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In Defense of Phenomenal Concepts

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Abstract: In recent debates, both physicalist and anti-physicalist philosophers of mind have come to agree that understanding the nature of phenomenal concepts is key to understanding the nature of phenomenal consciousness itself. Recently, however, Derek Ball (2009) and Michael Tye (2009) have argued that there are no such concepts. Their case is especially troubling because they make use of a type of argument that proponents of phenomenal concepts have typically found persuasive in other contexts; namely, arguments much like those that Tyler Burge used to motivate a certain form of externalism about mental content. The goal of this paper is to defend phenomenal concepts against this line of attack. Burge-style arguments, I contend, cannot be successfully used to make the case that there are no phenomenal concepts. As such, phenomenal concepts must remain central to understanding the nature of phenomenal consciousness.

In recent debates, both physicalist and anti-physicalist philosophers of mind have come to agree that understanding the nature of phenomenal *concepts* is key to understanding the nature of phenomenal consciousness itself. Anti-physcialist arguments emphasize the special epistemic access to the phenomenal that these concepts make possible,[1] and the most promising physicalist response to these arguments hinges on phenomenal concepts being capable of explaining our unique access to the phenomenal while themselves being fully physically explicable.[2] Though there is much disagreement about what exactly makes phenomenal concepts special and about how much explanatory work they can actually do while remaining physically explicable, physicalists

1 See, e.g., Chalmers (2003, 2007), Nida-Rumelin (2007), White (2007).
2 This is the so-called phenomenal concept strategy, see Loar (1997), Papineau (2002, 2007), Tye (1995, 2000, 2003), Perry (2001), Balog (1999, forthcoming), Carruthers and Veillet (2007), among others.

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and anti-physicalists alike share a commitment to the existence of such concepts—they are, we might say, *phenomenal concept theorists*.[3]

Given that the very structure of current debates about phenomenal consciousness relies upon this commitment to phenomenal concepts, arguments that call their existence into question will have broad implications. The most recent such argument is especially sweeping because its proponents, Derek Ball (2009) and Michael Tye (2009), make minimal assumptions about phenomenal concepts. According to Ball and Tye, phenomenal concepts are concepts of experience that must meet what we can call the *Experience Condition*: they can be possessed only by those who have had the relevant types of experience. Insofar as virtually all phenomenal concept theorists, whatever their differences, concede that phenomenal concepts must meet this *Experience Condition*, to deny that there are *any* concepts that meet the condition is to undermine phenomenal concept theorists across the board. The argument is also deeply troubling because it draws on Burgean considerations that phenomenal concept theorists have typically found persuasive in other contexts, i.e., in cases involving deferential concepts (see Burge 1979, 1986). In a sense, Ball (2009) and Tye (2009) seem to present phenomenal concept theorists with a dilemma: they can either dismiss highly compelling Burgean arguments, or they can deny that there are phenomenal concepts.

The goal of this paper is to defend phenomenal concepts against this line of attack. I begin with a presentation of the case presented by Tye and Ball and of their attempts to draw an analogy between phenomenal and deferential concepts (Section 1). I then argue that it is a mistake to co-opt Burgean considerations against the phenomenal concept theorist (Section 2). I conclude that since the argument from Tye and Ball fails, phenomenal concepts should remain central to ongoing debates about the nature of phenomenal consciousness.

3 Like Ball (2009) I use the phrase 'phenomenal concept theorist' to refer to anyone who is committed to the existence of phenomenal concepts regardless of their metaphysics.

1. The Case Against Phenomenal Concepts

There is significant disagreement among phenomenal concept theorists about how exactly to delineate the set of phenomenal concepts; that is, about which set of features exactly makes these concepts special.[4] There is, however, a consensus about the minimal requirements on phenomenal concepts. Ball (2009) formalizes these in his *Phenomenal Concept Criterion* (PCC, notation modified):

> (PCC) A concept c is a phenomenal concept C* only if:
>
> (i) there is some phenomenal experience of type *e*, and some property *p*, such that experience tokens fall under *e* in virtue of their relation to *p*;
>
> (ii) *c* refers to *p*; and
>
> (iii) *(Experience Condition)* under normal circumstances, a human being can possess *c* only if she has had an experience of type *e*. (Ball 2009, 938)

Ball's Criterion makes explicit, first, that phenomenal concepts are concepts of the phenomenal, that is, concepts that refer to the phenomenal properties of our experience. Second, it draws attention to the fact that phenomenal concepts must, at the very least, meet the *Experience Condition* (condition (iii)): they can be possessed *only by* thinkers who have introspected or are currently introspecting an experience with the relevant phenomenal properties. This *Experience Condition* is motivated by certain well-known observations about Mary the omniscient colour scientist. Intuitively, it would seem that Mary, while in her black-and-white room, is missing a particular perspective on phenomenal colour experience and with it a certain way of thinking about or conceptualizing these experiences. It also seems that this particular perspective is one that Mary can acquire only by actually undergoing and introspecting the relevant experiences herself.

4 See Balog (2009) for an overview of possible accounts.

Phenomenal concept theorists conclude that whatever else may happen to Mary when she finally experiences colour, she must at the very least come to think about or conceptualize the phenomenal properties of her experiences differently.[5] And this is just to say that Mary acquires new *concepts* of phenomenal properties when she finally experiences colour. Note that the notion of 'concept' employed here is itself rather minimal. Phenomenal concept theorists claim that Mary acquires new concepts insofar as she gets to token new mental representations, where these are individuated in a fine-grained (Fregean) way.[6] Both Ball (2009) and Tye (2009) follow the phenomenal concept theorist's lead. They too assume that 'concepts are mental representations which are components of thoughts' that 'individuate in a fine-grained way' (see Ball 2009, 944; Tye 2009, 40). This means that 'concepts that refer to the same entities can differ in their content' (Tye 2009, 40)—even if they necessarily refer to the same entities. 'For example, the concept [HESPERUS] has a different content from the concept [PHOSPHORUS], even though they both refer to the planet Venus in all possible worlds' (Tye 2009, 40; see also Ball 2009, 936).

The *Experience Condition* is ubiquitous in the literature on phenomenal concepts.[7] Virtually all phenomenal concept theorists concede that it is a minimal requirement on phenomenal concepts and, as a result, that it is *part of* what makes these concepts special, setting

5 This leaves open the possibility that Mary acquires *more* than a new concept when she leaves her room, including, e.g., new abilities.

6 See Balog (2009): 'Most of the recent discussion of phenomenal concepts presupposes the representational theory of mind (RTM) … The RTM says that concepts are constituents of thoughts' (296). Some may have in mind a more robust conception of 'concept', assuming for instance that concepts are finely individuated mental representations *that must be stored in memory*. It is this assumption which grounds Prinz's (2007) case against phenomenal concepts. Prinz claims that since the mental representations phenomenal concept theorists posit are not stored in memory, they are not phenomenal *concepts*. He concludes that there are no phenomenal concepts. This argument is less worrisome than the one presented by Tye and Ball, however, since it focuses on a purported further feature of *concepts* as opposed to a minimal feature unique to phenomenal 'concepts'.

7 Ball quotes a number of authors; I don't duplicate the quotes here (see Ball 2009, 938-9) but see, e.g., Papineau (2007), Block (2007), Loar (1997).

them apart both from ordinary concepts like WATER and HESPERUS and from other concepts of the phenomenal which may refer to phenomenal properties without meeting the *Experience Condition*. It is precisely because the *Experience Condition* is so widely endorsed that denying that there are concepts that meet it, as Tye and Ball do, amounts to denying that there are phenomenal concepts at all.[8]

In what follows, I assume Ball's minimal characterization of phenomenal concepts and his statement of the *Experience Condition* in (iii). I grant that a concept of, say, the red phenomenal property *r* is a *phenomenal* concept of *r* only if: (i) there are some red phenomenal experiences, and some property *r*, such that experiences are red phenomenal experiences in virtue of their relation to *r*; (ii) the concept in question refers to the red phenomenal property *r*; (iii) under normal circumstances, a human being can possess that concept only if she has had a red phenomenal experience. In what follows, I will take R* to be a concept of *r* which unequivocally meets conditions (i)-(iii). By contrast, I will assume that the concept RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTER is a *nonphenomenal* concept of *r*, one which meets conditions (i) and (ii) but not the *Experience Condition* (iii).

1.1. The Case: Introduction and First Step

Tye and Ball make their case against phenomenal concepts in several separate steps. Roughly, they begin by arguing that the existence of publically expressible phenomenal concepts would entail a) that the same public word might express a phenomenal concept in one instance and a nonphenomenal concept in another, and b) that normal perceivers with a normal history of colour exposure will possess (at least) two sets of co-referring concepts of phenomenal properties. Second, Tye and Ball use

8 It is true that Tye (2009), unlike Ball (2009), does not explicitly take himself to be arguing that there are no phenomenal concepts. However, like Ball, he argues that so-called phenomenal concepts do not meet the *Experience Condition*. Insofar as the *Condition* is widely considered to be a necessary condition on phenomenal concepts, Tye is in effect arguing that there are no such concepts.

Burge-style arguments to show that a) and b) have highly implausible implications. They conclude that there are no phenomenal concepts.

It is worth noticing that the case against phenomenal concepts so stated presupposes that phenomenal concepts are publically expressible. As Tye and Ball note, this is an assumption that phenomenal concept theorists themselves have made. Indeed, they typically believe that some constituent of the sentence (1)—uttered by Mary when she first sees red—expresses a phenomenal concept.

(1) So that is what it's like to see red.

Ball (2009) rightfully adds that there is no consensus among phenomenal concept theorists about which public word or expression in (1) expresses a phenomenal concept—some believe it is the word 'that', others that it is the expression 'what it's like to see red', yet others that it is the word 'red' (2009, 948). A number of phenomenal concept theorists, to avoid confusion, introduce new public words for phenomenal concepts, such as, e.g., 'Q_R' (Perry 2001), 'Q' (Block 2007), 'R' (Chalmers 2003; Tye 2009), or 'R*' introduced above.[9] Throughout the paper, I will assume that phenomenal concepts are indeed expressible in public language, and I will take 'R*' to be the paradigmatic public language expression of a phenomenal concept of red.

Here, then, is how the case proceeds. If phenomenal concepts are indeed publically expressible, then it should be possible for Mary to be introduced to the relevant public language expression after her release. We can further imagine that she chooses to use that expression when she first sees red, therefore uttering, instead of (1), the following:[10]

9 Ball is right when he writes that 'much of the phenomenal concept literature depends on the possibility of introducing a word' that expresses a phenomenal concept (Ball 2009, 950). See also Tye 2009, 69.

10 Since both Tye and Ball stipulate that the word 'red' expresses a phenomenal concept, I will reword their arguments as needed. Note that such rewording should have no effect on the *content* of the arguments presented. Ball explicitly admits that his arguments against phenomenal concepts 'are easily applicable *mutatis mutandis* if some other word [other than "red"] is held to express a phenomenal concept' (Ball 2009, 948).

(1*) So R* is what it's like to see red.

More importantly, perhaps, if phenomenal concepts are publically expressible, then it should be possible for Mary to be introduced to the relevant expression *while still in her room*. After all, 'Mary in her room can interact via her computer with someone who has introduced the term "*R*", for example' (Tye 2009, 69). This means that it is not only possible for Mary to use the word 'R*' while first looking at a red rose (as when she utters (1*)) but *also* to use the word 'R*' *while 'inexperienced' in her black-and-white room*. In fact, Inexperienced Mary can use the word 'R*' to utter a number of sentences like the following, even while never having experienced red:[11]

(2) Red things such as fire engines typically cause R*. (Tye 2009, 66)

(3) R* resembles G* more than what it is like to hear a trumpet playing middle C—where 'G*' expresses a phenomenal concept G* that picks out the green phenomenal property *g*. (Ball 2009, 948)

(4) If x is a number, x is not R*. (Ball 2009, 948, from Stoljar 2005)

(5) R* is a phenomenal property of experience. (Ball 2009, 948; Tye 2009, 66)

(6) This is not R*—where 'this' refers to a phenomenal character of which the speaker is aware. (Tye 2009, 67; Ball 2009, 948)

Though phenomenal concept theorists must grant that it is possible for Inexperienced Mary to *utter* (2)-(6), they are simultaneously committed to denying that Inexperienced Mary possesses the phenomenal concept R*. It seems as though phenomenal concept theorists must maintain that when Inexperienced Mary uses 'R*' in (2)-(6), she must be using the public word to express a *nonphenomenal* concept such as RED

11 As will become clear, it is important throughout the paper to keep claims about sentences of a public language separate from claims about the thoughts these sentences may express. I use plain text for sentences and small caps for thoughts.

PHENOMENAL CHARACTER. Tye and Ball conclude that if there are publically expressible phenomenal concepts, the public words that stand for them (words like 'R*') will express phenomenal concepts in some instances (as in (1*)) and nonphenomenal concepts in others (as when Inexperienced Mary utters (2)-(6)).

That is not all. Consider, now, the fact that Inexperienced Mary can agree and disagree with *experienced* normal perceivers about *r*. She can share an experienced perceiver's belief that red things such as fire engines typically cause red phenomenal characters. She can disagree with another experienced perceiver about the fact that red phenomenal characters are more pleasant than black ones. But for Inexperienced Mary and her experienced friends to genuinely agree or disagree about *r*, they must be deploying *the same concept* of *r*. Since Inexperienced Mary does not possess and hence cannot deploy the phenomenal concept R*, it must be that the shared concepts of *r* are nonphenomenal concepts like RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTER. It follows that experienced perceivers must possess (at least) two co-referring concepts of *r*: the phenomenal concept R* and a nonphenomenal concept like RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTER. In other words, if there are phenomenal concepts, experienced normal perceivers will have two sets of co-referring concepts for each phenomenal property.

Tye and Ball conclude that if there are publically expressible phenomenal concepts, a) the relevant public words will be used to express a phenomenal or a nonphenomenal concept depending on the instance, and b) experienced perceivers will possess two sets of co-referring concepts of the phenomenal

1.2. The Case: The Second Step

Tye and Ball go on to argue that the claims they have just established—a) and b)—have highly implausible implications. Their arguments draw on considerations which emerge in the course of the debate between Burge (1979, 1986) and some of his critics. Burge famously suggests 'that it is possible for a thinker to posses a concept C, even though her

conception of [its referent] is extremely vague or inaccurate' (Ball 2009, 944).[12] He would maintain, for instance, that it is possible for a thinker, Barry, to possess the concept BEECH even if Barry falsely believes that beeches are evergreens.[13] Burge's critics, meanwhile, will deny that Mistaken Barry possesses the concept BEECH (his conception of beeches is inaccurate), and some will even maintain that he possesses instead a concept distinct from the concept BEECH—say the concept thbeech where thbeeches *are* evergreens—together with the (false) meta-linguistic belief that the English word 'beech' typically expresses this distinct concept THBEECH (see Ball 2009, 945).

The considerations Burge brings to bear against those of his critics who posit two distinct concepts to accommodate their intuitions—e.g., the concepts BEECH and THBEECH—are the ones Tye and Ball co-opt in their case against phenomenal concept theorists. They argue that phenomenal concept theorists, like Burge's 'two-concept' opponents, become committed to highly counter-intuitive claims. Tye and Ball present three separate 'Burge-style' arguments against phenomenal concept theorists, and I present each in turn (1.2.1-1.2.3). I end the section by highlighting some parallels Tye and Ball draw between phenomenal and deferential concepts (1.2.4).

1.2.1. Argument 1: Contradictory Sentences

Tye and Ball first argue that phenomenal concept theorists, like Burge's opponent, will analyze certain pairs of sentences in a highly counter-intuitive manner. As mentioned above, Burge's two-concept opponents

12 See also Putnam (1970, 1975).

13 I am aware that the beech case is originally Putnam's. Tye and Ball do primarily compare phenomenal concepts to the concept ARTHRITIS, though they occasionally make a point using the concept BEECH (see Ball 2009, 949). I choose to illustrate the various strands of their arguments using the concept BEECH because their reference to the arthritis case strikes me as misguided. Indeed, the arthritis case involves comparing possible worlds with distinct linguistic communities—this is quite obviously not what we are doing when we think of Mary pre- and post-release. The question at issue is whether phenomenal concept theorists have any good reason for claiming that Mary—whose linguistic community is ours whether she is in her room or out—possesses two co-referring concepts of *r*.

deny that Mistaken Barry possesses the concept BEECH. They allow, however, that Mistaken Barry can go on to become an arborist, acquiring the concept BEECH in the process. Consider, now, the following pair of sentences:

(7) Beeches are evergreens. (uttered by Mistaken Barry)

(8) Beeches are not evergreens. (uttered by Arborist Barry)

Since Burge's two-concept opponents believe Mistaken Barry possesses the concept THBEECH but not the concept BEECH, they are committed to claiming that when he utters (7), Mistaken Barry expresses the thought:

(7') THBEECHES ARE EVERGREENS.

Arborist Barry, on the other hand, does possess the concept BEECH. Burge's opponents must therefore claim that when he utters (8), Arborist Barry expresses the thought:

(8') BEECHES ARE NOT EVERGREENS.

The Burge-style argument against two-concept theorists now amounts to this. Our intuitions strongly suggest that *sentences* (7) and (8) express contradictory thoughts. Yet the thoughts these sentences express according to Burge's two-concept opponents are *not* contradictory—(8') is not the negation of (7'). Burge's opponents therefore find themselves committed to a highly counter-intuitive claim concerning these sentences—that they do not express contradictory thoughts after all.

Tye and Ball argue that phenomenal concept theorists find themselves in an analogous situation. Consider the following pair of English sentences:

(9) I have experienced R*. (uttered by Mary as she introspects a red experience)

(10) I have not experienced R*. (uttered by Inexperienced Mary)[14]

Phenomenal concept theorists are committed to claiming that the public expression 'R*' in (9) expresses the phenomenal concept R*—since Mary is introspecting *r* when she utters it. They are also committed to claiming that the public expression 'R*' in (10) expresses the nonphenomenal concept RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTER, since Mary is inexperienced when she utters it. According to phenomenal concept theorists, the two sentences express the following two thoughts:

(9') I HAVE EXPERIENCED R*.

(10') I HAVE NOT EXPERIENCED RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTERS.

The Burge-style argument against phenomenal concept theorists now parallels the one above. Our intuitions strongly suggest that *sentences* (9) and (10) express contradictory thoughts. Yet the thoughts these sentences express according to phenomenal concept theorists are *not* contradictory thoughts—(10') is not the negation of (9'). Phenomenal concept theorists therefore find themselves committed to a highly counter-intuitive claim concerning these sentences, i.e., that they do not express contradictory thoughts after all.

1.2.2. Argument 2: From Introspection

The second argument against phenomenal concepts emphasizes the fact that experts and their inexperienced interlocutors can agree and disagree with each other. As the argument's first step makes clear, genuine (dis)agreement requires shared concepts. This has unfortunate implications for Burge's two-concept opponent. After all, an arborist may well genuinely (dis)agree with Mistaken Barry, and Burge's opponents must therefore accept that arborists will possess both the concept BEECH *and* the concept THBEECH. This, in turn, entails that an arborist who utters

14 Recall that the word 'R*' is a public language expression picking out the red phenomenal property *r* and that Mary can therefore use it both prior to her release and thereafter.

(8) Beeches are not evergreens.

could be expressing either a BEECH-thought or a THBEECH-thought—she *does* possess both concepts. But introspection surely renders this claim highly implausible: the arborist is not aware of having two sets of thoughts.

The same reasoning undermines phenomenal concept theorists, Ball argues. The argument's first step concludes that experienced perceivers must possess both R* and RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTER. This, in turn, entails that an experienced perceiver who utters

(2) Red things such as fire engines typically cause R*.

could be expressing either a thought involving R* or a thought involving RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTER. As Ball puts it, phenomenal concept theorists are committed to claiming 'that there are two thoughts that normal perceivers can express with sentences like (2)-(6). But introspection renders this implausible. We are not aware of having two sets of thoughts' (Ball 2009, 953).

1.2.3. Argument 3: Too Many New Thoughts

The final Burge-style argument goes as follows: if Inexperienced Mary possesses the nonphenomenal concept RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTER and if she acquires the co-referring phenomenal concept R* when she is released, then it would seem that this would allow her to think, upon her release, too many new thoughts and hence to learn too many new 'pieces of knowledge.' Indeed, for every thought about *r* she could token prior to her release using the concept RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTER, there is a new thought she can now token using R*, and hence a new piece of knowledge she has now acquired. Consider, then, a thought that she might have entertained while inexperienced, namely the thought that a red phenomenal character is not a number. According to phenomenal concept theorists, Mary will, after her release, get to think the new thought that R* is not a number, and they will conclude that she has thereby acquired a new piece of knowledge. Ball objects: 'but this is

implausible. For example, Mary would not be surprised to discover that [R*] is not a number' (Ball 2009, 953).

1.2.4. Deference

The preceding arguments suggest, Ball claims, that phenomenal concept theorists are mistaken when they assume that there are phenomenal concepts—minimally construed as concepts that meet the *Experience Condition*—over and beyond concepts of the phenomenal like RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTER. The case against phenomenal concepts now amounts to this: the existence of publically expressible phenomenal concepts entails, first, counterintuitive accounts of contradictory sentences; second, that experienced thinkers possess two sets of thoughts; and, finally, that Mary learns too many pieces of knowledge. This gives us reason to think, Tye and Ball believe, that there are no such concepts. When we think of the properties of our experience, we do so using concepts that pick out such properties but do *not* meet the *Experience Condition*. And these concepts are *deferential* at least insofar as it will be possible for thinkers to possess them despite having vague, incomplete, or inaccurate conceptions of their referents.

To strengthen their analogy, Tye and Ball point out that speakers can over- (or under-) extend 'phenomenal concepts' just like they can over- (or under-) extend deferential concepts. Thinkers with inaccurate or incomplete conceptions of beeches (such as Mistaken Barry) may over-extend their concept and judge that a tree is a beech when it is not. And the fact that these thinkers would accept correction from experts is an indication that despite their vague or inaccurate conceptions, they do indeed possess the concept BEECH. Colour concepts too can be over- (or under-) extended: 'some people are disposed to judge that some orange objects are red (when they are not in fact red)' (Ball 2009, 951). Such speakers 'would likely accept correction from others who confidently agree about the right way to classify the given shade. In this way, colour concepts are deferential' (Tye 2009, 63-4). But if colour concepts can be

over-extended—and are hence considered deferential—'phenomenal concepts' too can be over-extended. Tye and Ball claim:

> anyone who is willing to accept correction as to whether a given shade should really be counted as a shade of red should be willing to accept correction as to whether a given token experience she is undergoing while viewing the shade should properly be counted as having the phenomenal character of experiences as of red, assuming that she takes herself to be a normal perceiver in normal viewing conditions. (Tye 2009, 64)

And if the concepts some want to call *phenomenal* concepts can be over-extended, they must be deferential.

Burge-style arguments, together with facts about over-extension, show that Burge's opponents cannot plausibly make the case that there are distinct concepts BEECH and THBEECH. The fact that Mistaken Barry's concept lacks some features of an arborist's concept—the fact that his concept was not caused by experiences of beeches, that it was not linked to images of beeches, and that it did not enable him to recognize beeches—does not entail that there is no significant concept type of which Mistaken Barry's concept and the arborist's concept are both tokens. Similarly, Burgean considerations, together with facts about over-extension, show that phenomenal concept theorists cannot plausibly maintain that there are two distinct concepts R* and RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTER. The fact that the concepts Inexperienced Mary deploys lack some feature of her experienced interlocutors' concepts—the fact that her concepts are not caused by experiences of red, that they are not linked to images of a red object, and that they do not enable Mary to recognize/identify red objects—does not entail that there is no significant concept type of which Inexperienced Mary's concepts and her experienced interlocutors' concepts are both tokens. The upshot, then, is that anyone who accepts Burge-style arguments in the deferential cases should deny that there are phenomenal concepts. As Ball puts it: 'Since the arguments in the two cases (the phenomenal and the deferential) are so closely analogous, they stand or fall together.' (Ball 2009, 954) In some sense, Tye and Ball present phenomenal

concept theorists with a dilemma: these theorists can either reject Burge-style arguments in deferential cases or deny that there are phenomenal concepts—even minimally construed.

2. Undermining the Case Against Phenomenal Concepts

I will now argue that the case against phenomenal concepts just described is far from convincing. I will do so while granting Tye and Ball as much as possible. First, I do not attack the reasoning in what I have called the argument's first step. I assume, as Tye and Ball do, that phenomenal concepts (if there are any) are publically expressible, and I assume this entails that a) the same word of a public language will express a phenomenal concept in some cases and a nonphenomenal concept in others and that b) experienced perceivers possess (at least) two sets of concepts picking out phenomenal properties. I also assume that Burge-style arguments are indeed highly persuasive in deferential cases. My goal here is not to undermine Burgean arguments across the board. I am happy to assume—as a number of phenomenal concept theorists will be happy to—that Burge is right when he claims that thinkers can possess concepts like BEECH even if they have a vague or inaccurate conception of beeches. And I assume that Burge's opponents are correspondingly wrong when they maintain that Mistaken Barry must possess a distinct concept THBEECH in combination with a false meta-linguistic belief. I do argue, however, that Tye and Ball are wrong to claim that Burge-style arguments can be used to make a highly persuasive case against phenomenal concepts. I challenge the conclusions they reach in the argument's second step, attacking each of the three Burge-style arguments in turn (2.2-2.5). I begin by showing that the over- and under-extension of (so-called) phenomenal concepts does not actually strengthen Tye and Ball's claim that these concepts are really deferential (2.1).

2.1. Undermining the Analogy

The fact that colour concepts can be over- (or under-) extended and that speakers will accept correction 'as to whether a given token experience

… should properly be counted as … [an] experience as of red' (Tye 2009, 64) does not give us reason to think that there are no phenomenal concepts and that our concepts of experience are ultimately deferential concepts.

To accept correction as to whether a given experience is an experience as of *red* is to acknowledge that one might have classified the experience in question under the wrong *(deferential) colour concept red*. It is not, however, to say that the concept used to introspectively pick out the property that is thereafter classified as *red* is itself a deferential concept. Indeed, phenomenal concept theorists typically maintain that it is possible for Mary (or any other thinker) to deploy a phenomenal concept without knowing whether the property picked out is a *red* phenomenal property *r* or another colour phenomenal property. This is why phenomenal concept theorists believe it is rational for Mary to wonder (*in thought*) whether R* is a red phenomenal character; merely introspecting a phenomenal property does not enable a thinker to classify it adequately under a *colour* concept. The fact that speakers can misjudge their experience simply does not show that there are no phenomenal concepts, for over- (or under-) extension will occur so long as the concepts used to do the classifying are themselves deferential.

This gives us some initial reason for thinking that it may be possible for Burge-style arguments to be highly persuasive in deferential cases and yet unconvincing in phenomenal cases. Of course, it still remains to be shown that Burge-style arguments are *in fact* unsuccessful in phenomenal cases, and this is what I now proceed to do.

2.2. Contradictory Thoughts

Tye and Ball's first argument emphasizes the phenomenal concept theorist's implausible diagnosis of seemingly contradictory sentences. The worry arises because phenomenal concept theorists must maintain that (9) and (10) do not express contradictory thoughts, despite the fact that they intuitively seem to.

(9) I have experienced R*. (uttered while introspecting *r*)

(10) I have not experienced R*. (uttered by Inexperienced Mary)

A more careful examination of the case, however, reveals that the claim to which the phenomenal concept theorist is committed is not as counter-intuitive as it seems. There is, as a matter of fact, good reason to maintain that (9) and (10) do not express contradictory thoughts.

Indeed, for reasons mentioned in the preceding section, the right way to think of Mary is not by analogy to Barry the Beech-man but by analogy to someone I will call Annie the Astronomer. Imagine that Annie is at first quite naïve, at least inasmuch as she possesses the concept HESPERUS but *not* the concept PHOSPHORUS. Nonetheless, Naïve Annie can be introduced to the *word* 'Phosphorus' in just the way that Inexperienced Mary is introduced to the word 'R*' while still in her room.[15] Naïve Annie can be told only that the word is used in her community to express a concept that picks out the very same planet her concept HESPERUS picks out.[16] Imagine that Naïve Annie then proceeds to utter the English sentence:

(11) Phosphorus is not bright in the morning.

Our intuitions suggest, I contend, that Naïve Annie does not thereby possess the *concept* PHOSPHORUS. Rather, she is using the word

15 Such a case is possible only if it is possible for a speaker to use a *word* without possessing the concept which this word typically expresses in the speaker's community. Note that this doesn't entail that a complete, accurate conception of the referent is required for concept possession. To say that using a word is not *sufficient* for concept possession doesn't entail that complete, accurate conceptions are *necessary*. Note, also, that using the word 'Phosphorus' may not be enough here for possession of the concept PHOSPHORUS, possibly because Naïve Annie already possesses a concept of the heavenly body Venus—she possesses the concept HESPERUS. Our intuitions suggest that when a thinker becomes acquainted with a new public word for the referent of a concept she *already* possesses, it is far from clear that she thereby comes to possess a new, distinct *concept* of the referent (as when we learn foreign-language words). Again, this does not require making any substantial assumptions about the requirements on concept-possession.

16 This is by analogy to Inexperienced Mary, who knows from the start that the word 'R*' picks out the red phenomenal property *r*, i.e., that it picks out the same property her concept RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTER picks out.

'Phosphorus' to express the one concept of Venus that she does possess, namely the concept HESPERUS. This means that when Naïve Annie utters (11), she is actually expressing the thought:

(11') *HESPERUS* IS NOT BRIGHT IN THE MORNING.

Compare this with a sentence Annie may utter later, when she has finally acquired the concept PHOSPHORUS.[17] She may utter then:

(12) Phosphorus is bright in the morning.

Though sentences (11) and (12) *look* like they express contradictory thoughts, we have reason to deny that they actually do. Indeed, we have good reason to think that (12) expresses the following thought (which is not a negation of (11')):

(12') PHOSPHORUS IS BRIGHT IN THE MORNING.

In a case such as this one, it is by no means counter-intuitive to maintain that contradictory-looking sentences may not in fact express contradictory thoughts. What makes the relevant sentences *look* contradictory is the fact that the word 'Phosphorus' occurs in both. But since it is possible (in some unusual instances) for a speaker (Naïve Annie) to utter 'Phosphorus' without actually expressing the concept PHOSPHORUS, we ought to accept that, in some circumstances, speakers may utter sentences that *look* contradictory but are not.

Phenomenal concept theorists will maintain that the relation between (9) and (10) is analogous to the relation between (11) and (12). What makes the sentences uttered by Mary look contradictory is the fact that the word 'R*' appears in both. But since it is possible in some instances

17 Recall that when Naïve Annie is told about the word 'Phosphorus' she is told it picked out the same heavenly body as her concept HESPERUS. This means that when Annie finally acquires the concept PHOSPHORUS she does not need to be *taught* that Hesperus is Phosphorus: she will be able to think the identity claim unprompted. Still, since by acquiring the concept PHOSPHORUS she has acquired a new way of thinking of Venus (as the morning star), tokening the identity claim will be cognitively significant for her (and she may rationally doubt its truth).

for her to utter 'R*' without expressing the concept R*, we ought to accept that there are circumstances in which she may utter sentences that seem contradictory though they are not.

Note that this line of reply does *not* require the phenomenal concept theorist to deny what was established in the argument's first step, namely that Inexperienced Mary and her experienced friends can agree and disagree with each other about phenomenal property *r*. After all, the fact that (11) and (12) do not express contradictory thoughts does not entail that Naïve Annie cannot agree or disagree *while she is naïve* with 'wiser' astronomers. Naïve Annie can think that Hesperus is bright, or that it is 38 million kilometers from Earth, and her expert colleagues can agree or disagree with her because, like her, they possess the concept HESPERUS. Similarly, Inexperienced Mary can think that fire engines typically cause red phenomenal characters, or that phenomenal characters are not numbers, and her experienced friends can agree or disagree with her because they too possess the nonphenomenal concept RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTER. In both cases, there is opportunity for (dis)agreement because 'experienced' or 'expert' thinkers possess *two* co-referring concepts of *r*, one of which is shared with their less-experienced counterparts.

Unfortunately for the phenomenal concept theorist, however, Ball considers this exact move and argues that it fails (see Ball 2009, 952). Despite what the phenomenal concept theorist may want to claim, Mary is not in the situation of Annie. Indeed, we intuitively think that Annie cannot, after unequivocally acquiring the concept PHOSPHORUS, truthfully utter the sentence:

(13) I used to wonder whether Phosphorus was bright, but now I know.

Yet we intuitively worry that Mary can, after she has acquired the concept R*, utter an analogous sentence:

(14) I used to wonder what R* would feel like, but now I know.

Here is why, according to Ball, we think that Annie cannot truthfully utter (13): the complement clause ellipsis in (13) eliminates the possibility that the word 'Phosphorus' in that sentence expresses the concept HESPERUS—for what Annie now knows is that *Phosphorus* is bright. But if 'Phosphorus' expresses the concept PHOSPHORUS in (13), then the first half of the sentence turns out to be false since Naïve Annie did not use to wonder whether *Phosphorus* was bright. Indeed, she *could not* wonder that because she did not possess the concept PHOSPHORUS then and hence could not token, in thought, the question: IS PHOSPHORUS BRIGHT?

If the traditional Frege cases were really analogous to phenomenal concept cases, then our intuitions should suggest that Mary cannot truthfully utter (14) for exactly the reasons that Expert Annie cannot truthfully utter (13). After all, the complement clause ellipsis in (14) eliminates the possibility that the word 'R*' expresses a nonphenomenal concept, for what Mary now knows (and did not use to know) is that seeing red feels like R*. However, if 'R*' expresses the phenomenal concept R*, then the first half of (14) is false, because Mary could not wonder what R* felt like in her room—she did not possess the concept R* then. The fact that we intuitively believe Mary could utter truthfully (14) goes to show, Ball concludes, that 'there is a disanalogy between the phenomenal concept case and traditional Frege cases' (Ball 2009, 952). It is a mistake for phenomenal concept theorists to compare the concept pair R*-RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTER to the concept pair HESPERUS-PHOSPHORUS which entails that they have yet to show why it is that they are not committed to highly implausible claims about sentences (9) and (10).

Ball's attempt to find a disanalogy between phenomenal concept cases and traditional Frege cases, however, does not succeed. This is because sentences (13) and (14) are importantly disanalogous to begin with. It is no wonder, then, that our intuitions about whether they could be truthfully uttered diverge. Indeed, in uttering (13), Annie is singling out a particular *fact* about Phosphorus that she used to wonder about and that she now knows—the fact *that Phosphorus is bright*. In uttering (14), Mary is not singling out any one particular *fact* about *r* that she used to

wonder about and that she now knows: she is not saying that she used to wonder *whether* some thing was true of *r*; she is not saying *that* she now knows *that fact* to be true. Instead, she is saying that she used to wonder, much more generally, *what R* feels like*, and what she now knows is, generally speaking, *what R* feels like*. However, wondering about or knowing *what R* feels like* is interestingly unlike wondering *whether* or knowing *that*, e.g., seeing red feels like R*. Similarly, wondering or knowing *who* the American president is, or *what* the fifty states in the Union are is relevantly unlike wondering *whether* or knowing *that* Barack Obama is president, or wondering *whether* or knowing *that* Hawaii is a state in the Union. This is because it is possible for someone to *truthfully* think, I KNOW WHO THE PRESIDENT IS, or I KNOW WHAT THE STATES ARE without thereby tokening the further concepts BARACK OBAMA OR HAWAII. Similarly, it is possible for one to *truthfully* think I NOW KNOW WHAT RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTERS FEEL LIKE without thereby tokening the phenomenal concept R*. For what these thoughts primarily convey is that the one thinking them *is able to* token the further concepts BARACK OBAMA or HAWAII or R*.

What this means is that the complement clause ellipsis in (14) does *not* actually eliminate the possibility that 'R*' in that sentence expresses the nonphenomenal concept RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTER. Mary can truthfully utter (14) because she can truthfully think the following thought (no phenomenal concepts are deployed):

(14') I USED TO WONDER WHAT RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTERS FELT LIKE, BUT NOW I KNOW (WHAT RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTERS FEEL LIKE).

When we modify (14) so it expresses a particular *fact* about *r* that Mary now knows, the sentences become truly analogous and our intuitions with respect to them converge. Take, for instance, the fact *that* seeing red feels like R*. Now consider the following sentence:

(15) I used to wonder whether seeing red felt like R*, but now I know.

Do our intuitions suggest that Mary can truthfully utter (15) even though they suggest Annie could not truthfully utter (13)? I think not. For the ellipsis in (15) does eliminate the possibility that 'R*' expresses the nonphenomenal concept RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTER, and this means that 'R*' expresses the concept R*. But if that is the case, then the first-half of the sentence expresses the thought I USED TO WONDER WHETHER SEEING RED FELT LIKE R*. And Mary cannot truthfully think this, for she could not while in her room, wonder whether seeing red felt like R*: she lacked the requisite concept R*. There is no disanalogy, then, between phenomenal and Frege cases. This first Burge-style argument fails to show that phenomenal concept theorists are committed to highly counter-intuitive claims. The existence of publically expressible phenomenal concepts does not have any more implausible implications than does the existence of publically expressible co-referring concepts such as HESPERUS and PHOSPHORUS.

2.3. Introspection

Recall that the second Burge-style argument appeals to introspection. It points out that the following sentence can be uttered either by Inexperienced Mary or by her experienced colleagues:

(2) Red things such as fire engines typically cause R*.

Since experienced thinkers can share the belief Inexperienced Mary expresses when *she* utters (2), experienced thinkers could express either of the following two thoughts when *they* utter (2):

(2') RED THINGS SUCH AS FIRE ENGINES TYPICALLY CAUSE R*.

(2'') RED THINGS SUCH AS FIRE ENGINES TYPICALLY CAUSE RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTERS.

But this is introspectively implausible: experienced thinkers do not think they are expressing two thoughts with (2). Therefore, experienced perceivers do not possess two distinct co-referring concepts R* and RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTER.

Unfortunately for Ball, if this is indeed the form of the argument, it is deeply flawed.[18] The very same reasoning applied to Frege cases would lead to a clearly unacceptable conclusion.[19] Notice that the following sentence can be uttered by an expert in astronomy and by Naïve Annie:

(16) Phosphorus is bright.

Since expert astronomers can share the beliefs Naïve Annie expresses when she utters (16), these experts could express either of the following two thoughts when *they* utter (16):

(16') PHOSPHORUS IS BRIGHT.

(16'') HESPERUS IS BRIGHT.

But this is introspectively implausible: expert astronomers do not think they are expressing two thoughts when they utter (16). Therefore, expert astronomers do not possess two distinct co-referring concepts HESPERUS and PHOSPHORUS.

Clearly, something has gone wrong with the argument from introspection. Indeed, it is a mistake to assume, as the argument seems to, that if the *belief* Naïve Annie expresses with (16) can be shared with expert astronomers, then expert astronomers can (or will choose to) utter (16) to express that shared belief. After all, Naïve Annie's use of the word 'Phosphorus' is highly unusual. The discussion in the preceding section (2.3) suggests that were Naïve Annie and one of her expert colleagues both to utter (16), we would have reason to think that they were not in fact expressing the same *belief*, for Naïve Annie, unlike the expert, is using the word 'Phosphorus' to express the concept HESPERUS. And as was mentioned then, this does not entail that Naïve Annie's

18 Note, also, that arguments relying on introspection should seem somewhat suspect. Introspection is notoriously unreliable, and it is not clear that our introspective judgments regarding the concepts we are deploying should be trusted.

19 This is, of course, assuming that concepts are individuated in a fine-grained, Fregean way. As noted in the first section of the paper (1.1), phenomenal concept theorists as well as Tye and Ball do make that assumption.

beliefs cannot be shared with experts. *Beliefs* can be shared, because the expert in astronomy can think using the concept HESPERUS. The shared belief need not be a belief that Naïve Annie and experts will choose to express in English using the same *words*, especially if Naïve Annie is using 'Phosphorus' unusually. Similarly, it is a mistake to assume that *if* the belief Inexperienced Mary expresses while uttering (2) can be shared with experienced perceivers, then experienced perceivers would choose to utter (2) to express that shared belief. The *belief* can be shared, because experienced perceivers can *think* using the nonphenomenal concept Inexperienced Mary is deploying, but the belief in question need not be one that Inexperienced Mary and her experienced friends would express in English using the same *words*, especially given Mary's highly unusual use of 'R*'. In other words, the fact that Mary and her experienced colleagues can *share* beliefs does *not* entail that her experienced colleagues will express two thoughts with sentences like (2)-(6). Insofar as this second argument from introspection assumes this entailment, it fails as an argument against phenomenal concepts.

2.4. Too Many New Thoughts?

Finally, Ball argues that phenomenal concept theorists are committed to claiming that Mary learns too much. They must claim, for instance, that Mary's tokening the new thought

(17) R* IS NOT A NUMBER.

after her release constitutes learning a new piece of knowledge. However Mary will not be surprised when she thinks this new thought, and that suggests (to phenomenal concept theorists as well) that there is *no* learning.

Ball's observation helpfully highlights the phenomenal concept theorist's assumptions about new thoughts, learning and surprise. Phenomenal concept theorists seem to think that the tokening of a new thought—where thoughts are, of course, individuated in a fine-grained, Fregean way—constitutes an instance of learning. But they may agree

with Ball that surprise is a reliable indicator of learning and will tend to think that if a thinker is not surprised, she has not really *learned* anything.[20] What Ball shows then is that these two assumptions in combination give us reason to maintain both that Mary has learned something (a new thought was tokened) and that Mary has *not* learned anything (she is not surprised). What leads to the problem, however, are these assumptions about learning, new thoughts and surprise, and *not* the phenomenal concept theorist's insistence that there are publically expressible phenomenal concepts. To see this, think once again about Naïve Annie. Her acquiring the concept PHOSPHORUS will enable her to token an impressive number of new thoughts. Indeed, all the thoughts she previously tokened using the concept HESPERUS she can now token using the concept PHOSPHORUS. For instance, she can token her earlier thought that Hesperus is 38 million miles from Earth using the concept PHOSPHORUS, and this new thought is likely to be surprising to her. But consider, now, Annie's earlier belief that Hesperus is not a number. Acquiring the concept PHOSPHORUS may lead her to token the *new thought*

(18) PHOSPHORUS IS NOT A NUMBER.

If tokening a new thought constitutes an instance of learning, then we should conclude that in thinking (18) Annie has learned something. However, we can safely presume that Annie will not be surprised by the fact that Phosphorus is not number, and this suggests that she has not in fact learned anything. This shows that assuming that thinking new thoughts constitutes an instance of learning and that the latter must involve surprise is problematic regardless of whether or not there are phenomenal concepts. What we should conclude, then, is *not* that there

20 Not all phenomenal concept theorists will accept these assumptions about surprise. Some may indeed think that surprise occurs when thinkers learn something that conflicts with one of their previous beliefs or assumptions. Mary would not be surprised to learn that the French call grapefruits 'pamplemousse' if she has no previous beliefs or assumptions about what the French call grapefruits.

are no phenomenal concepts, but that those interested in accounting for the cognitive significance of learning (and that includes phenomenal concept theorists) need to think harder and more clearly about the relation between learning, the tokening of new thoughts, and surprise.

2.5. There are Phenomenal Concepts

What I have shown so far is that none of the Burge-style arguments presented by Tye and Ball are compelling in phenomenal concept cases. These arguments fail to show that phenomenal concept theorists are committed to any more implausible claims than is anyone who believes that HESPERUS and PHOSPHORUS are distinct concepts. There is no reason yet to conclude that there are no phenomenal concepts, minimally construed as those concepts of the phenomenal that meet the *Experience Condition*.

Though I have shown that Tye and Ball fail to provide decisive reasons for thinking that there are no phenomenal concepts, they may object that I have not provided any reason for thinking that there *are* such concepts. And indeed I have not. I *have* argued that we have reason to posit distinct co-referring concepts of phenomenal properties—for these are needed to make sense of Mary's rationality. They help make sense, for instance, of the cognitive significance of the thought that R* is what it's like to see red and of the rationality of *doubting* that R* is what it's like to see red. But those sympathetic to Tye and Ball may maintain that there is no reason to claim that one of these two distinct co-referring concepts must be (minimally) *phenomenal*. One may think, for instance, that explaining Mary's rationality does not in fact require that there be concepts of phenomenal properties that meet the *Experience Condition*. And indeed, one could argue that all that is needed to explain Mary's rational thoughts and rational doubts is her possessing the nonphenomenal concept RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTER and a distinct demonstrative concept which picks out whatever she is introspectively attending to. It seems that such a move may be appealing to Ball, who says in passing that demonstrative concepts cannot be phenomenal concepts. 'This is because Mary could

possess such an indexical concept in her room' (Ball 2009, 948). Hence, demonstrative concepts fail to meet the *Experience Condition*.

It is far from clear, however, that such a move can succeed. Let us assume that the two distinct concepts picking out *r* are the concept RED PHENOMENAL CHARACTER and a demonstrative concept. If we further assume, as Ball does, that the demonstrative in question does not meet the *Experience Condition*, and that Mary could therefore possess such a concept in her room, it is not obvious how we are to explain the cognitive significance of her thought upon her release. When she says, while introspecting a red experience,

(1) this is a red phenomenal character,

she is expressing a thought that is distinct from the thoughts she has expressed before—since we have been assuming throughout that thoughts are individuated in a fine-grained, Fregean way.[21] But if she is thinking a new (Fregean) thought, then either one of the concepts she is now deploying must be one she is deploying for the first time, or she is combining concepts she did possess and had deployed in her room in a new way. In either case, however, it is not clear why Mary did not, while in her room, think the thought she expresses with (1). If Mary never deployed the relevant concept, we should wonder why she did not. What is it about finally undergoing the experience that leads her to deploy it now since she *could* have tokened that very concept earlier? If she had deployed all the relevant concepts but without combining them in this exact way, we should wonder why she did not combine them so earlier. What is it about finally undergoing the experience that leads her to combine concepts she had already tokened before in a new way? Either way, since no concepts meet the *Experience Condition*, we must accept that Mary *could* have thought that very (Fregean) thought while in her room. But surely that is a counterintuitive result which

21 I assume that neither Tye nor Ball will deny that Mary thinks a new thought upon her release. Tye grants that she learns a new way of thinking, but he adds that 'that is not enough' (Tye 2009, 55).

positing minimally phenomenal concepts allows us to avoid. Being committed to the existence of such concepts ultimately provides us with a more satisfactory account of Mary's rationality than would denying their existence.

Note that this is not to say that minimally phenomenal concepts can *fully* or *adequately* explain *everything* about Mary's rationality. The fact that the construal of phenomenal concepts is so minimal, in fact, suggests that phenomenal concepts so construed may not do enough explanatory work. But what Tye and Ball are aiming to show by appealing to Burgean considerations is not that minimally phenomenal concepts cannot adequately explain all we need explained about, e.g., Mary. They are aiming to show, rather, that there are no such minimally phenomenal concepts in the first place. This, I believe, they have failed to show.

3. Conclusion

I have argued above (Section 2) that Tye (2009) and Ball (2009) fail to make a convincing case against phenomenal concepts. The Burge-style arguments they present in building their case may indeed be decisive in cases involving deferential concepts, but they are far from decisive in cases involving phenomenal concepts. Indeed, the very analogy between phenomenal and deferential concepts is inadequate. Not only does positing distinct co-referring concepts of the phenomenal help make sense of some of our rational judgments and doubts, but we actually have good reason for thinking that some contradictory-seeming sentences might in some instances fail to express contradictory thoughts. Meanwhile, the arguments from introspection and the appeal to Mary's new thoughts are simply invalid, yielding unacceptable conclusions in traditional Frege cases.

Where does this leave us? Ball emphasizes that his case against phenomenal concepts, if successful, will have welcome implications for physicalists. He argues that the Knowledge Argument actually *needs* phenomenal concepts (2009, 940) and concludes that if there are no

phenomenal concepts, the Knowledge Argument fails. Since I have argued here that it is the case against phenomenal concepts which fails, however, the Knowledge Argument stands. That is not to say, of course, that the Knowledge Argument succeeds—for as Ball himself acknowledges, the argument assumes more than the mere existence of minimally phenomenal concepts. Either defending or attacking physicalism, therefore, still requires considering the Knowledge Argument's further assumptions. More generally, Tye and Ball fail to show that ongoing debates about the nature of phenomenal consciousness should be framed without reference to phenomenal concepts. A thorough understanding of phenomenal experience will require an adequate account of these concepts, including what makes them special.[22]

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