

## ILLUSIONISM AND ITS PLACE IN CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

INTERVIEW WITH KEITH FRANKISH<sup>1</sup>  
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In the philosophy of mind, Frankish is best known for his “illusionist” theory of consciousness, according to which phenomenal consciousness in an introspective illusion – that it is an artefact of the limitations of introspection (Frankish 2017, 22). This view is not a new one and it has many powerful defenders, pre-eminently the American philosopher Daniel Dennett. In the following interview, we are discussing illusionism as one of the theoretical approaches to the problem of consciousness. Specifically, we are focusing on the main hypotheses of illusionism, its response to the so-called “hard problem of consciousness”, as well as its answer to other problems related to philosophical and scientific research on consciousness.

**KS:** Even though consciousness has been the subject of extensive scientific research since the 1990s, it still seems to many researchers that consciousness poses the so-called “hard problem”. At the beginning of our conversation, I would like to ask you, what do you think is special about the problem of consciousness as opposed to the other problems in philosophy and science?

**KF:** In one sense, I don’t think there is anything special about it. I don’t believe it presents a hard problem (as David Chalmers puts it), radically different from the problems we face in explaining other psychological or biological processes. I believe that explaining consciousness involves explaining a host of extremely complex and interrelated

psychological functions — ‘easy’ problems in Chalmers’ terms. This doesn’t mean that it will be easy to explain consciousness — it will take a huge amount of work — but it does mean that it won’t require a new metaphysical framework or a scientific revolution. What *is* special about consciousness, I think, is that it *seems* to present a hard problem. When we attend to our own experiences and reflect on them, we tend to think that they have a private subjective aspect that can’t be explained in third-person scientific terms. I believe we’re wrong to think this, but the fact that we do think it is a very interesting psychological fact about us. There’s something about our sensory processes and the awareness we have of them that makes them seem deeply mysterious.

**KS:** In your famous article “Illusionism as a theory of consciousness” (2016), you introduced illusionism as one of the theoretical approaches to consciousness in the contemporary philosophy of mind. Can you tell us what illusionism is and how it differs from the other approaches to consciousness?

**KF:** The central question is whether conscious experiences have phenomenal properties (also called “qualia”; I’ll use the terms interchangeably). These are supposed to be private mental versions of the qualities we attribute to things in the world, such as colours, sounds, tastes, and so on. The idea is that when we gaze at a cloudless sky, for example, the blue quality we are aware of is actually a private mental quality. There are reasons for taking this view. Science does not find these qualities in the world; it finds light-reflecting surfaces, pressure waves, airborne chemicals, and so on. The qualities, it seems, exist only in our minds, produced there by these physical stimuli.

Yet, (as Chalmers stresses) mental qualities present a special problem. They are undetectable by scientific means and resist explanation in scientific terms. Science does not find qualities in the brain any more than it finds them in the world. As with other phenomena that resist scientific explanation, such as telekinesis, there are various attitudes we can take here. We can accept that mental qualities are real and try to explain them. This is *phenomenal realism*, and it’s the orthodox view in contemporary philosophy of mind. Phenomenal realists divide into two groups: *conservatives* and *radicals*. The conservatives believe that, despite appearances, mental qualities can in fact be explained in standard scientific ways (comparable to believing that telekinesis is real but explicable in terms of known forces). Radicals, on the other hand, think that explaining mental qualities will require a scientific revolution or a new metaphysical framework (comparable to thinking that telekinesis is genuinely paranormal). But there is another option. We can reject realism and hold that the qualities do not really exist, either as properties of objects or as properties of our experiences. We can hold that they are a sort of illusion (comparable to thinking that telekinesis is a trick created by an entertainer). This is illusionism. Illusionists argue that we shouldn’t try to explain mental qualities, since they do not exist; rather we should concentrate on explaining why we have the *impression* that they exist.

**KS:** What do you mean by “illusion” in your illusionist theory and how does this meaning differ from other perceptual illusions or even hallucinations?

**KF:** I chose the word “illusion” to express the idea that there is something about our psychology which disposes us to believe in mental qualities, even though they are not real.

When we attend to our own experiences, we are strongly inclined (given suitable theoretical priming) to believe that they have mental qualities, and this inclination does not weaken even if we become rationally convinced that they do not really have them. The impression is due to deep features of our introspective systems, just as perceptual illusions are due to deep features of our perceptual systems, and like a perceptual illusion, it is not dispelled by new information.

There is a downside to using the term “illusion”, however. Many people think of illusions as involving mental qualities. They think that to be under the illusion of seeing a thing is to have a mental image of the thing rendered in visual qualia — like a show in an inner cinema, observed by an inner spectator. If mental qualities were an illusion in that sense, then illusionism would be circular. There would have to be another set of mental qualities in which the mental quality illusion was rendered, and we’d be no better off. But there are other, better ways of thinking of illusions. In general, we can say that to be under the illusion of perceiving something is to be undergoing all the psychological effects that perception of the thing would cause — having all the appropriate beliefs, desires, emotions, memories, associations, and so on (these states being understood as functional ones, with no phenomenal aspect). And then to be under the illusion of being aware of mental qualities is to undergo all the psychological effects that awareness of mental qualities would cause. There is nothing circular about this.

**KS:** Many critics point out that illusionists deny the existence of consciousness. However, you claim that illusionists reject only a certain concept of consciousness, namely “phenomenal consciousness” or the “phenomenal properties” of experience. If this is true, then this statement might presuppose that illusionists have a different concept of conscious experience. If so, what is the illusionist account of what conscious experience is?

**KF:** We certainly have conscious experiences — episodes of attentively seeing, hearing, tasting, feeling pain or pleasure, and so on. Our lives are full of them. These episodes make a powerful impact on us, psychologically and behaviourally, and we find it natural to talk about what they are *like*, how they *feel*. Illusionists deny none of this. What they deny is a certain *theory* of what conscious experiences are — the theory that says they involve direct awareness of private mental qualities. Similarly, illusionists don’t deny the existence of consciousness in the everyday sense; they only deny the existence of what philosophers call “phenomenal consciousness” — the sort that is supposed to consist of mental qualities.

The theory that consciousness involves awareness of mental qualities is so widely accepted that many people don’t realize that it is a theory. They can’t imagine any other way of conceiving of consciousness. But it’s obvious on reflection that it is a theory. We all start off as children with the naive view that qualities are properties of things in the world — that the blue quality belongs to the sky, not to our minds or brains. It is only when we realize the problems with that naive view that we adopt the theory that qualities are mental. We notice that we can experience qualities in the absence of their usual causes (as when we dream) and conclude that the qualities are really in our minds. It’s a natural conclusion to draw, but it isn’t the only possible one. (See my paper “Galileo’s real error” for a sketch of an alternative history in which philosophers chose a different option.)

The theory that qualities are in the mind takes us down a dead end. I have already mentioned the explanatory problem — science could not get any grip on mental qualities.

But there are more fundamental problems. As Daniel Dennett has shown, the idea that we are directly presented with qualia breaks down under pressure. In many cases, we simply would not be able to tell what our qualia were. Moreover, the presence of mental qualities on its own would explain nothing. In order for the qualities to have any effect on us, we'd have to be aware of them, and, barring magic, that would require an introspective system of some kind. (We are not automatically aware of properties of ourselves any more than we are of properties of the world around us.) And then it would be that system that was doing all the work in creating our sense of being acquainted with mental qualities. Introspectively, we could not tell whether we really were acquainted with qualities or just had brain systems that disposed us to *react* as if we were acquainted with them. Given how anomalous the qualities would be, the simplest hypothesis is the latter. Mental qualities, and the phenomenal form of consciousness they are supposed to constitute, are an introspective illusion.

So, what then are conscious experiences? They are multifaceted states (as Chalmers notes, there are many easy problems), and there is no sharp boundary between conscious experience and subliminal perception. (Or, perhaps, there are lots of boundaries, involving different component processes, revealed under different experimental conditions.) But at its heart conscious experience is a complex sensory interaction with the world and our own bodies, which promotes flexible, intelligent behavioural control. In very crude outline, the picture is something like this. Stimuli impinge on our sense organs, which send electrochemical signals to our brains. There, sensory processing systems interpret the signals and identify patterns that it is adaptive for us to recognize. When we attend to what we're perceiving, the resulting information is "globally broadcast" to a range of higher control systems, governing belief, emotion, memory, planning, language, and so on. These control systems respond by generating a host of expectations, associations, emotions, and other psychological reactions and tendencies to react, which enable us to respond flexibly to the current stimulus and to anticipate the next round of stimulation. This complex mind-world interaction — let's call it *perceptual consciousness* — is the core of consciousness.

**KS:** Even if we accept the claim that phenomenal consciousness is an introspective illusion, we still must explain why it seems to exist. This is what you have called the "Illusion problem". Do you have a possible answer to this problem, that is, do you have an answer to the question of how and why this illusion of phenomenality arises?

**KF:** This is the question we should be working on, instead of the hard problem. What is it about our perceptual processes and our introspective awareness of them that generates the sense of being confronted with qualities that seem intensely real yet can't be comfortably located either outside us or inside us? This is the cue for substantive theorizing. There are many routes the illusionist can take. Here, in outline, is the one I prefer.

I have already given a sketch of perceptual consciousness. In itself, perceptual consciousness does not produce any illusion of phenomenality. That involves a further development. The pattern of reactions produced by a distal stimulus carries additional information about that stimulus — not information about its intrinsic nature, but information about its *significance* for us, the *impact* it makes on us. Such information would be useful for social creatures. It would enable them to tell each other how things had affected them, and so to learn from their peers' experience as well as from their own. It would also enable

them to form plans for producing positive experiences and avoiding bad ones, anticipating experience rather than merely undergoing it. And I think we humans have evolved a capacity for monitoring our reactions to stimuli and using the information in this way. It is a higher-order capacity — a capacity for being sensitive to our own sensitivities and reacting to our own reactions. Let's call this capacity *introspective consciousness*.

It is introspective consciousness that produces the illusion of mental qualities. The key point is that the monitoring process doesn't provide a detailed picture of the reactions it tracks. Rather, it creates a simplified, schematic model — a sketch of the overall reactive pattern. This enables us to recognize different experiences, compare them, and characterize them by their modality, valence, and resemblance to each other. But it does not enable us to say more about them, or even to tell that what we are recognizing *is* a pattern of reactions. We simply have a sense that each experience has an indefinable but distinctive character. This is what we're expressing when we talk about what our experiences are *like*. It is something that's happening in us (to that extent the phenomenal realists are right), but it is not a private mental quality. Rather, it is a complex pattern of objective reactions, which we mistake for a simple subjective quality. We mistake mediated and partial awareness of complex reactions for immediate and transparent awareness of a simple quality.

Moreover, although the nature of these qualities reflects our reactions, they seem, pretheoretically, to belong to the objects we are perceiving. The information supplied by introspection is bound up with that supplied by our senses, so that we perceive things *as* having a certain impact on us, *as* infused with potent qualities. This explains why qualities seem to have a dual nature — in objects yet dependent on us. And it explains why it is a mistake to ask where the qualities really are. They are not *really* anywhere. Thanks to the combination of perceptual and introspective processes in our brains, we experience objects as qualitatively charged. But the qualities don't correspond to real, intrinsic features either of objects or of us. They are potent illusions, an imperative commentary, generated by our brains to express the significance things have for us.

**KS:** I consider the term “introspective representations” to be one of the problematic aspects of the illusionist approach, because it is sometimes not clear to me what you mean by the term “representation”. Therefore, I would like to ask you in what sense you use this term in your illusionist theory? How does it differ from representational theories and higher-order theories of consciousness? Do illusionists take more of an internalist or externalist stance?

**KF:** There are several questions here. First, how do I use the term “representation”? I use it in its standard sense in cognitive science for a brain state (a pattern of neuron firing) that serves as a proxy for something else, producing psychological effects appropriate to the presence of the thing. For example, a mental representation of a dog is a brain state that triggers inferences, associations, and other psychological reactions appropriate to the presence of a dog (whether or not a dog is actually present). A central tradition in cognitive science holds that mental processes involve operations on mental representations, perhaps of a computational kind. Of course, these mental representations are not things that we ourselves are aware of, at a personal level. They are not mental images. Rather, they are *subpersonal* states, part of the neural machinery that makes us aware of the things they represent.

Second, what is the role of mental representation in illusionism? There is no *essential* role for them, I think. Illusionism isn't defined in terms of mental representations. It is a broad approach to thinking about consciousness, and the basic claim can be expressed in personal-level terms. It is the claim that introspection misleads us into believing that we are acquainted with mental qualities. Developing this claim into a testable theory involves hypothesizing about the mechanisms involved (as I did briefly in my previous answer), and an obvious approach would be to do this in representational terms. Taking this line, we would suppose that introspection is subserved by mechanisms which produce higher-order representations of mental states and feed them into belief-generating systems. We could then go on to speculate about the form and content of these representations. This may not be the only way of developing an illusionist theory, however; perhaps there could be other versions which explain introspection in non-representational terms.

Third, how does illusionism differ from other representational theories? Illusionist theories that take a representational form will have strong similarities with existing representational theories. They will treat perceptual consciousness as consisting of first-order representations and introspective consciousness as consisting of higher-order ones, thus combining both the main representational approaches. Of course, this leaves plenty of room for disagreement about the nature of the representations and their cognitive role. (For example, on the view I sketched the higher-order states are not representations of perceptual states themselves, as higher-order theorists typically suppose, but of the reactions perceptual states generate.)

Despite this general similarity, there is an important difference between illusionism and other representational theories of consciousness. The latter are typically presented as theories of phenomenal consciousness, and first-order and higher-order theories are treated as rival accounts of it. For the illusionist, however, there is no such thing as phenomenal consciousness, and first-order and higher-order representations are different aspects of a multifaceted phenomenon. In practice, this difference may be less significant than it seems, however. I have argued elsewhere that representational theories gain their plausibility from their power to explain the reactions associated with consciousness, rather than from explaining phenomenal consciousness itself, and it may be that they can be usefully recast in illusionist terms and absorbed into the illusionist programme.

Fourth, do illusionists take an internalist or externalist stance — that is, do they think that the content of mental representations is determined by factors internal to or external to the individual? I don't think illusionism requires a commitment on this. Illusionists must reject some views of mental content — notably, ones that hold that intentionality is grounded in phenomenality. But a range of other views are consistent with an illusionist approach, and the choice can be made on independent theoretical grounds. My own preference is for a teleological account along the lines proposed by Ruth Millikan, which is externalist.

**KS:** Intuitively, it seems that if there is an illusion of phenomenality, then there must be someone who experiences this illusion. How do illusionists respond to the problem of the self and personal identity?

**KF:** The subject of the illusion is the person — the individual who perceives, thinks, feels, and acts. It is not an inner spectator within our heads. Of course, systems in our

brains are responsible for creating the illusion, just as they are responsible for our walking and talking, but they do not *experience* the illusion, any more than they walk and talk. Put another way, undergoing the illusion of phenomenality is a personal-level state, like the states of perceiving, dreaming, or experiencing an optical illusion. It depends on processes in the brain, but it is not a state of a brain system.

It is true that there is a way of thinking of illusions that treats the subject of an illusion as something internal. It is the view of illusion (and of veridical perception) as an inner qualia show, witnessed by an inner spectator, a self. This self might be an immaterial soul or a boss system within the brain. But, of course, illusionism rejects that inner show view of illusion, as I explained earlier. This isn't to deny that we may have a *conception* of the self as an inner spectator, but this conception is a psychological construction, which need not correspond to anything real.

There is also the question of personal identity. What makes a person today numerically identical with a person existing at some earlier or later time? I won't go into this here, but I think most of the options are either compatible with illusionism or could easily be made so.

**KS:** According to you, one of the positive arguments for illusionism is that it offers an attractive perspective on the function of consciousness. Could you describe this argument in more detail, that is, could you describe what function the illusion of phenomenality has?

**KF:** Let's distinguish two questions, one about the function of consciousness itself and the other about the function of the illusion of phenomenality. Since illusionism is a physicalist theory, it has no problem giving an account of the function of consciousness. If consciousness is physical, then it can have effects in the physical world and be selected for a function. On the view I sketched, perceptual consciousness facilitates flexible behavioural control, while introspective consciousness enables experience sharing and strategic self-control.

What about the illusion of phenomenality? Does it have a function? Illusionists don't have to claim that it does. They may say (as my sketch suggested) that it is a non-functional side effect of introspective processes that evolved for other purposes. But they might argue that the illusion has a function. The sense that we have phenomenal consciousness is a psychological state, which could have beneficial effects, causing the mechanisms that produce it to be selected for and enhanced. This view is defended by Nicholas Humphrey in his 2011 book *Soul Dust* and his new book *Sentience* (2022). Humphrey, too, thinks that the illusion of phenomenal consciousness results from the monitoring of internal reactions to stimuli, though he thinks that the reactions in question are produced by an ancient response system — he calls it *sentition* — that is separate from perception. Humphrey argues that there are advantages to having a sense of possessing a private inner world that is metaphysically special and that the mechanisms responsible for it have been tweaked by natural selection to enhance the effect. This is, I think, an extremely interesting idea, and it is a good example of the new lines of inquiry that are opened up by an illusionist approach. (Humphrey himself does not like the label “illusionism”, however, and calls his view *phenomenal surrealism*, stressing the creatively distorting nature of introspection.)

There is something I'd like to add. Some people, I find, think that illusionism entails that we should translate claims about the function and value of phenomenal consciousness into

parallel claims about the function and value of the *illusion* of phenomenal consciousness. So, for example, instead of saying that pain qualia are bad and that it is wrong to cause them, we should say the same about the illusion of pain qualia. There's something right about this; if a person has the illusion of pain qualia, then something bad is happening to them. But it is a mistake, I think, to locate the badness in the illusion itself. The badness lies in the first-order sensory state and its effects, which introspection misrepresents as pain qualia. What we are detecting, when we are aware of being in pain, is not an intangible mental essence but a pattern of real and imperative psychological reactions expressive of aversion and distress — a state of first-order perceptual consciousness. It is this reactive condition that is bad. Having introspective awareness of the condition allows us to adopt strategic attitudes towards it, but it is not what makes it bad, any more than awareness of a bodily injury is what makes it bad. Thus, illusionism does not entail that creatures without introspective capacities do not undergo pain or have any ethical claim on us. Quite the opposite. There is a lot more to say about the ethical implications of illusionism, and it is something I am currently working on.

**KS:** Like any theory of consciousness, several critical arguments have been formulated against illusionism. Which argument against illusionism do you find most challenging and why?

**KF:** We can distinguish three types of argument against illusionism. First, there are arguments that the view is *incoherent* — that it is obviously circular or self-defeating. For example, people object that if your experiences *seem* to have qualia then they do have qualia, or that an illusion requires a phenomenally conscious subject. In this category I'd also include the objection that illusionists deny the existence of consciousness. These are the weakest objections, in my view, since they misunderstand or caricature the illusionist position. Illusionists may be wrong, but they are not defending something blatantly incoherent. So, for example, when illusionists talk of our seeming to have qualia, they stress that “seeming” should be understood in a functional sense, not a phenomenal one. Similarly, illusionists do not deny that consciousness exists, merely that qualia do. Of course, if consciousness is identified with possession of qualia, then this would entail the nonexistence of consciousness, but that identity claim is precisely what illusionism denies, and to assume it would be to beg the question.

The second set of arguments aim to show that illusionism is *unsuccessful* — that it is not possible to explain our impression that we have qualia without supposing that we really do have them. Opponents might argue that there are certain consciousness-related reactions that cannot be explained in terms of brain processes. Or they might argue (as Philip Goff has done) that we cannot explain consciousness in terms of non-phenomenal intentional states, since intentionality is itself grounded in phenomenality. Arguments of this type are more interesting, and I think this is the most promising line for an opponent, though I do not know of any existing arguments that pose a serious threat to the programme. (As regards the two mentioned: there is no empirical evidence for the existence of reactions that cannot be explained in physical terms, and there are many physicalist alternatives to the phenomenal theory of intentionality.) Note that I am talking here about arguments for the failure of the illusionist programme as a whole. There will doubtless be good arguments for the failure of many *specific* illusionist theories.



The third type of argument is that illusionism is *inadequate* — that even if it were successful in explaining all the psychological reactions associated with consciousness, it would still fail to provide a full explanation of consciousness. The objector insists that as well as the reactions, which can be fully characterized in third-person terms, there are also distinctively first-person data — our direct acquaintance with qualia. This is a more charitable version of the denial objection mentioned earlier. (It is more charitable since the objector isn't claiming that illusionists deny consciousness, merely that they have a seriously impoverished view of what consciousness is.) This is the most basic objection to illusionism, but I don't think it has much force. Despite its more charitable form, it is still simply a flat denial of illusionism, based on an unargued conviction which the illusionist may share but does not trust. Moreover, there are several strategies illusionists can employ to defuse the objection. They can highlight incoherencies in the phenomenal conception of consciousness, as Daniel Dennett has done; they can offer alternative, non-phenomenal conceptions of consciousness, which mesh better with cognitive science, and they can develop empirical theories of introspection which explain away the intuition that drives the objection. I think these strategies will gradually undermine the objection.

**KS:** Do you consider illusionism to be a naturalistic theory of consciousness? If so, in what sense is this theory naturalistic? Do you consider yourself to be a naturalist?

**KF:** I do consider the theory naturalistic and myself a naturalist. In itself, that isn't very informative, since "naturalism" can mean different things. It's often used to refer to the view that there are no supernatural forces and that everything that happens can be explained by natural laws. But that is quite a weak claim and almost every contemporary theory of consciousness is naturalistic in that sense. Property dualists and panpsychists don't deny that consciousness can be explained by reference to natural laws; they just think that we have to expand our inventory of natural laws to include ones linking the physical and the phenomenal.

Another sort of naturalism is the philosophical naturalism advocated by Willard Quine and later developed by Penelope Maddy and others. This is the view that there is no sharp distinction between science and philosophy and that philosophy does not establish foundational epistemological or metaphysical claims that constrain scientific theorizing. As the Quinean naturalist sees it, we build and revise our theories of the world on the fly, and any claim can be revised or rejected if our best theories require it. I am very sympathetic to this form of naturalism, and I see illusionism as a natural consequence of adopting it. We may have strong intuitions about consciousness, but they should not impose hard limits on our theorizing about it. (How could our intuitions have the authority to impose such limits? It is hard to see how, unless they have a supernatural source — contravening naturalism in the first sense.)

Naturalism is also associated with physicalism — the view that everything is constituted by the fundamental entities posited by physics. I take this as a working hypothesis, but as a Quinean naturalist, I'm not dogmatically committed to it. I'd be willing to treat consciousness as fundamental if there were a strong enough theoretical case for doing so.

**KS:** Do you think that consciousness can be explained by standard scientific research in the cognitive sciences and neurosciences or are you also open to the possibility that we will have to expand our scientific methods in order to explain consciousness?

**KF:** I think we will be able to explain consciousness using the same methods and theoretical frameworks that we use to explain other aspects of the mind. This isn't to say that we have everything we need right now. Science is continually refining and expanding its tools, methods, and conceptual frameworks. But I don't think a scientific revolution will be needed specifically to explain consciousness.

**KS:** There is now a growing interest in panpsychism in the philosophy of mind. You yourself recently wrote an article "Panpsychism and the depsychologization of consciousness" (2021), which challenges this view of consciousness. Why do you think panpsychism has become such an attractive position in recent years?

**KF:** Partly it's fashion, I suspect; many philosophers have taken up metaphysics again, and this is a new metaphysical seam to mine. But I also think it is a natural development of the anti-physicalist strand in philosophy of consciousness that has received such a boost from David Chalmers' work. If phenomenal properties are distinct from brain properties, then why should they be restricted to the brain? It's inelegant to suppose that fundamental phenomenal properties are linked to highly complex physical ones by brute laws of nature. That's not how other fundamental properties behave. It is more attractive to suppose that all matter has a phenomenal aspect, of which human and animal consciousness is just a complex form. In short, if consciousness is fundamental, then it's natural to think of it as universal as well. Of course, panpsychism has huge problems, and I think that's a reason for not starting down the road that leads to it. (That's what I argue in the paper you mention.)

**KS:** How do you think consciousness studies will be developing in the future? Do you think that philosophy is still relevant in scientific discussions of consciousness?

**KF:** I think that in time we shall cease to see consciousness as presenting a distinctively philosophical problem and come to see it instead as a set of challenging scientific problems not radically different from the others cognitive science addresses. Philosophers will still have a role in solving these "easy" problems, doing broad-brush theorizing and reflecting on methodological issues, but they will not have any privileged role in theory construction.

Of course, many philosophers will disagree with me on this. But I think there is something we can all agree on, and this is that we need to explain the complex psychological reactions associated with consciousness, including our temptation to believe in the existence of phenomenal consciousness. (Explaining the latter is what I have called the *illusion problem* and what David Chalmers calls the *meta-problem* of consciousness.) These reactions certainly need explanation, and by focusing on this task we may shed light on the question of whether there is something further to explain, and so help to resolve the question of whether illusionism is an adequate view of consciousness. To see this, consider what may happen as we make progress in explaining the reactions. First, we might find that there are some reactions that we cannot explain without supposing that qualia are real and causally potent. I think this is extremely unlikely, but it is possible, and if it happened it would count decisively against illusionism. Second, we might find that although we have complete and

satisfying explanations for all our consciousness-related reactions (including our belief that there is more to explain than these reactions), we still feel convinced that there really is more to explain. This would give us at least some motivation for continuing to speculate about the hard problem. Finally, we might find that once we have the complete explanation for the reactions, we lose our intuition that there is more to explain, or at least cease to trust it. I think this outcome is the most likely, but we won't find out unless we get on with the task of trying to explain the reactions. Worrying about the hard problem and building metaphysical castles in the air will only be a distraction from that task.

**KS:** Thank you for your answers.

**KF:** Thank you for your questions! They were excellent, and I have had to think hard about my answers.

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