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QUESTIONING THE MORATORIUM ON SYNTHETIC PHENOMENOLOGY

Abstract. In a paper published in 2021, Thomas Metzinger proposed a global moratorium on development of synthetic phenomenology, with this beginning in 2021 and lasting until 2050, arguing that the development of conscious artifacts would bring about an explosion of human-like suffering on a global scale. The paper argues that Thomas Metzinger's call for a global moratorium is unsound as it is currently formulated. Metzinger's argument is based on a category error, a common mistake in AI discussions. For the sake of clarity in AI discourse, and for reasons explained in the paper, such an error should be at least pointed out, if not corrected. This is the primary purpose of the paper. However, Metzinger's proposal, can be taken as a generic warning against uncontrolled development of AI – the position we fully agree with.

Keywords: synthetic consciousness, moratorium on synthetic phenomenology, synthetic suffering, category mistake, cognitive equivalence, Thomas Metzinger.

1. Introduction

Thomas Metzinger proposed a global moratorium on the development (research, testing, implementation, production) of synthetic phenomenology, or conscious entities/systems, beginning in 2021 and lasting until 2050 (Metzinger 2021a,b). We question whether Metzinger's call for a moratorium is justified and whether it can be regarded as a sound philosophical argument.

Why developing synthetic phenomenology/consciousness (research, testing, implementation, production) or conscious artifacts is so controversial that Metzinger believes it warrants a ban? The terms 'phenomenology' and 'consciousness' both imply that the capability of having experiences, namely of having states whose phenomenal content enables the artificial agent to have access from its point of view to the surrounding world, is crucial to moving, making decisions, and carrying out actions effectively" (Cali 2022).

From an AI perspective, having an artifact with a sort of consciousness, which is defined as a set of cognitive-like capacities,¹ is an attractive proposition, because it arguably artifacts/artificial systems with cognitive-like capacities would be more proficient at many human-like tasks than systems without these capacities (see e.g. Alexander 2020, Cali 2022). But, Metzinger claims that developing synthetic conscious entities/systems will unleash the flood of suffering for which we will be responsible and therefore we should not do it. How is that so?

In the paper, we first summarize the major aspects of synthetic phenomenology/consciousness relevant to the discussion. Next, we present Thomas Metzinger argument for a global moratorium. We then consider whether the call for a global moratorium on synthetic phenomenology/artificial consciousness, as formulated by Thomas Metzinger, is a sound philosophical argument. In the discussion we focus on two logical errors – conceptual mistake and, related, cognitive equivalence². We conclude that it is not and propose adopting a charitable interpretation of Metzinger’s memorandum that would fit well with the current discussion about the dangers of AI and emphasize Metzinger’s valuable contribution to discussion on uncontrolled development of AI technology and its impact on humanities.

A few terminological clarifications. In the paper, the terms “artificial” and “synthetic” are used as synonyms and the term synthetic phenomenology (SP) is synonymous with artificial consciousness or synthetic consciousness. The term “natural” refers to entities created in the process of evolution (for a clarification see the discussion on (neo)Darwinian evolution and related references in Fodor and Pitatelli-Palmarini [2010]). The term “artificial” refers to objects conceptualized, designed, created, or produced in a man-designed/industrial process. We do not differentiate between natural, artificial and hybrid entities, i.e., biological entities enhanced with technology or artificial entities with biological parts (cyborgs). The term “system” in this paper denotes a natural or artificial entity. In the case of natural entities, a system could be a human agent or a conscious animal (the boundary between natural conscious and nonconscious entities is disputed; see e.g., Godfrey-Smith [2018]; see also Humphrey [2012] for one possible way to resolve the boundary between conscious and not conscious animals). In the case of artificial entities, a system may denote a physical entity – a robot or machine of sorts, a software bot, or any artifact. And artefact means non-biological entity; specifically “... artefacts are material things intentionally made by humans for particular (practical) ends” (Kroes and Verbeek 2014). These artefacts are in some works denoted as technical artefacts (Kroes and Verbeek 2014).

2. Background Discussion

Metzinger claims that as any conscious entities, natural or artificial, are cognitively equivalent with human (or biological) conscious agents (e.g., Shevlin 2020). Being cognitively equivalent, these systems would be like us, or at least sort of like us, in that they would be thinking and feeling beings, as we are. Furthermore, these artificial systems would have phenomenological experiences (e.g., internal experiences, the concept of the self, self-knowledge, feelings, etc.) like we have. More specifically, as suffering is a common feature of conscious beings (natural), at least of those we know about, these artificial systems would also have the capacity to suffer and they would actually suffer.

Now, as “every conscious suffering being is a moral patient³ demanding consideration” (Metzinger 2021a,b), these artificial creations would demand moral consideration from us as well, for at least two reasons: as suffering entities and as our creations (we may say our offsprings) towards which we have moral duties (e.g., Basl 20130). Thus, we will have a moral duty to these conscious artificial systems, whether they be disk drives, PCs, smartphones, WBE systems, bots, or whatever (e.g., Sotala and Gloor 2017), i.e. we are morally responsible for their wellbeing. Without knowing how to take care of, or minimize, or eliminate suffering in artificial conscious systems we should impose moratorium, that is what Metzinger is asking for, on developing conscious artefacts with innate capacity for suffering, a capacity which comes with consciousness.

Metzinger’s argument may be interpreted in two ways (at least). One way is to engage in the deep ethical dispute on the role of pain in all (natural and artificial) sentient beings and our moral duties towards suffering of any kind – exiting, not exiting, real and imaginary. This is the way Metzinger wants us to face his argument.

Another way to engage with Metzinger’s argument on more formal level, and, this is our approach, resist to be pulled into the deep moral grounds about abstract moral duties and suffering of non-existent synthetic systems, and show that Metzinger appeal for global memorandum on synthetic/phenomenology consciousness is not based on factual analysis i.e., is unsound. We claim that Metzinger appeal for global memorandum is based on two logical mistakes – category error and related to it, cognitive equivalence – and therefore his argument is unsound (as based on false assumptions) and as such, it does not warrant deep ethical response. It calls for disambiguation and technical analysis. But, does not warrant industrial action,

proposed by Metzinger, which the proposed ban on developing synthetic conscious entities/systems is.

Two concepts – category mistake and cognitive equivalence – are critical for the discussion. The first key concept is that of category mistake or category error. The term is sought to originate with Ryle (Ryle 1942). But it has been long present in philosophy but without having a specific label (see e.g. Boutler 2019, Magidor 2022). After Magidor (2016, 2022) we prefer to give examples of it rather than a definition. Magidor gives two: ‘The number two is blue’ and ‘The theory of relativity is eating breakfast’. Such claims seem odd outside of poetry or literature. They strike us as incoherent claims on reality. Similarly, modern examples of this error are claims such as “Robots have feelings”, “Robots are moral machines”, “Machine consciousness”, “AI systems have free will”, “Robots have rights”, “Synthetic autonomous agents”, or “Synthetic phenomenology/consciousness”. Stevenson (Stevenson 2010) characterizes such claims as “The error of assigning to something a quality or action which can only properly be assigned to things of another category, for example treating abstract concepts as though they had a physical location”.

Category mistake is committed when there are alleged similarities between two compared concepts where there is none as compared concepts belong to different conceptual and/or ontological domains. For example, the claim that “Spring is happy” is a category mistake attributing human feelings to seasons. As an argument in analytical philosophical work about the nature of seasons this claim would not fly. But as a line in poetry or uplifting writings it would be quite well placed. Does such an error matter? It matters in studies where logic, accuracy, and practical actions matters.

The second key concept is that of cognitive equivalence. By “cognitive equivalence,” we mean a 100% equivalence between cognitive systems, not just functional equivalence or some other sort of qualified equivalence that excludes properties like feelings, emotions, free will, self-knowledge, and so on. The cognitive equivalence principle claims that any system with cognition will have the same cognitive functions, regardless of its origins, physical substrate, or creation history (see e.g. Shevlin 2020). Metzinger’s assumption of cognitive equivalence is a category mistake (explained below), as it equates the properties of existing natural entities with the properties of imaginary artificial entities, entities belonging to two different ontological realms. Metzinger’s assumption of cognitive equivalence between any (natural and artificial) systems or entities is not supported by any substantial evidence (conscious suffering; artificial systems do not exist or have not been designed), but only by speculations.

3. What Is Synthetic Phenomenology?

What is synthetic phenomenology (SP)? There are many definitions for SP, as one may well expect with philosophical and psychological concepts that have been adopted in cross-disciplinary research fields like AI. With some approximation, the definitions of SP generally fall into one of two categories:

- (I) Those denoting it as a research program in AI and robotics (Gamez 2008, Chrisley and Parthemore 2007, Alexander 2020, Cali 2022).
- (II) Those denoting it as an abstract concept that describes the phenomenal properties of any conscious system, whatever it may be, such as biological, mechanical, or something else (e.g., post-biotic) (Denett 1991, Alexander and Morton 2007, Christley 2009, Chalmers 2017, Metzinger 2021, Smith and Schillaci 2021).

No classification is ever perfect, so some definitions may blend, to varying degrees, elements of both these categories.⁴ Thus, allocating them to (I) or (II) would depend on how the employed terminology is interpreted.

The first definition (I) is quite clear about what it is pursuing, namely consciousness-like functions in artefacts rather than conscious first-person experiences. The latter definition (II) generalizes consciousness to any object or system, thus implicitly assuming that whatever the carrier of the consciousness is (i.e., human agent, artefact, silicon, or post-biotic system), its consciousness will have the same capacities as the original concept, so it assumes that SP is multi-realizable. In other words, research in one kind of conscious system would give insights into all others, and modelling a consciousness in one system will also provide models for other systems. Metzinger's synthetic phenomenology falls into the second (II) category of SP, and this seems to be the reason for his argument.

4. Metzinger's Argument

Thomas Metzinger proposed a global moratorium on synthetic phenomenology from 2021 to 2050 (Metzinger 2021a,b). His argument goes as follows (Metzinger 2021a):⁵

- (A1) On ethical grounds, we should not risk a second explosion of conscious suffering on this planet, at least not until we have a much deeper scientific and philosophical understanding of what both **consciousness** and **suffering** really are.

- (A2) As we presently have no **good theory of consciousness** and no good, hardware-independent **theory about what suffering** really is, the risk of ENP (explosion of negative phenomenology) is currently incalculable.
- (A3) It is unethical to incur incalculable (of explosion of negative phenomenology) risks of this magnitude.

Therefore,

- (C1) Until 2050, there should be a global ban on all research that directly or indirectly aims, or knowingly risks, the emergence of synthetic phenomenology (as synthetic phenomenology would bring an explosion of conscious suffering).⁶

The central concept behind Metzinger's argument for a moratorium is suffering of conscious beings. According to him, with his type II definition of SP, any conscious system suffers.⁷ So synthetic systems or conscious artefacts of any sorts, conscious silicon things, or conscious post-biotic systems, once created, will also suffer as conscious human agents do. We have no idea how synthetic systems would suffer, or whether they would suffer at all, but at least according to Metzinger and his cognitive equivalence principle, we cannot exclude the possibility of suffering on logical or technical grounds. Thus, Metzinger adopts the precautionary principle in assuming that synthetic systems or artefacts with synthetic consciousness will suffer, in the same way (employing cognitive equivalence principle!) as natural conscious systems do.

For suffering to occur in any kind of system, four necessary conditions must be satisfied (Metzinger 2021a): (I) The C condition: a conscious experience,⁸ (II) The PSM condition: possession of a phenomenal self-model (PSM),⁹ (III) The NV condition: negative valence,¹⁰ and (IV) The T condition: transparency.¹¹

To these four conditions, Metzinger adds four corollaries:

- (a) An unconscious system is unable to suffer.
- (b) A conscious system without a coherent PSM is unable to suffer.
- (c) A self-conscious system without the ability to produce negatively valenced states is unable to suffer.
- (d) A conscious system without any transparent phenomenal states cannot suffer, because it would lack the phenomenology of ownership and identification (Metzinger 2021a).

Therefore, before any system can experience suffering, it must satisfy four conditions (I–IV) and four corollaries (a–d). Clearly humans do satisfy these,

as well as some animals. But Metzinger claims that any system with consciousness, synthetic or natural, would also satisfy them, regardless of its origin, creation history, or substrate, whether it be biological, silicon, some hybrid, or some hitherto unknown substrate.

Metzinger states that any conscious (with natural or synthetic consciousness) system will suffer¹². It is then logical (meaning that there is no logical contractions) to assume that artificial conscious systems, of which we know nothing, and that do not exist yet but may one day exist and be conscious, may suffer as well. Thus, any systems with consciousness, synthetic or not, existing now or in the future, will suffer (as human agents do) and, when these synthetic systems will populate the Earth, we will witness an explosion of suffering on Earth (i.e., an explosion of negative phenomenology realized in artificial conscious systems).

As moral agents, Metzinger posits further, we have duties towards any creatures and our creations (i.e., artefacts) in particular and we should strive to minimize suffering in general and suffering of these artificial creatures. Thus, we should stop working on developing conscious artefacts to avoid an alleged explosion of negative phenomenology in synthetic systems of our creation. We should do it at least until we understand what is suffering, what these artificial systems really are and whether (and how) they suffer. Metzinger's argument is much more elaborate than this short exposition. But this summary offers the gist of it.

5. Argument Dissected

Let us dissect Metzinger's argument and emphasize its pivotal claims, as we see it.

(Claim A) Metzinger begins with an assumption (implicit) that human agents suffer and that natural (not hybrid, or chimeras) biological conscious systems suffer as well (Metzinger 2017).

(Claim B) Further, Metzinger claims that consciousness is a functional feature, implementation independent, and can be present in any system (natural or artificial) with a set of certain properties.¹³ Still, further, any conscious system (natural and artificial) is conscious the same way as natural biological conscious systems are, in all dimensions including capacity to suffer. And still, further, artificial conscious systems when implemented as physical artefacts or extant will suffer.

We face, in the claims (A) and (B) factual (related to physical reality) and speculative (related to conceptual construct) assumptions mixed. First claim (Claim A) is that conscious biological systems clearly suffer. We know it for a fact as we all have direct experience of it. This claim is based on our experience (we are not sure how and which non-human animals suffer but we have strong indications that they do). We can accept the claim (A) with a qualification that consciousness (and everything that come with it) is restricted to certain (rather vaguely defined) level of biological organization (excluding simple organisms) and that having consciousness implies a capacity to suffer (in Metzinger's sense).

Second claim (B) is that, there is an epistemic possibility (Derose 1991, Brandon 2023) (that it may be true for all that we know), that artificial conscious systems, of which we know nothing and can only assume that one day they might exist, may suffer as natural conscious systems (of which we know) suffer, i.e., that natural (existing) and artificial conscious systems (imaginary) are cognitively equivalent having the same functions and the same capacity to suffer (**assumption 1**). Further, that based on this assumption (of cognitive equivalence between natural and artificial entities) we are entitled to lay the claims about real conscious artificial systems (still non-existing), not imaginary ones – the claim “that these conscious systems when implemented will also suffer in the same way as human (or natural) agents suffer” (**assumption 2**).

We posit that the claim (B) makes Metzinger's argument unsound as it is based on category error. The first assumption (**assumption 1**) (of cognitive equivalence) mixes the realm of natural entities with the realm of imaginary or speculative artificial entities without any justifications. The second assumption (**assumption 2**) mixes the realm of imaginary or speculative entities with the realm of real or physical entities (artifacts), again without any justification.

The **assumptions (1)** and **(2)** in Metzinger's claim (B) equate the properties of natural exiting entities (conscious organisms), the properties of artificial imaginary entities (conscious nonexistent artifacts), and the implied properties of presumed real exiting artificial entities (conscious existent artifacts). Both assumptions are category errors, as they allege equivalence between imaginary, abstract, and real entities without giving us an argument why different existential realms will have equivalent properties. We are asked to accept this logic. The argument is tempting, but, as we explain it, it is not factual; it is based on unsubstantiated speculations, and as such, it is invalid and unsound.

Is blending of different categories (conceptual and real) of objects permissible in an argument? Yes. As long as it is acknowledged and recognized.

Is such step productive? Yes, why not, in philosophical speculations for the purpose of exploring possibilities, we often do it. We should not do it, and in general we try to avoid it, if we plan to make a practical use of it, or stake factual claims, or call for action, as Metzinger does. There is no necessary (i.e., logical or epistemic necessity) relation between artificial consciousness and the consciousness of natural systems, and Metzinger admits this. Despite this, still he passes over the differences between humans and machines (by claiming cognitive equivalence), arguing from the speculative assertion (that synthetic conscious artifacts will suffer because biological ones do) to realities or facts, i.e. conscious artefacts. Some people accept this logic as valid and sound, we do not.

Such a claim is a conjecture. And again, as we said, as a speculative claim such a conjecture is acceptable. But as a claim about reality it is an factual error, or category error. Two different ontological realms (virtual and real) that do not mix by fiat or argument¹⁴.

While in many contexts conceptual discussions may be fruitful, in claims on reality, asking for real action, pure conceptual claims will not do. They often contribute to the bad image of philosophy as speculative, unreal, and irrelevant (see e.g. Boulter [2019] for the discussion of irrelevance of philosophy). This incongruence between claims and reality is quite widespread in the ongoing debate about the ethics of AI of human-compatibility of AI systems (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1988, Russell 2019, Veliz 2021, Klein 2023, Mickunas and Pilotta 2023). Such claims, unfortunately, are quite common in public fora, blogs, papers, the popular press, and even scientific publications related to AI technology, and they seem to obfuscate the real problems facing artificial intelligence (Russell 2019, Zuboff 2019, Veliz 2021, Powers and Ganascia 2020, Klein 2023, Mickunas and Pilotta 2023). But being common, popular, or widespread opinion does not make it right. Metzinger's claims, if taken at its face value, may have the same obfuscating effect on rational discussion about AI as the discussions about moral robots, free will in robotic systems, feelings or emotions in synthetic creations. But Metzinger's claims may be interpreted more charitable, however at the cost of dropping all quasi factual claims.

6. Conclusions

There is nothing wrong with philosophical speculations like Metzinger's (they are bread and butter of philosophical enterprise) as long as they remain in the realm of philosophical meditation without making any substantial claims on reality¹⁵. Further, there is nothing illogical or incoherent about

synthetic phenomenology when it is defined as a research program within AI aimed at studying and developing phenomenological-like functionality in artificial systems (e.g., Gamez 2008, Chrisley 2009, Mlsbt 2021, Cali 2022). Indeed, synthetic phenomenology seems to be a farfetched, futuristic AI endeavor, like many other AI projects or even Turing proposal of thinking machine and McCarthy's AI project itself (McCarthy 1959). As well, there is nothing wrong about conceptual speculations per se. Conceptual mediations are quite ubiquitous in philosophy.

But this is not the case with Metzinger; his claims are about reality, about real consequences, it is a call for action, and all this on a planetary scale. Metzinger wants us to take his argument beyond mere speculations, as an ethical and factual problem of the highest importance to humanity (indeed), while we claim that Metzinger does not show us that there is a problem, and the apparent gravity of the argument is a result of a sort of philosophical conjuring act – we create reality out of speculations. The error that Metzinger makes is that of claiming that (assumed) conceptual equivalence (of synthetic phenomenology of imaginary and real artifacts and natural phenomenology); and as we have said Metzinger's conceptual equivalence is category error. Thus, we posit that Metzinger's argument cannot be accepted as stated by him.

Accepting claims, or an argument, based on category error without qualifications, though may offer an interesting intellectual challenge, leads eventually to confusion, in particular if these claims spill over to the claims on reality (see e.g., Velze 2012). Maybe the last quotation from Alexander will clarify this concept further: "The category mistake occurs when commentators equate conscious machines with living ones. And Further "... the error is due to the fact that the living makeup creates specific drives and needs during the process of becoming conscious in the living system which is not the case with a designed machine" (Alexander 2020). For more detailed discussion of category error or category mistake see Blackburn (1994), Honderich (2005), Audi (2015), and Magidor (2016, 2022).

The apparent conceptual equivalence does not legitimize equivalence in reality; imaginary, speculative realms do not necessarily coincide in properties with reality.¹⁶ It is a quite common in modern philosophy to brush over this distinction (between conceptual and real) and to accept, without much ground to do so, conceptual claims as the legitimate claims on reality, as long as these claims do not violate logic, i.e. what is logically conceivable is conceivably real (see examples discussed by Bulter (2019)). These maybe claims of similarity or difference¹⁷.

One may suggest that accepting Metzinger's claim of artefacts suffering is the safe bet in the presence of epistemic ignorance, or as he calls it, epistemic indeterminacy. Yes, there is some truth to it and we do not deny it. But, epistemic indeterminacy characterizes, to varying degrees, any advanced AI research field, such as ethical AI, AGI, Explanatory AI (XAI), trusted AI, human-compatible AI, and provably beneficial AI (PBAI), and nobody calls to stop this work, even if these research programs are potential threatening our very existence. Epistemic ignorance (as it always have been) should be rather a stimulus for research, thought made carefully, than ban.

In summary, we propose to look at Thomas Metzinger's argument for the ban on synthetic consciousness not as a well-formed, sound philosophical argument but rather as an ideological manifesto warning about the potential dangers of the uncontrolled development of AI technology in general, especially if it is left in the hands of technologists, businesses, military establishments, and moneyed interests. Under such an interpretation, Thomas Metzinger could join the growing list of prominent researchers, thinkers, and sci-fi writers voicing concerns about the dangers of an unmitigated development and deployment of AI systems, even if these systems are not AGI-like yet (e.g., Lem 2014/1965, Russell 2019, Gupta 2020, Bartoletti 2021, Gawdat 2023, Hinton et al. 2023). This is maybe where the significant, undisputable merit of his work lies. But a global moratorium on synthetic phenomenology, as Metzinger formulated it, is not justified, desired or productive.

7. Explanatory notes

Why references do not include some historical publications on phenomenology and consciousness? The purpose of references is to connect with the current research on the topic. Therefore, the selected references are those that are actively contributing to current studies. In this approach, references that are relevant in some way but primarily of historical value are not included.

Why the paper is not discuss phenomenology and consciousness in a wider context? We do not discuss phenomenology and consciousness in a wider context because the paper has a very narrow focus: it argues that Thomas Metzinger's call for a global moratorium is unsound as currently formulated. Metzinger's argument is based on a category error, a common,

but frequently ignored, mistake in AI discussions. Any larger discussion of Metzinger's ideas would detract from the paper's main objective, which is to point out and address this specific error.

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The author would like to thank anonymous reviewers who pointed out flaws in the argument in the early versions of the paper. In response, the author rewrote the discussion and deleted some sections that detracted from the main narrative. We hope these changes have added to the clarity of the paper, but it is the readers who will ultimately judge this. The author also acknowledges the reviewers' comments on the selection of references and the limited discussion of the context in which Metzinger's argument is placed, as mentioned in the previous section.

N O T E S

¹ We use terms like “sort of” and “-like” to indicate that the qualified term is not being used in its original meaning but rather as a vague extension. Thus, for example, “a sort of consciousness” refers to a concept of consciousness that resembles the original concept but is not exactly equivalent. This “softening” of meaning is a standard philosophical practice among some philosophers and AI engineers in particular when working with problems that span multiple fields of research (e.g. Chalmers 2017, Dennett 2018).

² More arguments can be formulated against Metzinger's call for memorandum (banning this research will push it into out-of-oversight underground or military domain, by the same argument we should stop having children, new technologies despite the predicted ominous effects became quite beneficial, etc.); a perspective suggested by Prof. J. Wolenski in private communication. However these arguments are not part of this discussion.

³ To be a moral patient is to be “the target of the actions of a moral agent, and being worthy of moral consideration” (Floridi and Sanders 2004).

⁴ One may recall similar conceptualizations in artificial intelligence with weak, strong AI (see Searle 1984, 1990) and in-between AI for AI systems that escape the rigid two-class structure (which most of modern AI systems do).

⁵ All quotations, if not otherwise stated, are from Metzinger's paper on Artificial Suffering (Metzinger 2021a).

⁶ By the first explosion of conscious suffering, Metzinger refers to the emergence on Earth of biological conscious organisms with the inherent capacity to suffer. A second explosion of conscious suffering would happen if we were to create conscious systems that, according to the cognitive equivalence principle, would have the capacity to suffer. (Note that the concept of suffering used in Metzinger's argument is an abstraction borrowed from biological systems like humans.) The second explosion of negative phenomenology refers to a “second explosion of conscious suffering on this Planet” in “advanced AI and other post-biotic systems” (Metzinger 2021a).

⁷ Metzinger is not alone in attributing the ability to suffer to synthetic systems. For example, David Chalmers claimed that conscious machines (with synthetic consciousness) will feel pain the same way we do, happiness the way we do, etc. (Chalmers 2017, min 2:43). We need to add that this will be true if and only if synthetic consciousness is equivalent

to human consciousness, about which we know some things, or animal consciousness, about which we know somewhat less, because these are the only forms of consciousness that we know that suffer in some way, so we can only refer to these.

⁸ “Suffering” is a phenomenological concept, and only beings with conscious experience and a phenomenal self-model (PSM) can suffer. Zombies do not suffer, and human beings in a dreamless deep sleep, in a coma, or under general anesthesia do not suffer. It is also possible that persons or unborn human beings who have yet to come into self-conscious existence do not suffer. Robots, AI systems, and intelligent post-biotic entities can only suffer if they are capable of having phenomenal states (Metzinger 2021a).

⁹ “The most important phenomenological characteristic of suffering is the sense of ownership, the untranscendable subjective experience that it is myself who is suffering right now, that it is my own suffering I am currently undergoing” (Metzinger 2021a).

¹⁰ “The suffering system must be able to internalize and integrate the negative value of an experience.” In other words, “Suffering is created by states representing a negative value being integrated into the PSM of a given system” (Metzinger 2021a).

¹¹ “Phenomenal transparency means that something particular is not accessible for subjective experience, namely the representational character of the contents of conscious experience” (Metzinger 2021a).

¹² Metzinger implicitly extends human experience of suffering to other forms of consciousness as this is only experience of suffering that we directly have and we can make factual claims about.

¹³ See four necessary conditions for suffering to occur in any kind of system (Metzinger 2021a).

¹⁴ Philosopher David Chalmers (2023) claim that virtual is real but his real is not physical real.

¹⁵ As we may recall, Descartes’s argument about mind-body separation was quite cogent (logically admissible) as long as Descartes did not try to translate it into the realities of human body.

¹⁶ Reality is what is the final arbiter of conceptual constructs about reality, as one can learn from conflicting theories about quantum mechanics (Becker 2019).

¹⁷ As an example, we recall the difference between the Morning Star and the Evening Star is only in concept not in reality and the alleged similarity of ethics of AI system does not correspond to ethics in human agents without detailed qualifications and thorough analysis (see e.g. Veliz 2021).

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