

# PETER V. FORREST

## > AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Philosophy of Mind, Philosophy of the Cognitive Sciences

## > AREAS OF COMPETENCE

Metaphysics, Epistemology, Philosophy of Religion

## > EMPLOYMENT

College Tutor (Adjunct), St. Catherine's and Worcester Colleges, University of Oxford,  
2015-2016

## > EDUCATION

DPhil Philosophy, University of Oxford, July 2015 (awarded without corrections)

**Thesis:** "Can Phenomenology Determine the Content of Thought?"

**Supervisors:** Prof Tim Bayne & Prof Bill Child

**Examiners:** Prof Martin Davies & Prof David Papineau

**Examiners' Report Excerpt:** "This is an excellent thesis, showing a fine appreciation of the relevant literature and making many important and original points and distinctions. There are a number of sections that could be worked up for publication and, indeed, the whole thesis could form the basis for a worthwhile monograph. It is unusual to read a doctoral thesis that shows such a command of fundamental issues."

BPhil Philosophy, University of Oxford, 2011 (Distinction)

**Thesis:** "What is Phenomenal Externalism (and Should We Accept It)?"

M.A.R Philosophical Theology, Yale University Divinity School, 2009

B.A. English, Yale University, 2005 (*cum laude*, with distinction in the major)

## > PUBLICATIONS

"Are Thoughts Ever Experiences?" *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 54:1 (2017), 46-58.

"Can Phenomenology Determine the Content of Thought?" *Philosophical Studies* (2016).  
doi: 10.1007/s11098-016-0689-0)

## > UNPUBLISHED PAPERS

### Under Review

"Cognitive Phenomenology, Contrast Arguments, and Self-Knowledge"

"Cognitive Phenomenology on the Fringe"

## **In Progress**

"Is All Phenomenology Presentational?"

"Presentation and Interpretation"

"The Limits of Perceptual Phenomenal Content"

### > **AWARDS AND HONORS**

Jacobsen Fellowship, Royal Institute of Philosophy

*Awarded annually to 8 PhD students in UK-wide competition (1-year stipend)*

Visiting Scholar, Department of Philosophy, University of Texas at Austin

*Grant from Prof Galen Strawson's research fund (3-month fellowship)*

Laces Trust Scholarship, University of Oxford

*Merit-based scholarship for 1 DPhil student in the philosophy of mind, psychology, and psychiatry (2 year tuition and stipend)*

Hooker-Dwight Scholarship, Yale Divinity School

*Award for academic excellence (\$4500)*

### > **PRESENTATIONS**

"Presentation & Interpretation: the Case for Impure Cognitive Phenomenology"

- Newton Fund Conference on the Philosophies of Mind, Language, and Action, University of Sao Paulo (Sept 2016; withdrew due to medical reasons)

"Are Thoughts Ever Experiences?"

- Open Minds Graduate Philosophy Conference, University of Manchester (July 2015)
- Towards a Science of Consciousness, University of Helsinki (June 2015)
- Dissertation Seminar, University of Texas of Austin (March 2014)
- Philosophy of Mind Work-in-Progress Group, University of Oxford (June 2012)

"Why Phenomenology Cannot Determine the Content of Thought"

- Philosophy of Mind Work-in-Progress Group, University of Oxford (June 2015)

"Cognitive Phenomenology and the Fringe"

- Workshop on Cognitive Phenomenology, University of Fribourg (Nov 2013)
- Philosophy of Mind Work-in-Progress Group, University of Oxford (Nov 2013)

"Phenomenal Contrast, Understanding, and Sensory Imagery"

- MIND Network, Edinburgh University (Oct 2012)

### > **GRADUATE COURSEWORK**

#### **University of Oxford Supervisions**

Metaphysics & Epistemology, Plato, and Philosophy of Mind & Action

## **University of Oxford Seminars**

Metaphysics, Epistemology, Hume, Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Mind, Intentionality, Wittgenstein

## **Yale University**

First-Order Logic, Philosophy of Language, Dispositions and Laws of Nature, American Pragmatism and Religion, Divine Command Theory, Theology of Plato and Aristotle, Epistemology, Frege, Philosophical Methodology, Personal Identity, Modals and Conditionals, Jonathan Edwards, History of Ancient Philosophy, History of Modern Philosophy, Metaphysics, Kant's First Critique, Philosophy of Religion, Foundations of Modern Social Thought, Systematic Theology, Religion and its Philosophical Reformers, 20th Century European Intellectual History, Bioethics

### **> TEACHING**

#### **Undergraduate Lectures**

Key Issues in Contemporary Philosophy of Mind: Consciousness and Representation (2014)

#### **Undergraduate Tutorials**

*NB. Oxford tutorials are weekly 1-2 hour meetings with 1-4 students at a time, which constitute the backbone of the undergraduates' education and exam prep. The tutor chooses the topics, sets the readings, marks students' weekly essays, gives extensive written and oral feedback, and leads discussion during meetings (sometimes beginning by briefly presenting additional relevant material).*

Philosophy of Science (2012, 2015-2016)

Philosophy of Mind & Action (2014-2016)

Philosophy of Cognitive Science (2012-2015)

Philosophy of Religion (2015)

Ethics: Rights (2015)

Political Philosophy (2015)

Introductory Logic (2011, 2013-2014)

Philosophy of Psychology & Neuroscience (2012)

General Philosophy - Metaphysics & Epistemology (2012)

#### **Additional Areas of Teaching Interest**

Logic, Political Philosophy, General Philosophy of Science, Early Modern Philosophy

### **> ADMINISTRATIVE & SERVICE**

Jowett Philosophical Society, University of Oxford

*On 4-person organizing committee for renowned graduate philosophical society*

Research Assistant for Miroslav Volf

*Edited manuscripts, including two monographs, for Yale Professor of Theology*

> **REFEREES**

Prof Tim Bayne  
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## > **THESIS SUMMARY**

My doctoral thesis is concerned with the intersection between two of the major topics in philosophy of mind of the last half century: consciousness (or "phenomenology") and representation (or "intentionality"). The question of phenomenology is, "how can there be something it feels like, from a subjective viewpoint, for a physical thing to experience the world?" The question of intentionality is, "how can something physical, such as a brain state, be about, or represent, some other thing out in the world?" The majority opinion within analytic philosophy used to be that these two questions addressed two essentially independent domains. However, recently philosophers have explored the groundbreaking idea that these two domains might be fundamentally linked in previously unrecognized ways.

My research relates to one crucial question within this larger topic: whether and how thoughts are phenomenally conscious. Thoughts are an important test case for theories about the relationship between phenomenology and intentionality, because they have long been considered paradigmatic intentional states, in contrast to perceptual and sensory experiences, which are paradigmatic phenomenal states. While there is something it feels like for an individual to undergo a perceptual experience such as an olfactory experience of roasted coffee beans, entertaining a thought, by contrast, might seem to lack such a distinctive qualitative "feel". The thought is clearly intentional: it involves carrying propositional content about objects and properties in the world. But is there something it feels like for a subject to experience the thinking of it? To answer this question in the affirmative is to accept the existence of a phenomenology of thought, so-called "cognitive phenomenology" (CP).

The literature on this topic has focused on the question of whether CP exists at all. Instead, I address the largely neglected question of whether a specific type of CP exists that is able to determine thought's intentional content. Most proponents of CP are motivated by the hope that it can, since they believe that in the case of other conscious states, the phenomenology accounts for the intentionality (e.g. what it is like for a subject undergoing a visual experience of blue determines that her visual state represents the property blue). In this way CP is supposed to provide the key to a theory of the foundations of thought, by explaining how thoughts possess content in the first place. However, in my thesis I argue that this ambitious project is doomed to fail.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the project, and the second chapter performs some necessary ground clearing, by responding to a recent argument that thoughts can never be experiences, since they lack the requisite metaphysical profile: they persist through time as states or events, rather than as processes. In response, I show how this argument does not threaten the possibility of CP. The third chapter considers the major arguments for the existence of CP, and I respond to the positive case for the content-determination view. Part of my response involves formulating, and refuting, an argument for CP based on a "higher-level content" view of perceptual experience. I conclude that, while there may be limited evidence in favor of CP, the evidence does not specifically support the existence of the type of CP required to

determine the contents of our thoughts.

Chapter four examines evidence for a more modest type of CP, inspired by William James's notion of "fringe" consciousness. For example, we have all vividly experienced recognizing a face in a crowd as familiar without being able to place it, or sensing a word on the tip of our tongue. I argue there are compelling reasons to think that the phenomenology of these sorts of experiences is not reducible to the sensory-perceptual, and is rightly considered cognitive, in that it serves to communicate information to the subject *about her* (largely unconscious) cognitive life. Finally, in chapter five, I lay out my main argument against the stronger, content-fixing type of CP. I contend the claim that phenomenology determines thought content depends for its intuitive plausibility on the notion that what is *thought* can be wholly captured in what is *experienced*—that of which we are aware in the special, phenomenal sense. For, as I argue, phenomenal features of an experience necessarily are presented to the subject, and thus are features of direct subjective awareness. But this view of conscious thought is not very promising. Indeed, it runs afoul of any realistic theory of how concepts are structured and individuated. And since no other account of how CP might perform the content-fixing role has been offered, the prospects of CP determining intentionality look dim.