

Sensational Properties:  
Theses to Accept and Theses to Reject<sup>1</sup>

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My aim is to discuss the nature and significance of sensational properties of experience. I proceed by formulating a series of theses about sensational properties that we ought to accept; and then by formulating a series of theses we ought to reject.

The subjective properties of an experience are those which specify what having the experience is like for its subject. The sensational properties of an experience are those of its subjective properties that it does not possess in virtue of features of the way the experience represents the world as being (its representational content). Perhaps no topic in the philosophy of mind has been more vigorously debated in the past quarter-century than whether there are any sensational properties, so conceived. The existence or otherwise of sensational properties is pivotal in assessing functionalism, representationalism, and many other conceptions of mental states and the nature of our ability to think about them. Instead of engaging in extended sentence-by-sentence dissection of these many discussions, I hope that the theses I formulate will, taken

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<sup>1</sup> © Christopher Peacocke 2007. This short piece began life as no more than a pair of slides, with the same title, for a public discussion with Fred Dretske about the existence of sensational properties at David Chalmers' and David Hoy's 2002 Summer N.E.H. Institute at UC Santa Cruz. I thank Fred Dretske, and all those who in subsequent years prompted me into action by asking "Whatever happened to 'Sensational Properties: Theses to Accept and Theses to Reject'?" Because of length limitations, the piece retains the character of a statement of position. I thank an anonymous referee for the *Revue* for comments meriting longer treatment than is here permitted.

together, comprise a positive conception of sensational properties that can be drawn upon in assessing those debates. My main aim is to articulate that conception.

The paradigms of sensational properties have been properties that J.J. Gibson would have characterized as visual field properties.<sup>2</sup> Examples are: being an experience that we intuitively classify as one in which the area of the visual field in which the dinner plate is presented is oval in shape; or as one in which that area is changing in shape as one walks closer to the dinner plate; or as one in which the area has a property of a sort that is instantiated when a white surface is presented in a region of the subject's visual field. Visual experience is intrinsically spatial (on which, more below); but examples of sensational properties can equally be drawn from modalities that are not intrinsically spatial. An experience can be of the distinctive smell of cinnamon. This experience need not involve the subject of the experience having any conception of cinnamon, or of the source of the smell. Even if the subject's experience has the representational content that the air in his nose has a certain scent, what it is for the air to have this scent is plausibly explicable only in terms of an experience of this scent; that is, only in terms of the sensational property of his olfactory experience.

#### THESES TO ACCEPT

##### Thesis (I)

Every experience has sensational properties; this is what makes an experience an experience.

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<sup>2</sup> J. J. Gibson, *The Perception of the Visual World* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950).

Not every perceptual mechanism produces perceptual experience. The blindsight subject who can (initially to her surprise) report whether there is a circle in her environment must be receiving information from her surroundings via some perceptual mechanism. But she does not enjoy a perceptual experience of the circle. We already know from the case of propositional, nonautobiographical memory that there can be representational states in which something is given as correct - e.g. that World War I ended in 1918 - where this exhausts the subjective properties of the state. We can conceive of perceptual mechanisms producing such thin states. These states would not be experiences. They would also not be states or events on which attention could operate to provide objects of attention, as opposed to occupying attention. Any genuine perceptual experience must be in at least one sense modality, and it will have some sensational properties proprietary to that modality. Any visual experience will involve some visual-field sensational properties; any taste experience will have some sensational properties distinctively associated with taste; and so forth.

## Thesis (II)

Some experiences have no representational properties concerning the subject's environment or his body.

When you close your eyes and point your head in the direction of the noonday sun, you have a visual experience in which there are colours and shapes, and usually some motion, in your visual field. It does not thereby look as if there are objects or events in your

spatio-temporal environment. A fortiori, it does not look as if there are things or events in the environment subtending certain solid angles, and does not look as if certain counterfactuals are true about what would happen if things in your environment were moved along certain paths. The visual experience in this example has no representational content concerning the subject's environment, nor concerning her body. If the experience has no such representational content, but still has sensational properties, it follows that those sensational properties are not possessed in virtue of those kinds of representational properties of the experience.

In such a noonday experience, the region of the visual field displaying certain sensational properties can be identical with the region in which in some other experience a window, say, is presented when you are having a visual experience as of the world being a certain way. (This is especially clear in the case of after-images.) It follows that the existence of regions of the visual field in visual experience, even those connected to representational content in the way of the aforementioned window, is not to be analyzed in terms of representational content concerning the subject's environment or her body.

What is the proper way to express the condition that in a particular token experience  $e$  occurring at a particular time, the region  $r$  of the visual field has the visual-field property it characteristically possesses when the subject of the experience (whose vision is normal) sees something red? The third thesis addresses this question.

### Thesis (III)

The proper notation for describing sensational properties of experience, in the visual case, expresses a relation between an experience  $e$ , a region  $r$  of the visual field, and

the sensational property of being red  $\square$ , thus:

red  $\square(e,r)$

or, better:

In  $e$ : red  $\square(r)$ .

In these notations, there is no attribution, or certainly no overt attribution, of an intentional content, nothing within this predication that itself has a correctness condition. The predicate “red  $\square$ ” here picks out what in *Sense and Content* I called a primed property.<sup>3</sup> The second, preferred, notation “In  $e$ : red  $\square(r)$ ” has two virtues. It separates out the identity of the token experience,  $e$ , from the specification, red  $\square(r)$ , of what it is like to have the experience. This preferred notation also distinguishes what are, intuitively, properties of the visual field such as that of being red  $\square$  or square from the events in which they are so experienced.

There is a difference between those sensational properties whose canonical characterization involves colour and those whose canonical characterization involves space. No region of the visual field is itself literally red when our subject sees a ripe tomato. Being red is a public property of a physical surface; or of a solid, for example a lump of red Murano glass; or of light, as with a neon sign, a ray of theatre light, or a red firework exploding in the sky. A region of the visual field is not of any of these sorts. If

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<sup>3</sup> *Sense and Content: Experience, Thought and their Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), Chapter 1.

the visual field were literally red, one would be faced with absurd issues: why is it not itself perceived, why cannot many people perceive it? This is why sensational properties should be characterized as primed properties.

For spatial properties, however, matters stand differently. The region of your visual field that is white □ when you look at a white dinner plate when sitting at the table is literally an oval region. If we do not use spatial properties in characterizing the visual field, we omit a subjective feature of the experience.

This state of affairs raises a puzzle in need of a solution. If we are to use spatial notions of size, shape, motion, direction and distance in characterizing the visual-field properties, and insist that these uses are literal, we have to explain the relation of these spatial properties and relations to real, physical space. We must meet this need if we are to show that the use of these spatial notions is not just a pun, or something metaphorical. Since we are concerned with sensational rather than representational features, we cannot meet this need by saying that these spatial properties and relations are simply the properties and relations the experience represents things in the world as having. That would be an adequate answer for the use of spatial notions in characterizing representational content, but it is unavailable for apparently spatial sensational properties of experience. Nor is there any such thing as mental space, which is genuinely spatial, to which we could appeal to answer the question. Insofar as we can make sense of a subjective space at all, it is precisely such space as is alleged to be involved in the visual field – and that is precisely what is in need of explanation.

I propose the following as a solution to the puzzle.

#### Thesis (IV)

The visual field is a real, curved plane in space, a plane individuated (in the case of human vision) by its relation to the two retinas; so spatial vocabulary used in describing the visual field can be taken literally.

When you look at the world with only one eye open, your visual field at any given time is the curved plane of space at which the surface of the retina of your open eye is located at that time. On this account, which curved plane in space is your visual field is a time-relative matter. Suppose your eye moves in its socket. Then the curved plane in which your retina is located at a time  $t_1$  before the motion is distinct from the curved plane in which your retina is located at a later time  $t_2$  after the motion of your eye. This is not to say that the visual field is experienced as a surface. It is not, and if it were, we would have a case of representational content concerning an internal part of the body, which would be something different from our actual experience of sensational properties. The visual field has up, down, left and right directions that correspond to something in phenomenology. The appropriateness of this labeling of the directions no doubt depends on contingent connections between those directions and the normal orientation of the visual field relative to the subject's body and the gravitational vertical. The labeling is not intrinsic to the curved plane itself.

Now consider the case in which you have both eyes open, and functioning, and you are focused so that there are no double images in your experience. Then the visual field is a constructed, curved plane, as if you were seeing from a single 'Cyclopean' eye with a single extended retina. In that case, the visual field is the curved, geometrically

constructible location of the retina of the Cyclopean eye. When there are double images, there are two visual fields.

Under this approach, the visual field is related to, indeed is located in, real space. Location, distance, size and shape in the visual field are spatial properties and relations in a genuinely spatial plane.

Here there are some similarities between the sensational properties of visual experience and the occurrence of pain in some part of one's body. In my judgement, neither the possession of pain, nor the possession of a sensational colour property in the visual field is itself a representational property. Both involve a predication of a sensational property of something spatial or located in space – a location in or region of the visual field in the visual case, a predication of an (apparent) part of the body in the case of pain. The two cases differ of course in that the pain is experienced as being in something which is itself experienced as a bodily part. Nothing is experienced as a bodily part when a subject experiences some region of his visual field as red □.

Here are three attractions of this way of elaborating Thesis (IV).

First, the approach can explain why it makes sense to speak of up and down, and of left and right, in the visual field. Different regions of the visual field really do stand in the relations required for these labels to apply. It is hard to believe that such talk is purely metaphorical. Again, the partial parallel with pain is helpful. The apparent location of one pain in your forearm can really be closer to your elbow than the apparent location of a second pain in the same forearm.

Second, this approach can explain the fact that it makes sense, and it is important in describing our phenomenology, to talk of the orientation of the visual field as a whole



relative to the rest of the body, or to the gravitational vertical, or to some other given line in environmental space. What is upwards in your visual field is not upwards with respect to the gravitational vertical when you are lying down. It is not upwards, nor anything else, with respect to the gravitational vertical when you are in space and there is no gravitational vertical. Upwards in your visual field is not necessarily the same as upwards in the sense of being towards the top of your head. If your eyes slip and tilt in their sockets, upwards in your visual field can be a different direction from the direction towards the top of your head. It seems impossible to make sense of these distinctions between experiences under the hypothesis that spatial talk in describing sensational properties is not to be taken literally.

Third, the approach allows us to assimilate the existence, and, on occasion, the awareness, of sensational properties of experiences to a more general phenomenon found in other types of experience. Consider the phenomenon in vision of being able to attend, in two experiences that are otherwise the same, first to the objects presented and their properties (e.g. the coin on the table and its colour); and then to the region of the visual field in which the coin is presented, to that region's shape, and its other visual-field properties. I propose that the duality of possible distributions of attention in a given experience is an instance of a more general phenomenon that has been noted for other senses such as touch, as emphasized in the writings of Brian O'Shaughnessy and Michael Martin.<sup>4</sup> Suppose you press the palm of your hand against the corner of your desk. In doing so, you feel the rectangular corner as a rectangular corner of an object.

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<sup>4</sup> B. O'Shaughnessy, 'The Sense of Touch', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 67 (1989) 37-58; M. Martin, 'Sight and touch' in *The contents of experience: Essays on perception*, ed. T. Crane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Alternatively, by focusing your attention differently, you can experience the pressure and corresponding deformation of the palm of your hand, without any other change in the experience. On the present treatment of sensational properties, this double-aspect of perception is present in both the visual and the tactile cases, despite other important differences between them.

We have a

Corollary of Thesis (IV)

Even sensational properties are properties of things that are individuated by their relations to real, physical space.

Thesis (IV) implies that the regions of the visual field that have visual sensational properties are individuated by their relations to real, physical space. If anyone still has any inclination to think that some Berkeleian, idealistic project of constructing a conception of the physical world from purely sensational states has some chance of success, this Corollary suggest that even the intended starting point of such a project cannot be elucidated without reference to the physical, public, nonmental world. Not even the instantiation of sensational properties by experience is available as a suitable species of construction materials which would meet the Berkeleian requirements.

Even if a sensational property is not itself a representational property, the question arises of whether every experience with sensational properties also thereby has some representational properties. For the visual case, one may already begin to suspect that this

is so if indeed the visual field is individuated by its relations to real space, in the way I have been suggesting.

It seems to me that a strong case can be made that any visual experience will have some minimal representational properties. This is of course consistent with the claim that there are sensational properties of experiences that cannot be reduced to representational properties. It is also consistent with Thesis II, the argument for which cited visual experiences with no representational contents concerning the subject's environment or his body (and not visual experiences that have no such contents at all). Here are three sample considerations in support of the view that any visual experience will have some minimal representational properties. Each of these considerations is an instance of a general type for which other instances could equally be given:

(a) Consider an experience in which a red  $\square$  region of the visual field is adjacent, in the visual field, to a blue  $\square$  region of the visual field. This experience of adjacency of the two regions is simply correct on the above account of the visual field: for the regions of the curved plane of space experienced as having those primed properties really are adjacent. So this seems to be a case of a correct representational content. The case is analogous in certain respects to that of one pain in your arm being closer to your elbow than a second pain. The experienced locations of each pain do really stand in spatial relations, and it can really be true that one of them is closer to your elbow than the other. Acknowledging this point is entirely consistent with regarding pain itself as a nonrepresentational state.

(b) We can conceive of illusions in which the whole of the visual field is incorrectly tilted with respect to the gravitational vertical. To speak of correctness and

incorrectness here already commits us to the existence of a representational element in such experiences.

(c) The brain in the vat may have visual experiences with certain visual-field primed properties. But for this unfortunate subject, there is no such thing as the curved plane of space that is occupied by his retina or the corresponding region within his head, for he has neither retina nor head. This is a case of a phantom spatial visual field, just as the amputee may experience pain in a phantom limb. For these respective subjects, it is as if there is something – in one case, a region of space determined by relations to a retina, in the other case, a limb – parts of which enjoy the relevant sensational properties or events, even though in both cases there is no such thing.

The representational properties involved in enjoying an experience with visual field can be described as vestigial, for two reasons. First, the representational contents to which they contribute are only in very exceptional cases ones that it is important that the subject of the experience accepts, either for action for the subject's epistemic aims. As treated here, these representational contents concern neither the subject's environment, nor his body. Second, instantiation of sensational properties by certain regions of the visual field corresponds very directly to the regions of space in which the proximal stimulation by light actually occurs in the organism's retina. Eyes will have evolved gradually, under the selection pressures that favour those better able to discriminate information about the world retrievable from the light. Very early precursors of the mature eye will be light-sensitive devices whose stimulation does not, as in much later creatures, lead to the computation of complex representational contents concerning the environment or the subject's own body. The visual-field properties of experience may be

traces in consciousness, vestiges of these early states that are both early in evolutionary history, and are now early in the visual computational process.

Thesis (V)

The existence of sensational properties of experience is consistent with what, following G. E. Moore, has come to be called the ‘transparent’ or ‘diaphanous’ quality of experience.

Moore famously wrote: “When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element [the sensation or consciousness itself – CP] is as if it were diaphanous”.<sup>5</sup> There seems to be no such thing as introspecting the sensation or experience itself, as opposed to introspection of what, in some very broad sense, the sensation or experience is of. This is what I shall mean by the transparency of experience. Can the agreed transparency of experience be marshaled into an argument against the existence of sensational properties?<sup>6</sup>

Arguments to the nonexistence of sensational properties of experience (that is, to representationalism) sometimes start from an instruction such as: “Focus your attention on the scene before your eyes and on how things *look* to you”.<sup>7</sup> From that starting point,

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<sup>5</sup> ‘The Refutation of Idealism’, repr. in *G. E. Moore: Selected Writings*, ed. T. Baldwin (London: Routledge, 1993), p.41.

<sup>6</sup> For an extended argument for representationalism from the transparency of experience, see M. Tye, ‘Representationalism and the Transparency of Experience’, repr. in *Privileged Access: Philosophical Accounts of Self-Knowledge* ed. B. Gertler (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003). There are hints of the argument in G. Harman’s ‘The Intrinsic Quality of Experience’, repr. in his *Reasoning, Meaning and Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), at p. 251.

<sup>7</sup> Cp. Tye, op. cit., p.31, from which the quoted instruction is taken.

it becomes entirely plausible that what you are aware of, and how things look to you, will be specified by what objects and events there seem to be before you, and what properties and relations they are presented in your experience as possessing. In the nature of the case, all of this is captured in the representational content of experience. That is all that could be so captured, given that the initial instruction concerned ‘the scene before your eyes’, viz. what is in the volume of space in front of your eyes. The initial instruction already rules out the possibility of being aware of sensational properties by this route; and so the framing of the argument seems to beg the question against the friend of sensational properties.

If we had been given different instructions, we would have been aware of sensational properties. Suppose you are in a flat area of Japan. You may perceive a bullet train in the far distance, and you may perceive it as moving extremely fast. Your experience has the representational content that it is moving fast. But it may be moving rather slowly across your visual field, and that too is something of which you can become aware. It may be moving across your visual field at the same rate as a nearby cat that is moving very slowly across a path in front of you. This sensational property is a property that the train and the cat can share with some speck of colour that moves slowly across your visual field in an experience which (in accordance with the considerations in favour of Thesis (II)) has no representational content concerning the subject’s environment or body. If this is correct, it follows that the property of being experienced as moving slowly across the visual field is not analyzable in terms of representational properties concerning the environment or the body, since there are no such represented properties in the case of the moving speck.

The correct initial elaboration of Moore's point is that in being aware of something, we are aware of some of its (apparent) properties and relations, and the properties and relations of which we are aware in experience are never purely properties and relations of the experience (except perhaps the time at which it occurs), but are apparently properties and relations of other things. In the case of the representational content of experience, these other things are the apparently perceived objects and events. For bodily sensations, the properties and relations experienced are given as properties and relations of apparent parts of the body. In the case of the sensational properties, the experienced properties are, in the visual case, properties and relations of the visual field and its parts. It is one of the virtues of the notation

In  $e$ : red  $\square(r)$

that it highlights this point. The transparency or diaphanousness of experience is, then, respected in both the representational and the sensational cases.

It is a question for further philosophical research why the Moorean transparency of experience exists. One direction future research should explore is the hypothesis that the phenomenon is explained by the generalization we conjectured earlier in this paper, viz. that the experience of a sensational property involves the presence of representational properties in the same experience. If that generalization is true, it will be arguable that there will always be something independent of the experience or sensation itself that, in the experience, is given as having certain properties. If this is the right form of

explanation of Moorean transparency, it makes it all the more pressing to understand in turn the source of the generalization that is used to explain the transparency.

#### Thesis (VI)

We can distinguish between those sense modalities that are *intrinsically spatial* and those that are not. The intrinsically spatial ones are the modalities for which there is some space, essential to the characterization of the sensational states given in that modality, that plays a role analogous to that played by the visual field for sight.

Vision is intrinsically spatial by this criterion. Hearing is not. Though binaural experiences have spatial representational content – you can hear the footsteps as coming closer from roughly 45 degrees to the left of straight ahead of you – such spatial content is not essential to an experience’s having an auditory character. Monaural hearing does not have any such spatial content. Strawson was right to think that his ‘sound world’ in *Individuals* is non-spatial.<sup>8</sup>

#### Thesis (VII)

The qualities classically classified as ‘secondary qualities’ have a distinctive relation to sensational properties. For  $e$  to be an experience in which something is seen as red, there must be some part  $r$  (region or point) of the visual field such that

In  $e$ : red  $\square(r)$ .

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<sup>8</sup> P. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, 1959), Chapter 2, ‘Sounds’.



By contrast, the corresponding point does not hold for something to be experienced as square or round: the relevant regions of the visual field may be an irregular quadrilateral or be elliptical, respectively.

The obvious explanation for the difference claimed in Thesis (VII) is that what it is to be a secondary quality is to be explained, constitutively, in one way or another in terms of the power of instances of the quality to produce sensational states in perceivers. This Thesis (VII) is then very much in the spirit of the original characterizations of secondary qualities in Galileo, Boyle and Locke.

It may be objected that there is a puzzling asymmetry here. What psychologists call colour constancy is as much a real phenomenon as shape constancy, so how can there be a difference between colour and shape of the sort Thesis (VII) claims? The answer is that visual sensational properties should not be either identified with, or thought to be straightforwardly lawfully correlated with, corresponding properties of retinal stimulation. The existence of perceptual constancy phenomena for colours does not conflict with Thesis (VII). In fact in some of the most famous examples, it confirms the Thesis. Identical combinations of energy fluxes at the retina produce perception of different colours in Edwin Land's famous experiments involving colour 'Mondrians'.<sup>9</sup> But though the retinal stimulation patterns are constant for the different perceived colours, the sensational properties of the experiences are different too. Hence there is no conflict with Thesis (VII). Even in an example in which you look at a white sheet of paper through brown sunglasses, while it is true and significant that the paper still looks

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<sup>9</sup> E. H. Land, 'The Retinex Theory of Color Vision', repr. in *The Perceptual World*, ed. I. Rock (New York: W. H. Freeman and Co., 1990).

white, and not brown or yellow, it does not look the same shade of white as when you were not wearing the sunglasses. It looks a more yellowish-white than it does without the sunglasses; and correspondingly it is presented in a yellowish-white  $\square$  region of your visual field. This is all in accord with the commitments of Thesis (VII).

### THESES TO REJECT

Reject (I)

For it to be the case that

In  $e$ : red  $\square(r)$

the experience itself or its vehicle must be red or square.

The clear-headed friend of sensational properties will distinguish between (a) the visual experience, (b) the objects, properties and events represented in the experience, (c) the visual field, in the sense used above, and (d) the mental representation which is the vehicle of the experience. Properties of any one of these four should not be confused with properties of any of the other three. No one could claim that all friends of sensational properties have always been clear on this. The history of discussions justifies

representationalists in cautioning against any such confusion.<sup>10</sup> But such confusion is not an essential to being a friend of sensational properties.

Reject (II)

Every representational property of an experience is possessed in virtue of some sensational property.

The difference between monaural and binaural experience of a sound is a counterexample to Reject (II). We have an experience of the sound's direction, given egocentrically, in the binaural case, and not in the monaural case. The sensational properties of the two experiences are, however, the same. The experience of directionality is a pure difference between the two experiences: there need not be any other difference between the two experiences. Such examples mean one should not even contemplate the project of attempting to elucidate, philosophically, representational properties of experience in terms of sensational properties. The case for the existence of sensational properties is independent of the fate of any such project.

Reject (III)

The visual field is to be explained in terms of a special ability to see the world as a picture projected onto a plane.

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<sup>10</sup> See for instance F. Dretske, 'Experience as Representation', *Philosophical Issues* 13 (2003) 67-82, esp. at pp. 68, 72.

There is such a thing as imagining a vertical transparent plane in front of oneself, and then experiencing the shape a perceived object would project onto such a plane. Some representational painters can do this. But it is a sophisticated activity, not essential to having experiences with sensational properties. The coin can be presented in an oval region of the visual field without the subject having to engage in any such activity. Even when such activity does take place, it is arguable that the subject draws on sensational properties in coming to experience projected shape on the vertical plane. The friend of sensational properties is also likely to argue that the experience of depictions is to be elucidated in terms of sensational properties, rather than vice versa.<sup>11</sup>

#### Reject (IV)

Sensational properties and qualia cannot be the referents of general terms in a public language, nor can they be the referents of concepts expressed by general terms in a public language.

One might expect that the content of Reject (IV) would be endorsed by some of those who deny the existence of sensational properties, in the course of propounding their argument. In fact one of the main defenders of this proposition has been Ned Block, a leading friend of qualia and sensational properties, and a believer in the intelligibility and possibility of inverted spectra – cases in which the “things we agree are red look to you the way things we agree are green look to me (and vice versa)”.<sup>12</sup> Block describes,

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<sup>11</sup> For one such account, see my ‘Depiction’, *Philosophical Review* **XCVI** (1987) 383-410.

<sup>12</sup> N. Block, ‘Inverted Earth’, *Philosophical Perspectives* 4 (1990) 53-79, at p.53.

“tendentiously”, “the supposition that experiential contents that can be expressed in public language such as *looking red* are qualitative contents as the fallacy of intentionalizing qualia” (55). His view is that “What gives an experience the content of *looking red* is its relation to red things, not its qualitative content” (55). He also holds that “One route to the fallacy of intentionalizing qualia among qualia realists is to define secondary quality terms in terms of the qualitative content of the experiences they normally produce” (56). Of attempts, such as mine, to define ‘red’ in terms of a tendency to produce red □ experiences in normal observers, he writes “Such a view would not be very attractive if there is no “the” quale produced by red things” (56). Overall, Block’s view is that both sides of the inverted spectrum debate have made a vital error, which he aims to correct in this passage: “if an inverted spectrum is possible, then experiential contents **that can be expressed in public language** (for example, *looking red*) are not qualitative contents, but rather intentional contents” (55, Block’s boldface). His argument is that if spectrum inversion is rife, I could not justify my claim that red things look red to me but not to you. Any argument I could use could be used by you, a subject of spectrum inversion, against me.

As against Block’s conclusion, nothing could be more natural than to describe a case in which your spectrum is inverted as one in which green things look red to you. If Block is right, this natural expression is wrong. If Block’s points are correct, the characterization of secondary qualities in terms of sensational properties is also wrong. So is he right?

It is a problem with Block’s position is that its arguments are not applied to the full extent to which they would be valid. When they are, the consequences are hard to

accept. The words “same way” and “same kind of experience” are also words in the public language. In fact they are words that Block, and any friend of qualia and the possibility of inverted spectra, uses in formulating these views. Yet the same kind of arguments Block uses against the expressibility of experiential contents in public language would apply to the relations of sameness of qualitative kind of experience. Suppose a person - ‘Invert’ we can call him - has a spectrum that is inverted relative to the rest of us. He insists “I see the tomato the same way as you do”. We assert the opposite form of words. Again, short of brain investigations, this dispute may be irresoluble (at least by the same standards of irresolubility that Block considered in his own examples). In Block’s example, he envisaged a dispute about which things are really red. Here we are envisaging a parallel dispute about which experiences are really of the same kind. It seems that if we applied reasoning analogous to that which Block applies in the case of particular kinds of colour experience, we would have to conclude that sameness or difference of kind is not something that can be expressed in public language either. This conclusion cannot be right, even by Block’s own lights. The conclusion would make it a puzzle how we could ever even communicate the hypothesis of the inverted spectrum using such phrases as “sees in the same way” and “sees in a different way”. The conclusion would also of course make it a puzzle how there could ever be words in the public language, such as “pain”, that pick out a qualitative type of experience. If, however, we can make sense of “same way” and “different way” in genuinely picking out qualitative properties, it seems hard to resist the conclusion that we can have words in the public language that pick out one particular one of those ways.

How can quantification over, and identity of, those ways be expressible in public language, but specific ways not be so expressible?

We are in need of a characterization of the situation, one that does not leave us saying about some words for qualitative properties what we do not equally say about qualitative relations. I suggest that in using the public word 'red', we presuppose that some central group of language users see red things the same way as we do, in this (perceptually given) range of ways. This is not to presuppose that inversion is impossible. It is not even to rule out the possibility of very widespread inversion. It is just that in this case we could no longer rationally continue to use the word 'red', without further stipulation, once we know the situation.

There is a certain irony in this view. It seeks to found the possibility of public meaning on an account of understanding that involves grasp of an identity relation, of sameness of kind of experience between different subjects of experience. The irony lies in the fact that in the rhetoric and dialectic of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, the much-derided appeals to grasp of a sameness relation in an account of understanding have been pinned on those who were trying to defend the possibility of a private language. If the present view is correct, the presence of a sameness relation in an account of what is grasped when a colour predicate is understood is what makes public meaning and description of experience possible, rather than impossible.<sup>13</sup> I would then, also reject any thesis to the effect that sensational properties could exist and be the objects of thought only under an illegitimate conception of what it is for someone else to have a sensation,

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<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 4, 'Conceiving of Conscious States' in my book *Truly Understood* (forthcoming).

and under an illegitimate conception of what it is to be capable of thought about another's sensations.

So, is it after all a fallacy to intentionalize qualia, or not? I have argued that qualitative content, and also relations between qualitative content, can be expressed in the public language. The position I have developed also endorses the legitimacy of the natural description of an inverted subject as having experiences in which things that are really red look green to him. This is legitimized, because the presuppositions of proper use of the word 'red' can be fulfilled consistently with some subjects having inverted spectra. If you were to discover, after a comprehensive brain scan when looking at various objects, that you yourself were one of these subjects, you would rightly describe yourself in English as seeing as green things that are really red.

There are, however, two other respects in which, on the present account, it nevertheless remains a mistake – though for reasons different from those identified by Block - to intentionalize qualia. First, to have an experience in which some region of the visual field is red  $\square$  is not thereby to have an experience in which something looks red. In experiences with only vestigial representational content, as in the example of one's experience when facing towards the noonday sun with eyes closed, there can be red  $\square$  regions of one's visual field without any surface, volume, external event or object looking red. Second, even when objects are perceived in an experience, in unusual circumstances something seen as white may be experienced in a pinkish  $\square$  region of one's visual field. Looking through rose-tinted spectacles at a white object produces the experience as of a white object seen through pink glass, not an experience as of an object



with a pink surface. (Purists will therefore refrain from using the phrase ‘looking at the world through rose-tinted spectacles’.)

Reject (V)

Accepting the present conception of sensational properties offends against what is right in Sellars’ rejection of the Myth of the Given.

This territory, like the others traversed in this piece, has hidden landmines every step of the way, but I hope I can avoid stepping on them with the following formulation of what seems right to me in the rejection of the Myth of the Given. A mental state can give a noninferential reason or entitlement for making a judgement about things that exist independently of that mental state only if it has a representational content concerning such independently existing things. For convenience, I label this ‘the minimalist version’ of opposition to the Myth of the Given. The minimalist version is consistent with the recognition of perceptual states without conceptual content entitling thinkers to make noninferential judgements about the world around them, provided these states are conceived as having some form of nonconceptual representational content. Violation of even this minimalist version would involve a noninferential transition to a judgement that could be no more than a leap in the dark, from a state that involves nothing about the world independent of the state to a judgement that involves a commitment to the character of the world beyond that state.

When a thinker makes a judgement about the sensational properties of his own current experiences, he is not making a judgement about something that exists

independently of that experience and its character. He is not violating the minimalist version of opposition to the Myth of the Given. Still, it may be asked, why make an apparent exception for a thinker's judgements about his own mental states? Shouldn't a state that entitles a thinker to a judgement about some subject-matter always have a representational content concerning that subject-matter, even in the case in which the subject-matter is the thinker's own mental states? I reply that certain perceptual experiences entitle a thinker to judgements about the objective, spatial world only because they have intentional contents individuated in part by their relations to that objective spatial world. What it is to have the spatial, temporal and other contents they possess is, as a constitutive matter, dependent upon the relations of states with such contents to what in the spatio-temporal world, in certain standard circumstances, produces them.<sup>14</sup> But a similar point about individuation applies equally to concepts of mental states. The concept of a visual-field property, like the concept of pain, is what it is because it is rationally applied in the first-person case in response to instantiations of that very property in the thinker herself. That is why it is not a leap in the dark for a thinker to self-apply the concepts *has a part of the visual field that is white* □ or *is in pain* simply on the basis of occurrences of experiences of those very kinds. In short, we have here a kind of externalism about the internal. The lessons of external individuation, now rather familiar for various observational concepts, should be applied to concepts of conscious states and events too. In my judgement, the lessons of externalism in the theory of conceptual content have yet to be fully assimilated. If we do appreciate their wider

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<sup>14</sup> See the discussion of the 'instance-individuation' of observational perceptual contents in my book *The Realm of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Chapter 2, Section 3.

significance, we will also appreciate the consistency of the minimalist version of the rejection of the Myth of the Given with the acknowledgement of the existence of sensational properties.

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