam Chakrabarti (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 251-272; Plantinga, *Warrant*, 65-88.

<sup>30</sup> It should be emphasized that there is a striking lack of consensus about how to even begin to model testimonial and memorial justification. For that reason, it hardly seems appropriate to demand, well in advance of any such consensus, that testimonial and memorial justifiers be

#### 4. The Concept of Phenomenal Properties

It may be that Casullo intends to present a deeper challenge to phenomenal theories of experiential justification. This is suggested when Casullo claims, while critiquing Roderick Chisholm's analysis of experience, that Chisholm "fails to provide a general characterization of the concept of a sensible characteristic" and "... fails to identify some general phenomenological feature common to sense experience in its various forms."<sup>31</sup> The second sentence here suggests that Casullo wants Chisholm to identify a feature or property common to all sense-experiential states (and thus to all experiential justifiers). As I demonstrated in the previous section, (EJ) satisfies this demand. The first sentence, however, suggests that Casullo may also want an explication of the concept of a phenomenal property.

Notice, then, that Casullo takes Chisholm to task for failing to provide a general account of the concept of a sensible characteristic. Chisholm stands accused, rather like Euthyphro, of giving mere *examples* of  $\phi$  (in this case colors, odors, shapes, and so forth) where what's needed is a theoretical definition or conceptual analysis of  $\phi$ . Although Chisholm is focused on sensible characteristics (which he thinks of as the *objects* of sense-experiential states and thus as properties of external entities) rather than phenomenal properties, one might expect Casullo to level similar accusations at the advocates of (EJ). For if (a) what experiential justifiers have in common is that their justificatory powers depend upon their phenomenal character and (b) phenomenal character is understood in terms of instantiating phenomenal properties, one might sensibly wonder what makes the properties in question phenomenal. Perhaps, then, Casullo intends to question whether the concept of a phenomenal property (and the related concept of phenomenal character) can be given an intelligible explication. If not, then the second-order properties that fix (EJ) cannot be clearly articulated. No doubt this would be cause for concern. For if there is no basis for distinguishing phenomenal

---

classified as a posteriori. Even so, aside from the preservative model, there are other reasonable positions on testimonial and memorial justification that do not, given (EJ), yield the result that (most) memorial and testimonial justifiers are a priori. For instance, one might conclude, after adopting the Humean position that testimonial justification is reducible to a conjunction of perceptual, memorial, and inferential justification, that testimonial justification is always inferential. One might argue, similarly, that memorial justification is inferential insofar as the memory that  $p$  is a premise, along with the belief that one's memory is reliable, in an argument that can be used to justify the belief that  $p$ . In each case, there will usually be empirical premises at work in the generation of testimonial and memorial justification.

<sup>31</sup> Casullo, *A Priori Justification*, 150.

properties from other kinds of properties, then, by extension, there's no basis for distinguishing experiential justifiers from other kinds of justifiers.<sup>32</sup>

Unfortunately, there's no widely accepted explication, criterion, or set of jointly necessary and sufficient conditions for the concept of a phenomenal property. Instead, when philosophers introduce the terms "phenomenal property" and "phenomenal character," they usually define them by ostentation. For instance, here is how Chalmers introduces the concept of a phenomenal property:

Consciousness involves the instantiation of phenomenal properties. These properties characterize aspects of what it is like to be a subject (what it is like to be me right now, for example, or what it is like to be a bat) or what it is like to be in a mental state (what it is like to see a certain shade of green, for example, or what it is like to feel a certain sharp pain). Whenever there is something it is like to be in a mental state, that state has specific phenomenal properties.<sup>33</sup>

Chalmers points to various first-order "feelings" and claims that what they have in common is that there is something that it is like to have them. Definitions of this kind pervade the philosophical literature and are widely taken to render the concept of a phenomenal property intelligible. While Chalmers' definition may not be as illuminating as we'd like, it does pick out a feature of numerous mental states that we are prepared to grant *prima facie* recognition; namely, that they have properties that somehow give rise to something-it-is-likeness.

When we reflect on a token pain state, we can discern that it has among its various properties both painfulness and being-indexed-to-time-*t*. It's doubtful that there is "something it is like" when a mental state instantiates the latter property. By contrast, the former property is a paradigm of something-it-is-like-ness. Thus, there is a seemingly intelligible distinction between the phenomenal and non-phenomenal properties of mental states. Of course, absent some further account of "something-it-is-like-ness," this approach may well be hopeless; it offers only to exchange one insufficiently clear term for another. Does this point undercut (EJ)?

The proper response here is to note that even among philosophers who think phenomenal properties themselves are superfluous, explicable in terms of representational content, or otherwise able to be explained away, there is a near consensus that the concept of a phenomenal property is intelligible.<sup>34</sup> There is

---

<sup>32</sup> It wouldn't be hard to miss this point in Casullo's discussion of phenomenal theories, since the discussion goes by very quickly. Indeed, it lasts for only three paragraphs.

<sup>33</sup> David Chalmers, "The Representational Character of Experience," in *The Future for Philosophy*, ed. Brian Leiter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 154-155.

<sup>34</sup> For (EJ) to be intelligible, what's needed, at a minimum, is a coherent *conceptual* distinction between phenomenal properties and other kinds of mental state properties. We don't necessarily

agreement that, for instance, there is something it's like to hit one's thumb with a hammer. And none of us would like to be hit with a hammer precisely because we have a sense of what it would be like. If we knew how to theoretically account for something-it-is-likeness, we might then be in a position to deliver a satisfying explication of the concept. Still, a consensus prevails despite our philosophical failings. We are able to sensibly use the concept of a phenomenal property even though we cannot provide necessary and sufficient conditions for its extension. And we are not required to give a final analysis of a concept (or distinction) before putting it to use. Indeed, as Michael Huemer contends, "no generally accepted analysis of any philosophically interesting term has yet been devised."<sup>35</sup> If he's correct, then such a constraint would render much of philosophy (and ordinary conversation) impossible; ergo, the constraint is untenable. Moreover, given the rather poor track record to which Huemer points, even those of us who aren't quite as pessimistic about conceptual analysis should nevertheless be wary of any proposal to link the intelligibility or theoretical *bona fides* of a concept to our grasp of its final analysis.

According to (EJ), when mental states that possess phenomenal character justify beliefs in virtue of that character, the kind of justification they provide is experiential. If Casullo is prepared to deny the very intelligibility of the concept of a phenomenal property, he can then deny that (EJ) is an intelligible account of experiential justification.<sup>36</sup> But this would be a high price to pay for a rather limited philosophical victory. For the concept of a phenomenal property is intelligible, even if the best we can do to limn the borders of its extension is to

---

need this conceptual distinction to track a fundamental metaphysical difference. It could be that representationalism is correct; i.e., it could be that phenomenal character supervenes on (or consists in) representational content and that phenomenal properties are not *sui generis* properties but supervene upon (or are a species of) representational properties. Even so, if we can conceptually differentiate the phenomenal-seeming representational properties from other representational properties, a view that advocates of representationalism tend to endorse, then that's all we need to ensure that (EJ) makes sense. The same point applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to other reductionist approaches to the metaphysics of phenomenal properties. For more on representationalism see: Alex Byrne, "Intentionalism Defended," *The Philosophical Review* 110, 2 (2001): 199-240; Fred Dretske, *Naturalizing the Mind* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press), 1995; Tye, *Ten Problems of Consciousness*, 1995.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Huemer, "The Failure of Analysis and the Nature of Concepts," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Philosophical Methods*, ed. Chris Daly (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 52.

<sup>36</sup> For some evidence that Casullo does not think the concept of a phenomenal property is unintelligible, see: Albert Casullo, "Phenomenal Properties," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 60, 2 (1982):167-169.

R.M. Farley

point to various mental states and note that they feel some kind of way.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, even if the concept of a phenomenal property is *sui generis*, we can still sensibly employ it in our account of experiential justification.

## 5. Implications for Casullo's Project

Casullo claims that “[armchair] arguments both for and against the existence of a priori knowledge are largely inconclusive” and, as a result, we should take “a different approach to addressing the issue of the existence of a priori knowledge: one that appeals to empirical evidence.”<sup>38</sup> The proposal that we use largely or exclusively empirical methods to determine whether there is a priori knowledge or justification (and, if there is, its nature and scope) is Casullo's signature contribution to the literature on the a priori. Its credibility rests upon the claim that armchair methods cannot yield an adequate account of experiential justification; i.e., premise (2) in my reconstruction of his argument for empirical investigation.

In preceding sections, I presented a *prima facie* plausible armchair-based phenomenal theory of experiential justification—(EJ)—which says, roughly, that *m* provides experiential justification for *b* iff *m*'s power to justify *b* depends upon its phenomenal character. I then showed that (EJ) is not susceptible to Casullo's attempts to refute phenomenal theories. This result undermines premise (2) of Casullo's argument for empirical investigation. Thus, I conclude that armchair methods can and should play a substantial role in our ongoing investigation of the a priori.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Perhaps there will be intractable disagreements, then, about what properties are correctly classified as phenomenal. That result is perfectly consistent with the claim that there is a category of properties that are what they are because there is something it is like for them to be instantiated.

<sup>38</sup> Albert Casullo, “Response to my Critics: Chris Pincock, Lisa Warenski and Jonathan Weinberg,” *Philosophical Studies* 173, 6 (2016):1706.

<sup>39</sup> I would like to thank Walter Edelberg, Alejandro Vazquez del Mercado, and an anonymous referee for helpful feedback on this paper and/or the views it expresses.