49.0 Main Point

The main target of Block’s paper is Harman’s Intrinsic Qualities of Experience, that we read previously. Block wants to show that there are qualities of our experiences of things, of which we are aware, when we are aware of objects. Recall that Harman holds that when I am aware of something blue, there is only the blueness of the object of which I am aware. That is, I am aware only of properties my experiences represents, not properties of the representation of those properties.

Block wants to show the opposite: he wants to show that when I am aware of something blue, the blueness of which I am aware is the blueness of my experience of the object, not the blueness of the object itself. That is, I am aware of the properties of my representation of the object, not the properties that experience represents.

In order to do this, he puts a twist on the classic inverted spectrum thought experiment.

49.1 The “Fallacy” of intentionalizing Qualia

Block begins by making a few distinctions: our experience has content. The intentional content of experience is that which the experience is of or about. The qualitative content is how the experience “feels” – what it is like to have such-and-such an experience. The Qualia.

Block claims that analyzing the qualitative content in terms of intentional content is a fallacy. NOTE; this has to be established. Just because Block thinks it is a fallacy, doesn’t mean that it is. He has to show how this step is fallacious, before he can claim it a fallacy.

In these terms, the inverted spectrum hypothesis becomes: Suppose someone who has the same intentional content, but different qualitative content.

And if spectrum inversion is rife, then the experiential content – that which is expressed in a public language – are not qualitative contents, but rather intentional content. Even if you see red as different than I do, we both call it ‘red’, as we both speak a public language. Therefore, the intentional content is the same.

The fallacy, then, is “the supposition that experiential contents that can be expressed in public language such as looking red are qualitative contents” (678)

NOTE: Block, in the very next paragraph, says that “the intentional contents of color experience must be referentially based... [i.e ‘red’ refers to red]... The reason is that “modes of presentation” of color experiences are qualitative contents, and qualitative contents are precisely that in which our experiences as of red things – our contents of looking red– can differ.” This is interesting, because this is exactly what a defender of the “fallacy” would say. ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosoporus’ have the same referent, but different modes of presentation – when I think about Venus as Hesperus, I am thinking about that planet under one mode of presentation. When I am thinking about
it as Venus, I am thinking about it under another. A defender of the “fallacy” of intentionalizing qualia would argue that the referent of our red thoughts (i.e. experiences) is red, but someone else may think about it (i.e. experience it) with a different mode of presentation – the ‘green’ qualia.

49.2 Inverted Earth:

There is quite a bit of this paper that I have skipped over - part of it is the details of who is his target, and who isn’t (ironically, he says Harman is not, even though he said he was in the opening paragraph). And part of it just rehashes that which we already covered w/ Shoemaker.

So: Suppose a world just like ours except that all the colors of all the objects were inverted.

Then, imagine a pair of genetically identical twins, one of whom is on inverted earth and has color-inverting lenses in his eyes, and other other is on Earth and is normal. Suppose you are the home twin. When both of you look at the sky, the retina stimulation is identical (because of the color-inverting lenses), and therefore you have identical experiences – you see the sky as blue, and you see the blueness of the sky. You see the sky as of blue.

And you both speak the public language, so when you say ‘My, isn’t the sky blue’, you mean what everyone else means – your word ‘blue’ refers to that publically accessible property of the sky that is blueness. But the same is true of your twin. So when he (or she) says ‘My isn’t the sky blue’, their word ‘blue’ picks out the publically accessible property of the sky that is blueness on Inverted Earth. But this is a different property than the property on actual earth. In fact, it is the property shared by yellow things on actual earth. You twin’s word picks out that which your word ‘yellow’ picks out. Therefore, on Inverted earth, the word ‘yellow’ means blue, and the word ‘blue’ means yellow.

1. The intentional content of your and your twin’s experiences are inverted.

2. You are functionally inverted w.r.t to your twin - You are in a state typically produced by blue things, he (or she) is in a state typically produced by yellow things.

Conclusion: you and your twin have the same qualitative content, but different intentional and functional content.

49.3 Finally-

Recall that Harman’s argument against qualitative character is an appeal to introspection – “Look at a tree and try to turn you attention to intrinsic features of your visual experience. I predict you will find that the only features there to turn you attention to will be features of the presented tree.”

Block claims that this appear is “an error in philosophic method”. Block thinks that “in addition to being aware of the color I can also make myself aware of what it is like for me to be aware of the color.” (689)

NOTE: this is really off-target. this problem is: what is the qualitative content of your experience of blue, NOT what is the qualitative content of your experience of your experience of blue. And Block’s comment here is that he can be aware of what
it is like to be aware of something blue. In other words, being aware of his being aware. That is a higher-order awareness, and not the target of Harman’s statement.