

AMY KIND

## QUALIA REALISM<sup>1</sup>

(Received in revised form 13 September 2000)

The last few decades have witnessed a resurgence of interest in qualia, with a heated debate being waged over their existence and nature. As philosophers on both sides of the debate would agree, the stakes are high; no less than the fate of functionalism hangs in the balance. Though issues relating to qualia had arisen in connection with the identity theory, it was with the emergence of functionalism in the 1970s that qualia were brought into the limelight. In particular, it was through the inverted and absent qualia thought experiments that qualia were ushered onto the philosophical stage. These thought experiments, both of which purport to establish that there can be beings who are functionally identical to one another yet different qualitatively, have continued to pose a major threat to functionalist theories. In response, functionalists have had to argue that qualia are functionalizable, a counterintuitive claim that has often seemed tantamount to the denial of the existence of qualia.

Much of the contemporary qualia debate has in this way grown out of, and been framed by, functionalist concerns.<sup>2</sup> And this, I will suggest, has had unfortunate consequences for our understanding of qualia. Insofar as philosophers have come to the question of the existence of qualia by way of consideration of the plausibility of functionalism, they have been so focused on metaphysical considerations that they have lost sight of an important fact, namely, that there is an epistemic dimension to the notion of qualia.

In recent years the term 'qualia' has been claimed and reclaimed by such a large variety of authors to pick out their own favorite phenomenal properties that my claim that there is an epistemic dimension to qualia might seem immediately objectionable. One could argue that the term 'qualia' can no longer be employed with any unambiguous meaning; there is no such thing as 'the notion of qualia' to bear any philosophical weight. A survey of the recent



qualia literature would no doubt support this objection, showing that for every philosopher who has defined 'qualia' in epistemic terms, there is another who has not. But it is this trend among philosophers to use the term 'qualia' to pick out properties specified purely metaphysically that makes up the very problem that I want to discuss. Whether the fact that the term has come to be used in such a way should be seen as a symptom or as a cause, the epistemic considerations that should be (and, at least initially, were) a part of the debate about qualia have gotten lost.<sup>3</sup> This paper thus aims to restore the epistemic dimension to the qualia debate. In doing so, I will also recommend how we can best draw the dividing line between pro-qualia and anti-qualia views – however the philosophers involved would themselves characterize their views. As might already be clear, my own sympathies lie on the pro-qualia side, although I will not here attempt to defend the existence of qualia. Rather, by refocusing attention on the epistemic considerations, I hope to make clear what such a defense requires.

### I. BLOCK'S CHARACTERIZATION OF THE DEBATE

The philosopher perhaps most responsible for framing the current qualia debate against a backdrop of functionalist concerns is Ned Block.<sup>4</sup> Not only was he influential in originating discussion of the inverted and absent qualia thought experiments in his seminal papers "What Psychological States are Not" (Block and Fodor, 1972) and "Troubles with Functionalism" (1978), but he has also repeatedly characterized the locus of controversy in the qualia debate at least partly in terms of the compatibility of functionalism with the existence of qualia. Such a characterization is naturally read into papers of his such as "Are Absent Qualia Impossible?" (1980)<sup>5</sup> and "Inverted Earth" (1990) and is made most explicit in his recent papers, "Qualia" (1994) and "Mental Paint and Mental Latex" (1996):

Qualia are experiential properties of sensations, feelings, perceptions and, in my view, thoughts and desires as well. But, so defined, who could deny that qualia exist? Yet, the existence of qualia is controversial. Here is what is controversial: whether qualia, so defined, can be characterized in intentional, functional or purely cognitive terms. (Block, 1994, p. 514)

The greatest chasm in the philosophy of mind – maybe even all of philosophy – divides two perspectives on consciousness. The two perspectives differ on whether there is anything in the phenomenal character of conscious experience that goes beyond the intentional, the cognitive and the functional. A convenient terminological handle on the dispute is whether there are “qualia” . . . . The debates about qualia have recently focused on the notion of representation, with issues about functionalism always in the background. (Block, 1996, p. 19)

It is this most recent paper – and the divide it sets up between the two views *phenomenism* and *representationism* – on which I want to focus in what follows. Following Block’s lead in the above quotation, I will use “phenomenal character” as a neutral term, not synonymous with the term “qualia.” The issue between the phenomenists and the representationists can thus be said to concern the *nature* of the phenomenal character that they all agree exists.

The representationists, the group that Block locates on the anti-qualia side of the debate, claim that the representational content of experience exhausts the phenomenal character of experience. Here Block seems to have in mind the view of someone like Gilbert Harman, whose arguments for representationism are put forth largely to defend functionalism against qualia-oriented objections.<sup>6</sup> According to Harman, “[t]wo perceptual experiences with the same intentional content must be psychologically the same” (Harman, 1990, p. 49). In other words, there are no nonrepresentational properties of the experience that could make a difference psychologically.

On the pro-qualia side of the debate Block locates the phenomenists; the members of this group, including Block himself, claim that the phenomenal character of experience is not exhausted by its representational content.<sup>7</sup> As I will suggest in a moment, there is an important ambiguity in the notion of “representational content”, but for now let me simply note that the phenomenists’ claim that there is more to phenomenal character than its representational content amounts to the claim that there are some mental properties that are *intrinsic* to an experience.<sup>8</sup>

To get a sense of what such properties are supposed to be, an analogy to paint and paintings is useful. Consider a painting of Santa Claus. In the painting, Santa Claus is represented as having certain properties: wearing a red suit and hat, having a big belly, having a white mustache and beard, etc. Importantly, these are properties of

what the painting represents and not properties of the painting itself – the painting certainly does not wear a red suit, have a big belly, etc. (And the fact that these properties are properties of what is represented is unaffected by the fact that what is represented does not exist, that is, even though what is represented is only an *intentional* object.) But in addition to the properties of what is represented by the painting, there are also properties of the painting itself: being flat, being square, being covered with paint, etc.

Next consider an experience with the same intentional content as that of the painting: a mental image of Santa Claus. In the mental image, Santa is represented as having certain properties, and as is the case with the painting, they are properties of what the image represents, not properties of the image itself. Does the image also have mental properties analogous to the intrinsic properties of the painting – its flatness, its squareness, its being covered with paint? Representationists say ‘no’ – the only mental properties of the mental image, or of any experience, are its representational properties. In contrast, phenomenists say ‘yes.’ This is not to say that phenomenists must think that experience has mental properties analogous to *all* of the painting’s intrinsic properties; they need not claim, for example, that experience has properties analogous to the painting’s flatness or squareness. But they must think that experience has properties analogous to the painting’s being covered in paint; in fact, such properties are often referred to as *mental paint*.<sup>9</sup>

Attention to the property of being covered in paint, however, reveals an ambiguity in the notion of representational property. As we have said, being covered with paint is a property of a painting itself and not of the object represented by a painting. This property is thus nonrepresentational in the sense just described. But there is another sense in which this property is representational, namely that it plays a role in representing the object represented. The fact that a painting of Santa Claus has red paint at a certain location, for example, plays a representational role in the depiction of Santa Claus. It is in this respect that the property of being composed in part of red paint is different from the properties of squareness and flatness.

The same ambiguity arises with respect to experience, so to avoid confusion, it will be useful to separate the two different senses of

“representational”. Properties that are representational in virtue of being properties of what is represented by the experience (rather than properties of the experience itself) I will call *representational<sub>R</sub>* (“R” for representationism – since the representationists think that *all* phenomenal properties of experience are such properties). Properties that are properties of the experience itself (and thus are not representational<sub>R</sub>) but that play a role in representing the intentional object of the experience, I will call *representational<sub>P</sub>* (“P” for phenomenism – since it is only the phenomenists who would countenance any such properties). Note that while phenomenists can recognize the existence of representational<sub>R</sub> properties, representationists must deny the existence of any representational<sub>P</sub> properties.<sup>10</sup>

Armed with this distinction between these two senses of “representational”, I want briefly to revisit and clarify Block’s characterizations of phenomenism and representationism. As stated above, the representationists believe that phenomenal character is exhausted by its representational content, whereas phenomenists do not. It should now be clear that the sense of “representational” at play in these characterizations is representational<sub>R</sub>. Furthermore, it should also be clear that the acceptance of mental paint constitutes a denial of representationism.

Importantly, however, while the acceptance of mental paint is sufficient for an embrace of phenomenism, we should not assume that phenomenism simply equates phenomenal character with mental paint. Mental paint is by definition a representational<sub>P</sub> property of experience, but a phenomenist might well claim that experience has intrinsic properties that are nonetheless not representational<sub>P</sub>. In theory, a phenomenist could even deny that there is any such thing as mental paint; it would be consistent with phenomenism (at least phenomenism as defined by Block) to claim that phenomenal experience *never* has properties that are representational<sub>P</sub>. In practice, of course, the phenomenists typically do accept the existence of mental paint, but in doing so, they also typically claim that experience has at most only some properties that are representational<sub>P</sub> or that only some experiences have properties that are representational<sub>P</sub>.

Such is Block's own position – although he thinks that pains and mental images can plausibly be understood to be intentional, he also thinks that there are other experiences that cannot. He often uses the example of an orgasm to illustrate this point.<sup>11</sup> If there is some experience, orgasmic or otherwise, that is not intentional, that does not purport to represent anything at all, then its phenomenal character cannot be explained in terms of mental paint. Mental paint, like actual paint, plays a representational role. To capture nonrepresentational<sub>P</sub> phenomenal character, Block introduces the notion of *mental latex*. Insofar as some properties of experience are nonrepresentational<sub>P</sub>, he suggests that they be thought of like the latex base in latex paint: “Paint has pigment – that differs from color to color – and also has a base that can be common to many colors. One such base is latex. The pigment represents the color, the latex represents nothing” (Block, 1996, p. 28).

The discussion of mental paint and mental latex permits one last clarification of Block's characterization of the qualia debate. For Block, this debate – the “greatest chasm in the philosophy of mind” – comes down to the question of whether there are such properties of experience as mental paint and mental latex. Those who deny the existence of both sorts of properties, the representationists, fall on the anti-qualia side of the chasm, whereas those who recognize the existence of at least one of these sorts of properties, the phenomenists, fall on the pro-qualia side.

Given this understanding of the qualia debate, it would seem that the concepts of mental paint and mental latex, either jointly or separately, should map onto the concept of qualia. Now as I have already noted, philosophers use the term ‘qualia’ in a variety of ways, and so one might very well object at this point that there is no single concept of qualia onto which mental paint and mental latex could map. But I think this is a mistake. Generally speaking, when philosophers differ in their usage of the term ‘qualia’, it seems to me that it is at the level of theory – with different philosophers giving us different theories as to how such properties are to be understood. Still, such theories should be seen as attempts, with varying degrees of success, to capture the same concept. This concept recurs throughout the qualia literature, reflected in the

works of philosophers with very different theoretical treatments of qualia:

“Qualia” is an unfamiliar term for something that could not be more familiar to each of us: *the ways things seem to us* (Dennett, 1988, p. 38).

Qualia include the ways it feels to see, hear and smell, the way it feels to have a pain; more generally, what it’s like to have mental states (Block, 1994, p. 514).

[Q]ualia are simply those features, whatever they may be, which comprise the phenomenal or subjective aspects of bodily sensations and perceptual experiences (Tye, 1994, p. 160).

Qualia, if there are such, are properties of sensations and perceptual states, namely the properties that give them their qualitative or phenomenal character – those that determine “what it is like” to have them (Shoemaker, 1991, p. 121).

Certainly, then, it seems fair to demand that mental paint and mental latex capture at least this pretheoretic notion of qualia. In what follows, however, I will argue that they do not. But to see this, we will first need to describe this pretheoretic notion of qualia a little more carefully.

## II. QUALIA’S EPISTEMIC DIMENSION

As a starting point, let us lift from the above quotations the following claim:

(Q) qualia are the ways things seem to us.

(Q) certainly does not give us much information about what qualia are, much less a theory about them. But however uninformative it is, for our purposes it does have a very important virtue, namely, that it makes manifest the fact that we understand qualia at least partly in epistemic terms – in terms of our epistemic access to them. Claiming that qualia are the ways things *seem* to us makes no sense if we do not have access to qualia, and since the access we have to our mental states comes through introspection, (Q) presupposes that qualia are directly introspectible.

I want to be very careful about what exactly this presupposition amounts to, since as soon as one mentions epistemic considerations in the context of discussions of qualia, a whole host of

characteristics inevitably crop up: infallibility, incorrigibility, and indubitability, to name but a few. Unfortunately, these epistemic characteristics have seemed to be caught in a hopeless tangle from which no single one can be disengaged.<sup>12</sup> In fact, because the group as a whole has traditionally been linked to an outmoded Cartesian view of the mind (a view that most philosophers of mind no longer feel the need to take seriously), few philosophers have even bothered to try to disentangle them. Correspondingly, it is perhaps unsurprising that when the emergence of functionalism focused attention on the metaphysical dimension of qualia, the epistemic dimension was so easily swept under the rug – everyone was all too happy to put this disreputable snarl of epistemic notions aside.

Nonetheless, despite the air of unrespectability surrounding the epistemic notions, one cannot take qualia seriously if one ignores them entirely; as I suggested, the notion of “seeming” brings in the notion of introspectibility. What I want also to suggest, however, is that (Q) nonetheless allows us to ignore the rest of the epistemic notions – and that is what I hope to do. Though (Q) does presuppose that qualia are directly introspectible, it does not presuppose that qualia are infallible, incorrigible, or indubitable – it is not, that is, built into (Q) that the “seeming” be understood as immune from doubt, from revision, or from error. Furthermore, just as (Q) itself does not presuppose these notions, neither does our understanding of it in terms of direct introspectibility. Even once we make the move to interpret “seeming” in terms of direct introspectibility, there is no reason to think that we have tarred qualia with the brush of these other epistemic notions. What it means to say that qualia are directly introspectible is that one knows about one’s own qualia noninferentially; one can know about one’s own qualia, that is, without having to rely on inferences from, say, one’s behavior. Direct introspectibility can thus be distinguished (at least in principle) from the other epistemic notions mentioned above. The claim that qualia are directly introspectible should simply be understood as a claim about the access someone has to her own qualia and does not itself preclude the possibility of error, of doubt, or of evidence that would justify her in rejecting her beliefs about them. Even if it were to turn out that all and only the states that were directly introspectible were infallible, for example, this would not change



the fact that the notion of direct introspectibility is different from infallibility – and likewise for indubitability and incorrigibility.

The claim I have been making, then, is that there is an epistemic constraint on our understanding of qualia. The above paragraphs should make clear that this claim is a limited one, concerning only direct introspectibility, and it does not obviously entail that the epistemic constraint involves infallibility, incorrigibility, or indubitability.<sup>13</sup> Whether qualia also have these further epistemic properties is an important question, but even though it will ultimately have to be addressed by participants in the qualia debate, I am going to sidestep it entirely in what follows.

### III. MENTAL PAINT AND MENTAL LATEX VS. QUALIA

However weak the epistemic constraint on our understanding of qualia might be, it is nonetheless strong enough to make clear that the notion of qualia is different from those of mental paint and mental latex. To see this, however, we must examine more closely Block's analogy to paint and latex.

Block recognizes that the analogy is misleading in several respects, explicitly warning against putting too much weight on the fact that latex serves as a *base* for paint. We should not, that is, think of the nonrepresentational<sub>P</sub> properties of experience as forming a base for the representational<sub>P</sub> properties of experience. Likewise, we should not put too much weight on the fact that paint always has some base or other, be it latex, oil, or water. By no means does Block intend to imply that every experience that has mental paint also has mental latex (Block, 1996, p. 28).

Though he does not specifically mention it, Block presumably also rejects the converse claim – that every experience with mental latex has mental paint. Such a claim might reasonably have been inferred from the analogy with actual paint/latex, however. Since a painting has the property of being a *latex* painting only in virtue of being covered with latex *paint*, the paint/latex analogy seems to suggest that an experience would have mental latex only in virtue of its having mental paint. Given that Block wants to leave open the possibility that some experience (like an orgasm) is nonintentional,

a case in which there would be mental latex without mental paint, this is another respect in which his analogy is misleading.

Now, the fact that the analogy is limited or misleading in these respects is essentially harmless. However, there is another misleading aspect to the analogy that *is* harmful and that serves to obscure an important issue about mental paint and mental latex. When we look at a painting, we can have direct, noninferential perceptual awareness of the paint that is covering it. We cannot, however, have direct, noninferential perceptual awareness of the latex of the paint. The asymmetry in our epistemic access to actual paint and latex suggests a comparable epistemic asymmetry with respect to mental paint and mental latex: we can have direct introspective awareness of mental paint, but not of mental latex.

Though Block himself thinks that mental paint is directly introspectible, it is clear that he thinks that the believer in mental paint can consistently believe otherwise. For example, he suggests that it would be reasonable to believe that the only introspective access we have to mental paint comes from inferences drawn from thinking about the inverted spectrum: "By imagining that things we both call red look to you the same way that things we both call green look to me, we succeed in gaining indirect introspective access to mental paint" (Block, 1996, pp. 27–28). Furthermore, not only does he explicitly separate the question of whether there is mental paint from the question of whether we can be directly aware of any such mental paint, but he also cites Sydney Shoemaker as an example of someone who believes both that there is mental paint and that we cannot be directly aware via introspection of mental paint.<sup>14</sup> I will return to Shoemaker's view in Section IV, below; for now, I mention it only as evidence that being directly introspectible is not part of the concept of mental paint. Block's position about our epistemic access to mental latex is less clear, but my suspicion is that he would want to maintain that we can have direct access to the mental latex of our experiences. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to suppose that just as Block thinks that mental paint could exist even if we were unable to have direct introspective access to it, he presumably also believes that mental latex could exist even if we were unable to have direct introspective access to it. Certainly he does not say anything to suggest otherwise.

As this suggests, the analogy is doubly misleading: mental paint, unlike paint, need not be something to which we can have direct epistemic access, whereas mental latex, unlike latex, can be something to which we have direct epistemic access. But what is the upshot of these disanalogies? I call attention to them not because I think they doom the analogy itself. There will always be some differences between two subjects of comparison, and such differences do not necessarily mean that the analogy should be discarded. Rather, I raise these points because they suggest that neither mental paint nor mental latex adequately captures the notion of qualia. Mental paint and mental latex might very well match up with qualia on the metaphysical dimension. But we have seen that qualia, unlike mental paint and mental latex, are defined at least partly along an epistemic dimension. Insofar as there is no epistemic constraint on the concepts of mental paint and mental latex, those concepts must thus be different from the concept of qualia.

#### IV. THE QUALIA DEBATE REQUALIFIED

In reaching this conclusion, I should stress that I do not mean to suggest that there are no such properties as mental paint and mental latex. Perhaps there are. What I do want to suggest, however, is that the qualia debate – the greatest chasm in the philosophy of mind – is not properly viewed as a debate about their existence. To view the qualia debate in that way would privilege metaphysical considerations at the expense of epistemological ones. This point is especially vivid in Block's treatment of one of Harman's arguments for representationism. Harman argues as follows:

In the case of a painting Eloise can be aware of those features of the painting that are responsible for its being a painting of a unicorn. That is, she can turn her attention to the pattern of the paint on the canvas by virtue of which the painting represents a unicorn. But in the case of her visual experience of a tree, I want to say that she is not aware of, as it were, the mental paint by virtue of which her experience is an experience of seeing a tree. She is aware only of the intentional or relational features of her experience, not of its intrinsic non-intentional features. ... And that is true of you too. There is nothing special about Eloise's visual experience. Look at a tree and try to turn your attention to intrinsic features of your visual experience. I predict you will find that the only features there to turn your attention to will be features of the presented tree ... (Harman, 1990, p. 39).

Block has responded by criticizing Harman's focus on awareness as a red herring; "the matter that is really at stake", according to Block, is "whether there are intrinsic mental features of our experience" (Block, 1990, pp. 73–74). More recently, he has repeated this criticism. Having interpreted Harman as claiming "the issue is whether we can introspect the representational [i.e. representational<sub>p</sub>] features of the experience, the mental paint . . .", Block says we should focus on two "deeper" issues: (i) whether there is mental paint; (ii) whether there is mental latex (Block, 1996, pp. 27–28). In essence, Block accuses Harman of highlighting the issue of introspectibility at the expense of the issue of intrinsicity. But Block himself makes exactly the reverse mistake, highlighting the issue of intrinsicity at the expense of the issue of introspectibility.

Once these two issues are separated, we see that there are really four different positions in the qualia debate where Block has distinguished only two:

**Phenomenism<sub>1</sub> (P1)** There are intrinsic mental properties of our experience, and, moreover, we can directly introspect such properties. This seems to be Block's own view (Block, 1990, 1996).

**Phenomenism<sub>2</sub> (P2)** There are intrinsic mental properties of our experience but we cannot directly introspect them. This, I take it, is Shoemaker's view (Shoemaker, 1994b, 1996). He argues that our knowledge of the intrinsic properties of experience is knowledge by description; we have introspective awareness of the representational<sub>R</sub> content of our experience but only theoretically informed awareness that the experience has the intrinsic properties necessary to generate such representational content.

**Representationism<sub>1</sub> (R1)** There are no intrinsic mental properties of our experience, but there are some nonintrinsic properties of our experience that we can directly introspect. This view is held by Harman (1990) and Tye (1995), who claim not only that the representational<sub>R</sub> properties of our experience exhaust its

phenomenal character but also that such phenomenal character is directly introspectible.<sup>15</sup>

**Representationism<sub>2</sub> (R2)** There are no intrinsic mental properties of our experience and no properties of our experience that we can directly introspect. This position, commonly regarded as eliminativism about qualia, has been advocated by Dennett (1988, 1991).

It is because both P1 and P2 recognize the existence of intrinsic mental properties of our experience that I classify them as phenomenist; in contrast, since both R1 and R2 do not recognize the existence of intrinsic mental properties of our experience, I classify them as representationist. Having distinguished these four positions, however, I want to suggest that it is a mistake to draw the dividing line in the qualia debate between phenomenism and representationism, with P1 and P2 on the pro-qualia side and R1 and R2 on the anti-qualia side.

How should we draw the line? My own inclination is that of the four positions I have distinguished, only P1 should be viewed as a pro-qualia view. Admittedly, this claim presupposes something that I have not argued for here, namely that qualia must at least be understood as intrinsic mental properties of experience. However, since drawing the dividing line in the qualia debate between the phenomenists (who recognize intrinsic mental properties of our experience) and representationists (who do not) already makes this presupposition, this assumption cannot be something to which someone who casts the debate in phenomenist/representationist terms can object. Moreover, when we think about the issue dividing the phenomenists and the representationists, it becomes clear that the sense of intrinsicity at work in this presupposition is a very weak one. What makes representational<sub>R</sub> properties of an experience nonintrinsic is the fact that they are properties of the experience only derivatively, in virtue of being properties of what the experience represents. But functional properties, despite being relational, could be seen as being properties of an experience nonderivatively. Thus, my presupposition could even be accepted by a nonrepresentationist functionalist.

I should note, however, that a closer investigation into qualia might well reveal that the metaphysical constraint on qualia is stronger than the one that I am presupposing, and thus it might turn out that not even P1 is truly a qualia realist position. There are hard questions about what intrinsicality amounts to, and just as direct introspectibility has seemed enmeshed in an epistemic tangle, intrinsicality has often seemed enmeshed in a metaphysical tangle (caught up with such notions as ineffability, monadicity, and unanalyzability). However, while these will clearly be issues with which a defender of qualia will have to grapple, I will not attempt to address them here. Doing so is not important for present purposes, namely, isolating what is problematic about casting the qualia debate as one between phenomenism and representationism.

The problem, simply put, is as follows. Even if there are intrinsic properties of experience, if such properties were not directly introspectible, there would still be no such properties as qualia. Likewise, of course, even if there are properties of experience that are directly introspectible, if the only such properties were nonintrinsic (e.g., representational<sub>R</sub>), then there would be no such properties as qualia. In this respect, P2 and R1 are actually quite similar.<sup>16</sup> Of the four positions above, only P1 recognizes the existence of qualia, at least according to our pretheoretical understanding of qualia. As a result, only P1 can be properly understood as realism about qualia.

At this point, I expect that a natural rejoinder would be to claim that P2 and R1 are significantly different from R2. Someone might very well try to argue that even though R2 belongs on the anti-qualia side – even though R2 *is* eliminativist about qualia – P2 and R1 do not. Rather, these two positions take the middle ground, suggesting that we need to revise our conception of qualia – qualia are not what we thought they were.

However natural this rejoinder, I think it is mistaken. Notice first that it concedes a very important point: that P2 and R1 have similar status with respect to their acceptance of qualia. Thus, it is not a line of response that can be made by someone who treats the qualia debate as one between phenomenism and representationism; it is not, that is, a rejoinder that can be made by someone like Block. To press this line, one would no longer be able to view R1 as anti-qualia

without also viewing P2 as anti-qualia – or, at least, one could not consistently do so without further argument.

Despite the unavailability of this line of response, it calls to our attention an interesting omission, namely, that we have been given no reason at all for why the line in the qualia debate should be drawn between P2 and R1. The fact that current discussions about qualia originated in discussions of the plausibility of functionalism might well explain why the line has been drawn where it is – philosophers such as Block have focused on the metaphysical issues about qualia that were brought to the forefront by the debate about functionalism. But however well this fact about the origins of the qualia debate explains why the dividing line has been drawn between P2 and R1, it does not present us with any principled reason for doing so.

As I suggested in Section II, our understanding of qualia presupposes that they have an epistemic dimension. Assuming (as I have) that qualia have a metaphysical dimension as well, characterizing the debate as one between phenomenism and representationism privileges the metaphysical at the expense of the epistemic. In fact, we could just as easily highlight the epistemic dimension, classifying P1 and R1 on the pro-qualia side, and P2 and R2 on the anti-qualia side. Without an argument to motivate the focus on intrinsicality, there is no reason to view P2 as any less anti-qualia than R1.

More importantly, perhaps, we have already seen that there is reason to expect that no such argument could succeed, that is, there is reason that we should regard both R1 and P2 as anti-qualia. Given that R1 is already commonly recognized to be an anti-qualia view, the point at issue in my criticism of the phenomenism/representationism divide boils down to the status of P2.<sup>17</sup> And to see that P2 must be understood as anti-qualia, we can return to the claims I made in Section II, above. How could any property of our experience be a quale if it could not be directly introspected? Qualia, remember, are supposed to be the way things *seem* to us, and this makes little sense if we do not have direct introspective access to them.

Perhaps it will help to think of things this way: Suppose someone were to argue that, although there are such things as chairs, we are mistaken to think that they can be perceived. She tells us some elab-

orate story about why it seems to us that we perceive chairs, and she claims that the only way we can come to know of the existence of chairs is that postulating their existence best explains the existence of some other phenomenon. Confronted with such an argument, we would be well within our rights to refuse to take seriously her claim that, according to her theory, there are such things as *chairs*. She seems not merely to have revised the traditional conception of chairs – she seems to have eliminated chairs altogether. We are in a similar situation with respect to qualia. ‘Qualia’ is a technical term, but qualia themselves are not theoretical entities, like atoms, whose existence we posit for their explanatory power. Nor do we infer the existence of qualia from a philosophical argument. Theories to the effect that qualia are not directly introspectible are like theories to the effect that chairs are not directly perceivable; just as the latter are not really about *chairs*, the former are not really about *qualia*.

Or, to come at the matter slightly differently, consider Paul and Patricia Churchland’s suggestion that qualia might very well be “the spiking frequency of the signal in some neural pathway, the voltage across a polarized membrane, the temporary deficit of some neurochemical, or the binary configuration of a set of direct-current pulses” (Churchland and Churchland, 1981, p. 30). The Churchlands note that this suggestion often strikes their opponents as outrageous. But what is the source of the outrage? The problem with these properties is not that they violate some metaphysical constraint on what qualia are but rather that they violate, or at least appear to violate, an epistemic constraint; it is hard to believe that properties such as spiking frequencies could be the subject of direct introspective awareness. Perhaps, as the Churchlands suggest, with the proper conceptual framework we would be able to introspect spiking frequencies, but regardless, this example reveals the importance of the epistemic constraint on the notion of qualia; in order for us to grant that spiking frequencies are qualia, we would have to become convinced that they are accessible to introspection.<sup>18</sup>

In short, then, a qualia realist cannot be content with a P2-like position, one according to which qualia are simply identified as intrinsic mental properties of our experience and it is denied that we have introspective access to them. To defend the existence of qualia, it is not enough to defend the claim that there are intrinsic



mental properties of our experience. A defense of the existence of qualia must defend the existence of intrinsic mental properties of our experience that are directly introspectible; it must, that is, be a defense of P1. Moreover, insofar as the focus on the phenomenism/representationism contrast suggests otherwise, it does the qualia realist a disservice by, in effect, allowing a dispute among opponents of qualia realism to masquerade as a dispute between qualia realists and their opponents. In this way, much of the current discussion of qualia, to the extent that it concerns the sorts of issues discussed by Block, actually impedes progress in the qualia debate. By including P2 under the umbrella of qualia realism and (mis)casting the qualia debate solely in terms of intrinsicity, such discussion renders impossible an accurate assessment of qualia realism. The defense of functionalism, which was responsible for much of this confusion in the first place, might be able to proceed without attention to the epistemic dimension of qualia, but the defense of qualia realism, I have argued, cannot.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1999 meeting of the Central States Philosophical Association, where I benefited greatly from the discussion, and in particular, from the comments of William Robinson. I am grateful also to Torin Alter, Stephen Davis, Frank Menetrez, Dion Scott-Kakures and Peter Ross for discussion and comments on earlier drafts.

<sup>2</sup> The work of Thomas Nagel and Frank Jackson, and the corresponding secondary literature, is a notable exception. Nagel-Jackson arguments about qualia cast the issue not in functionalist terms but in more broadly materialist terms.

<sup>3</sup> William Lycan (1987, 1996) claims that the “original” sense of qualia owes to C.I. Lewis (1929). However, when I refer to the qualia debate as it was “initially”, I have in mind the beginnings of the contemporary debate about qualia. As I mentioned in the text, I take it that this debate began in the early 1970s with the publication of articles such as Block and Fodor, 1972.

<sup>4</sup> Sydney Shoemaker (e.g. 1975, 1981) and Gilbert Harman (1990) also should bear some of the responsibility for this way of framing the qualia debate.

<sup>5</sup> In a response to this paper, for example, Shoemaker describes it as follows:

The question of what account we are to give of “qualia” (of the “qualitative”/“phenomenal”/“subjective”/“raw feel” aspects of the mental), or of what can and cannot sensibly be said about them, is one of the most central issues in the philosophy of mind. Block’s formulation of this question focuses it on the issue of “functionalism.” To hold that absent qualia are possible – that a state lacking

in qualitative character can be functionally equivalent to a “qualitative state” like pain (one that necessarily has qualitative character) – is to hold that functionalism fails as a general philosophy of mind (Shoemaker, 1981, p. 257).

<sup>6</sup> Importantly, representationists need not be functionalists, and functionalists need not be representationists, but it is nonetheless true that the underlying motivation for representationism has often stemmed from the desire to provide functionalists with a strategy for answering qualia-oriented objections. For criticism that Block has run together functionalism and representationism, see Lycan, 1996, p. 176, n. 3.

<sup>7</sup> For lists of which philosophers can be categorized as representationists and which as phenomenists, see Block, 1996, p. 30.

<sup>8</sup> Phenomenism thus coincides with what Block had once called *qualia realism*: “the view that there are intrinsic mental features of our experience” (Block, 1990, p. 53). However, as I will argue in Section IV below, a view that truly reflects realism about qualia must be stronger than phenomenism.

<sup>9</sup> The phrase ‘mental paint’ comes originally from Harman, 1990.

<sup>10</sup> I should note that I do not mean for the distinction between representational<sub>p</sub> properties and representational<sub>R</sub> properties to be exhaustive; there may be other properties that we want to refer to as representational properties that do not fall neatly into either category. Here I have in mind, for example, the property of *being an image of Santa Claus*. This is a property of the image itself, and thus cannot be said to be representational<sub>R</sub>, but it also is not a property of the image that plays a role in representing the intentional object of the image. Thus, insofar as we would want to count this property as a representational property, it would have to be in some other sense of ‘representational.’

<sup>11</sup> The example is used at length in Block, 1996; in Block, 1995, he even refers to the example as his favorite way to make the point that phenomenal character can be nonrepresentational<sub>p</sub>.

<sup>12</sup> See Shoemaker, 1994a.

<sup>13</sup> In fact, it is precisely this point that Dennett (1988) misses in his attack on qualia. His attack proceeds largely by motivating the claim that there is a confusion inherent in the notion of properties of our experience that are both intrinsic and incorrigible. However, he initially characterizes qualia as properties of a subject’s mental states that are (1) ineffable; (2) intrinsic; (3) private; (4) directly or immediately apprehensible in consciousness. Thus, showing that there is a tension between intrinsicity and incorrigibility does not show that the notion of qualia contains a confusion. It seems he has snuck in the notion of incorrigibility under the guise of direct apprehensibility.

<sup>14</sup> These points are made at Block, 1996, pp. 27–28. For Shoemaker’s own statement of his view, see Shoemaker, 1994b (especially Lecture III) and Shoemaker, 1996. Regardless of whether Block correctly characterizes Shoemaker’s view (see, e.g., Shoemaker, 1996, p. 56), what is important for our purposes is that the way Block characterizes Shoemaker’s view shows that he does not view being directly introspectible as part of the notion of mental paint.

<sup>15</sup> Lycan (1996) probably also belongs in this camp. However, he does not commit himself to the claim that the representational<sub>R</sub> content of experience exhausts its phenomenal content, since he wants to leave open the possibility that phenomenal content is constituted in part by functional properties (Lycan, 1996, pp. 134–135).

<sup>16</sup> Shoemaker explicitly recognizes the similarity between his view and Harman's in Shoemaker, 1994b, pp. 256–257 and Shoemaker, 1996, p. 56.

<sup>17</sup> The consensus that R1 is an abandonment of the traditional notion of qualia is wide but not universal. Some defenders of R1 insist that their view *is* an analysis of qualia (see, e.g., Lycan, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> I am grateful to Dion Scott-Kakures for suggesting the use of this example.

## REFERENCES

- Block, N. (1978): 'Troubles with Functionalism', in C.W. Savage (ed.), *Perception and Cognition: Issues in the Foundations of Psychology*, pp. 261–326; reprinted in D. Rosenthal (ed.), *The Nature of Mind*, pp. 211–228. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991. (Page references are to the reprinted version.)
- Block, N. (1980): 'Are Absent Qualia Impossible?', *The Philosophical Review* 89, 257–274.
- Block, N. (1990): 'Inverted Earth', in J. Tomberlin (ed.), *Philosophical Perspectives* 4, *Action Theory and Philosophy of Mind*, Atascadero, Calif.: Ridgeview, pp. 53–79.
- Block, N. (1994): 'Qualia', in S. Guttenplan (ed.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 514–520.
- Block, N. (1995): 'On a Confusion about a Function of Consciousness', *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 18, 227–247.
- Block, N. (1996): 'Mental Paint and Mental Latex', in E. Villaneuva (ed.), *Philosophical Issues* 7, *Perception*, Atascadero, Calif.: Ridgeview, pp. 19–49.
- Block, N. and Fodor, J. (1972): 'What Psychological States Are Not', *The Philosophical Review* 81, 159–181.
- Churchland, P.M. (1989): *A Neurocomputational Perspective: The Nature of Mind and the Structure of Science*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Churchland, P.M. and Churchland, P.S. (1981): 'Functionalism, Qualia, and Intentionality', *Philosophical Topics* 12, 121–145. Reprinted in Churchland, 1989, pp. 23–46; page references are to the reprinted version.
- Dennett, D. (1988): 'Quining Qualia', in A. Marcel and E. Bisiach (eds.), *Consciousness in Contemporary Science*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 43–77.
- Dennett, D. (1991): *Consciousness Explained*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Harman, G. (1990): 'The Intrinsic Quality of Experience', in J. Tomberlin (ed.), *Philosophical Perspectives* 4, *Action Theory and Philosophy of Mind*, Atascadero, Calif.: Ridgeview, pp. 31–52.

- Lewis, C.I. (1929): *Mind and the World Order*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Lycan, W. (1987): *Consciousness*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Lycan, W. (1996): *Consciousness and Experience*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Shoemaker, S. (1975): 'Functionalism and Qualia', *Philosophical Studies* 27, 291–315.
- Shoemaker, S. (1981): 'Absent Qualia Are Impossible – A Reply to Block', *The Philosophical Review* 90, 581–599.
- Shoemaker, S. (1991): 'Qualia and Consciousness', *Mind* 100, 507–524. Reprinted in Shoemaker, 1997, pp. 121–140; page references are to the reprinted version.
- Shoemaker, S. (1994a): 'Introspection', in S. Guttenplan (ed.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 395–400.
- Shoemaker, S. (1994b): 'Self-Knowledge and "Inner Sense"', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54, 249–314. Reprinted in Shoemaker, 1997, pp. 201–268; page references are to the reprinted version.
- Shoemaker, S. (1996): 'Colors, Subjective Reactions, and Qualia', in E. Villanueva (ed.), *Philosophical Issues* 7, *Perception*, Atascadero, Calif.: Ridgeview, pp. 55–66.
- Shoemaker, S. (1997): *The First-Person Perspective and Other Essays*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tye, M. (1994): 'Qualia, Content and the Inverted Spectrum', *Noûs* 28, 159–183.
- Tye, M. (1995): *Ten Problems of Consciousness*, Cambridge: MA: MIT Press.

*Claremont McKenna College*