

Block and the Representation Theory of Sensory Qualities

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In the nearly half a century since its modern inception (Anscombe (1965), Hintikka (1969)), the Representation theory has faced no more implacable enemy than Ned Block. He has offered objection after objection, usually in the form of apparent counterexamples, and as I write this he shows no sign of flagging.

What I am calling the “sensory qualities” are the introspectible (apparently) monadic qualitative properties distinctively inhering in sensory states, such as: the redness occupying such-and-such a region of your ordinary visual field right now, the pitch or the volume of a musical tone you hear, the smell of horse manure, or the feel of velvet cloth under your fingers. N.b., these are subjective properties; there may be no actual red thing, musical tone, manure or cloth in your environment. The Representation theory casts such qualities as representata, as properties ascribed to the world by the relevant sensory systems;¹ e.g., what it is for you to have a red patch in your visual field is in fact your visual system’s—veridically or not—representing a red thing at such-and-such an angle. (This is the merest sketch; I shall fill in more detail below.)

What is both interesting and admirable about Block’s opposition to this view is that he actually shares most of the Representation theory’s presuppositions and motives. (1) First and foremost, the theory serves as a bulwark against what I believe is the most powerful mind-body dualist or at least antimaterialist argument ever, the argument from apparent phenomenal individuals (Lycan (1987a), (1987b), (1996)); see sec. IV below. Yet, far from being a dualist,

Block is materialist to the core. (2) As against some behavioristically and/or holistically minded materialists, Block is a token-identity theorist, holding that mental states are brain states.

(3) Some materialists oppose the idea of individual representations in the brain; other philosophers, materialist or not, deny that perceptual and other sensory states represent anything. Yet Block not only countenances internal mind-brain representation, but for the most part grants that the relevant mental/brain states represent what the Representation theorist says they do. (4) For vision, the Representation theory is thought to presuppose color realism,² a contentious position to say the least; but Block is himself a color realist.

Thus, Block concedes an enormous amount to us Representationists,³ meeting us on our own ground, and still finds vigorous objections to make.

I BROADER DISAGREEMENT?

Block has never been careful to distinguish what I am calling the sensory qualities from other mental features related to consciousness, subjectivity and the phenomenal. He often characterizes his target as being a theory of, more generally, “phenomenal character” or “phenomenal consciousness.”

Phenomenal conscious qualities include the way things look, sound, and smell and the way pain feels.... No currently available neurophysiological or computational concepts are capable of explaining what it is like to be in a phenomenally conscious state, e.g., to have a pain or to see something red.

[1993, pp. 181-82.]

P- [phenomenal] consciousness is experience. P-conscious properties are experiential properties. P-conscious states are experiential states, that is, a state is P-conscious if it has experiential properties. The totality of the experiential properties of the state are 'what it is like' to have it. Moving from synonyms to examples, we have P-conscious states when we see, hear, smell, taste, and have pains. [1995, p. 230.]

And most trenchantly:

The recent focus of disagreement is on whether the phenomenal character of experience is *exhausted* by such representational contents. I say no. Don't get me wrong. I think that sensations—almost always—perhaps even always—*have* representational content in addition to their phenomenal character. What's more, I think that it is often the phenomenal character itself that has the representational content. What I deny is that representational content is all there is to phenomenal character. I insist that phenomenal character *outruns* representational content. I call this view 'phenomenism.' Phenomenists believe that phenomenal character outruns not only representational content but also the functional and the cognitive, hence they believe in qualia. [2003, p. 165; italics original. Block has neologized that last word to make it mean, by definition, something nonrepresentational, noncognitive and nonfunctional.⁴]

Now, the term of art “phenomenal character” has been used in each of several ways, not all of them clear. At a minimum, Fred Dretske at least in some moods wants to say that so far as the term means anything, it means just what I have called a sensory quality; that is tolerably clear though vague at the edges (Lycan (2008), sec. 8). But Block and others usually seem to mean something broader by it. And since it is Block’s views that are the topic of this paper, let’s go with what he has meant by it: the relevant sensory state’s “experiential properties,” “what it is like” to be in it. Notice carefully that this is a feature of *the state*, itself, or more properly a relation between the state and its subject.

In the third of the foregoing quoted passages, two issues are run together. First, “[t]he recent focus of disagreement”: Does the phenomenal character of experience outrun the experience’s representational content? Second, “phenomenism” as then defined: Does the phenomenal character of experience outrun representational content *and* the cognitive *and* the functional?

On the first point, I firmly agree with Block. For each of several reasons I shall explain in the next section, phenomenal character in his sense does outrun the representational content that (according to us Representationists) constitutes a sensory quality. But I am no phenomenist, for I am a functionalist at heart and hold that every mental property that is not a representational property is a functional property.⁵

Despite having coined the label, Block does not spend much time defending phenomenism per se; his arguments are primarily trained against the sufficiency of representational content for phenomenal character in his sense. Those arguments may or may not succeed, but if a given one does, that will do nothing to impugn the Representation theory

of sensory qualities, *unless* a parallel argument can be made to show that representational content does not suffice for the relevant sensory quality either.

II DISTINCTIONS

Here are three ways in which phenomenal character outruns representational content, because it outruns the sensory quality constituted by that content. First, in most cases, a sensory state's "overall feel" contains the relevant sensory quality(ies) only as a proper part (Lycan (1998)). For a sensory state may present a quality, but also have affective and/or conative components over and above that quality. The obvious example is pain, which includes both affect and conation along with its strictly qualitative core. Though the components normally co-occur, they can (in the real world) be split apart by drugs; morphine patients can report that "the pain," meaning the core, is still there but they no longer mind it.⁶ Hunger works similarly.⁷ The perceptual systems afford less dramatic but still actual examples. E.g., seeing a traffic light turn red involves the sensory quality redness, but includes more: the impulse to step on the brake, plus perhaps a slight feeling of alarm. Such components of the experience's phenomenal character are not constituted by representational content (at least not by that which constitutes the subjective redness); according to me they are primarily functional.

A second way in which phenomenal character outruns sensory quality is simple: Phenomenal character is a matter of "what it's like," which can come apart from sensory quality in each of two ways. First, according to most Representationists,⁸ one can host a sensory quality without being aware of doing so, e.g., when one is distracted by exigency or just

by thinking hard about something else; the quality can occur without being noticed by its subject. But in such a case, it would not be like anything for the subject to experience that quality; there would be no phenomenal character in Block's sense.

Moreover, even in the case in which one is aware of a sensory quality, the phenomenal character requires awareness and so is something distinct from the quality itself. Indeed and more fundamentally, it is categorically distinct: subjective redness is a sensory quality, but the higher-order "what it's like," i.e., what it's like to experience the subjective redness, is a property *of* that quality.

In case the point is not already clear, notice, a sensory quality is described in one's public natural language: "red," "spiky," "high." "loud." "pungent." What it's like to experience the same quality seems, rather, ineffable. If I ask you what it's like to experience that phenomenal red color (I know you've already called it "red"), your linguistic resources will probably have run out; the "what it's like" to experience a given quality cannot easily be described in public natural language at all.⁹

Thus, when a sensory quality does have or give rise to a phenomenal character, the latter is something over and above the former, and (so far as has been shown) is not determined by it.

The third way in which phenomenal character outruns sensory quality is even simpler: In cases of what is now called "cognitive phenomenology," there is phenomenal character in the entire absence of sensory quality. Goldman (1993) and others¹⁰ have argued that some nonsensory, purely cognitive mental items such as thoughts and other propositional attitudes

have phenomenal character; there is something it is like to entertain them, even though no sensory quality is involved.

(If phenomenal character does so far outrun sensory quality, what then is it? More specifically, what does it require that the mere sensory quality does not? I say (Lycan (1996)) it is direct awareness of the relevant mental state under a particular introspective aspect or mode of presentation. More commissively, I understand that awareness in terms of what is sometimes called “higher-order perception” but what I now think of as garden-variety attention directed inward.¹¹ My philosophical theory of all that, in turn, invokes representational notions, but different ones from those involved in the Representation theory of sensory qualities themselves. It is, of course, controversial, both because the phenomenon, awareness of one’s own mental state, admits of competing explications, and because some theorists insist that the matter must be deeper than anything merely to do with perspectival representation even augmented by functional considerations.)

III A BIT MORE ON THE REPRESENTATION THEORY

I must assume that readers of this volume understand the theory’s basics. But I’ll give one slightly hackneyed example. You see a grey rat. The greyness you see is that of the rat; your visual system correctly and veridically represents greyness in that part of the environment.

Deranged Desmond hallucinates a pink rat, or likely more than one. (All right, once while in graduate school I hallucinated frogs and toads hopping across my desk.) The pinkness Desmond sees is that of the rat; it’s just that that rat doesn’t exist, but is merely an intentional object of Desmond’s nonveridical visual state, a representatum. Russell would have insisted on

the actual existence of a pink sense-datum. Against that, the Representation theory says that there is no actual pink individual; the pink individual is the nonactual rat. Sensory qualities are the sensible properties of things in the world, which things may or may not be real.

I warn against three bad objections. First, to the nonactual per se: The Representation theory is sometimes thought committed to (shudder) Meinong: that along with the many things that actually exist, there are plenty of other things that are just like the things that exist except for happening to lack the extra property of existing.¹²

That objection ignores two things, first, that the metaphysics of nonexistence is everyone's problem, and there is no theory of nonactual objects that is more than barely tenable (Lycan, 1994). The problem is not peculiarly that of the Representationist (or of one's current opponent on whatever issue). Second, more fundamentally, it is a simple fact of common sense that there are things that do not exist, such as a hallucinated pink rat or the Easter Bunny or the free lunch. However troublesome it is for fundamental ontology, that fact does not entail Meinong's extravagant exegesis of it, or David Lewis' outrageous concretist interpretation, or any other particular metaphysical account of it. The Representation theory of sensory qualities is entirely neutral on such underlying issues; it says only that when you hallucinate a pink rat (sorry, I know you are not Desmond), the pinkness you experience is that of the rat. Neither the rat nor its color actually exists, but as before, there are plenty of things that don't exist. We can all give lots of examples.

The second bad objection (Sturgeon (2000), Kriegel (2002), Chalmers (2004), but not Block) is that representation cannot suffice for sensory qualities because representation can occur unconsciously. But as noted in the previous section, so can the hosting of a sensory

quality. This claim may be disputed (as possibly by Levine (2001)), but consider the proverbial truck driver driving "on autopilot" who obviously saw the red light, and saw its redness in particular (why otherwise would s/he have stopped?), but who was daydreaming and quite unaware of the redness, or even of applying the brake.

Note also: To deny that a sensory quality may occur without the subject's awareness is a modal claim, an allegation of necessary truth. In the face of apparent real-world counterexamples, the proponent bears a heavy burden of proof. S/he cannot just assert it, but must produce an argument from more basic principles.

The third bad objection (Kriegel (2002a) and Chalmers (2004)—and I am afraid that Block (1996, 2003) encouraged it—is that Representationists often appeal to functional considerations as what is needed to make mere representation into representation of the particular sort that is supposed to constitute a modality-specific sensory quality. Block called us "quasi-" as opposed to "pure" Representationists; fine. But then it seems that the crucial work, the naturalizing of the distinctively phenomenal, is being done by the functionalism; as Kriegel puts it, italicizing, "a theory that accounts for [the phenomenal/nonphenomenal distinction]...by adverting to the functional role properties of the mental states in question is a *functionalist* theory" (p. 62).

That's just silly. For a theory merely to advert to functional role properties does not collapse that theory into functionalism. The great difficulty about sensory qualities was in locating them ontologically. (Of what, exactly, is the pinkness inhering in Desmond's hallucinatory experience a property?) And that is what is accomplished by the specifically representationist part of Representationism, not by the functionalist part. The functionalism

accounts for the visualness and perhaps other broadly-speaking-phenomenal properties of the experience, which is important, but locating the pinkness was the crucial work.

IV BLOCK *NOT* ON THE ARGUMENT FROM APPARENT PHENOMENAL INDIVIDUALS

The dualist argument I mentioned in my opening remarks plays on uninstantiated sensory qualities. Take an after-image. You are experiencing a green after-image as a result of seeing a red flash bulb go off; the greenness of the after-image is the sensory quality. Actual Russellian sense-data are immaterial individuals; so the materialist cannot admit that the greenness is a property of an actual sense-datum. Nor is the greenness exemplified by anything physical in your brain. Let's suppose there is no green physical object in your visible environment either. So there is no green physical thing either inside your head or visibly outside it. But since there is a green thing that you are experiencing, it must after all be a nonphysical, immaterial thing.

That is a valid deductive argument against materialism, and its premises are hard to deny.

The Representationist reply to the argument (Lycan 1987a, 1987b, 1996) is to disambiguate: There is no *actual* green thing; after-images are illusions. The greenness is that of a nonactual blob.

Now, if Block—a materialist—has ever made a reply to the after-image argument, I've missed it. It's possible he actually accepts the Representation theory of the colors of after-images. But I would like to hear one way or the other.

V BLOCK'S OLD ('90s) OBJECTIONS

I'll merely list them, since I (Lycan, 1996) and others, notably Tye (1998, 2003), have replied at length: Inverted Earth (Block, 1990), and subsequent exchanges on inversion themes; the memory argument (Block, 1996, but see also 2003); "something overhead" (1995); male orgasm (1995, but see also 2003); phosphenes (1996); Bach-y-Rita's subjects' tactile sensations; Marvin, a counterpart of Jackson's (1982) Mary (Block, 1996, but see also 2003).

VI "MENTAL PAINT"

(Block, 2003.) I have never been quite sure what "mental paint" is. Harman's original analogy was to the paint constituting a representational painting; we see paint, let's say paint that is itself blue but in the context represents a distant green mountainside. Block here defines mental paint as "[m]ental properties of the experience that represent the redness of the tomato" (p. 173). I do not see why he puts the matter in terms of mental (much less introspectible) properties of the experience *that do the representing*. According to us Representationists, it's the experience as a whole that represents the color. Perhaps the experience must do so in virtue of one or more particular properties it has, but presumably those are its psychosemantic properties, however the correct psychosemantics goes, and they certainly need not be mental.

But in his section "What is the Issue?," Block drops that bit and frames the question simply as, "Is there anything *mental* in experience over and above its representational content? I say yes, the representationist says no." There Block is speaking of the "pure"

Representationist, who probably doesn't exist (though Fred Dretske in some moods has come close). "Quasi-"Representationists as Block calls us admit that there is at least something mental in experience, and of which one can be aware, over and above representational content—if only to distinguish sense modalities; one thing I can know about an experience from the inside is that it is olfactory rather than visual. Though I myself am a quasi-Representationist regarding sensory qualities, I am only a "quasi-*quasi*-"Representationist regarding phenomenal character, admitting that there is even something broadly *qualitative* in experience that isn't just the experience's representational content (sec. II above). Quasi- and quasi-quasi-Representationists can believe in both mental paint and mental oil (p. 173), and even that we can be aware of both.¹³

Block's framing of the issue is a bit confusing, because (a) of course there is no representing without a representation, for us a brain state, and (b) that brain state is also mental. So it should be uncontroversial that there is mental paint as defined. What are controversial as Harman originally intended are whether we can introspect the paint—Harman, Dretske and Tye say no—and, more importantly, whether "phenomenal character" in whichever sense can be identified with it.

But never mind the title term. Block's actual claims are clear enough.

1. He prefaces his case against Representationism by considering a purely internalist-functional theory of sensory color and offers a counterexample involving one Erisa (p. 166), who of course experiences red as differently from blue, but the example is engineered to remove all differences of function. —This is irrelevant to the Representationist theory, but I note that it also begs the question against the functionalist, or at least is bare assertion. The

functionalist always appeals to normal causes, and in the example there certainly are normal proximal causes, retinal hits, that would distinguish the red from the blue experiences.

2. Block moves on (pp. 170-71) to argue that if “phenomenal character” (or sensory qualities) supervene on the brain, then Representationism is refuted by an appeal to Swampman, whose experiences have no intentional content. —But could we please have a moratorium on Swampman? People have directly opposing intuitions about him, and he has been used to defend precisely opposing conclusions. It is hardly consensus that Swampman would have no intentional contents (there is no other consensus about him either).

3. If Representationism were thus refuted by the supervenience thesis, of course we Representationists could just reject supervenience and go externalist, contending that sensory qualities are “wide.” Block’s response to that move is brisk: “This seems to me to be a desperate maneuver with no independent plausibility” (p. 171). —Um, here he is perhaps forgetting the works by Fred Dretske, me and possibly others offering extensive explicit and, n.b., independent defenses of phenomenal externalism (Dretske 1996, Lycan 2001).

4. On pp. 174-75 Block raises an issue about illusions and hallucinations: There is something in common as between a visual experience of a red tomato and an hallucination of one. —Emphatically agreed (contra Disjunctivists); because each represents a tomato and the tomato as being red. But more to the point, “there is something *introspective* in common” (my italics), and again I agree. Block imputes to me the idea that what is in common is that “one is aware that the experience represents the tomato,” and objects that one need not have the concept of representation to be aware of what is in common. Agreed a third time. What’s

introspectively in common is just that in the two experiences there are tomatoes that *look the same*.¹⁴

5. Male orgasm again: Lycan (1996) had argued that it has representational features, and that the rest of its (more worthwhile) phenomenal features are functional. Block responds that “according to me there are features of the experience of orgasm that don’t represent anything, so mental oil exists” (p. 176). —Yes, of course there are and it does, but Block does nothing to show that those features are not functional properties. He concludes, “The representationists should put up or shut up. The burden of proof is on them to say what the representational content of experiences such as orgasm is” (p. 177). But as Block himself actually quotes, I did have a shot at that (reluctantly, my books being family publications); the issue is what to do about the remaining and majority phenomenal character. I say it is all functional, and Block provides no argument against that.

6. Phosphene experiences (pp. 177-78): “My view is that one can be aware of something more [than the representata].” —As always, rejecting the transparency thesis, I agree. For example, one can be aware of the visualness of the experience. And one can be aware of what it’s like to have it. But that is not the issue, or at least not Block’s (1996) original issue about phosphenes, which was that so far as has been shown, not all visual individuals look like physical objects in the first place. In response I argued that for any visual experience, there is some technological means to produce a veridical qualitative equivalent. My point was that a movie screen is a physical object whether or not it looks like one. Block now rejoins that there is no guarantee that a phosphene experience could be induced in a movie theater, but I see no

reason why the experience *could not*—again a case in which a modal claim requires argument but its denial does not.

7. Marvin again: Marvin is by design a close relative of Jackson's Mary: For the first time he learns what it's like to see red, though he is not told what the subjective color is called. This is supposed to be a problem for the Representationist: "What does the representationist say about what Marvin has learned?" —Answer: Nothing whatever. Representationism is a theory of sensory qualities, not a theory of learning or concepts or (especially) higher-order w.i.l. Block has just changed the subject.

But he goes on to repeat a question asked in Block (1996) that does seem to bear on sensory qualities: "[W]hat, according to the representationist, is the difference between Marvin's concept of red and Marvin's concept of blue?" (p. 181). Lycan (1996) had made the obvious reply, that the difference is simply that between representing redness and representing blueness. Block makes two quick counterarguments (p. 182). First, can Marvin have phenomenally different experiences of the same (worldly) color? (E.g., one of his eyes may differ from the other.) —Of course he can; the same object may look one color to him using one eye but a different color to him using the other. We color realists conclude that both looks cannot be veridical; at least one is inaccurate. What of it? (More on this below.)

Second, suppose a Cartesian demon fools Marvin into thinking of two of his concepts that they pick out different colors when actually they designate the same one. "But surely the concepts are different independently of what they pick out." Yes, of course, if Block is talking about introspective concepts and not color concepts that apply to the world. They are phenomenal concepts of some sort, as Block seems to grant. But now we've gotten far away

from Representationism about sensory qualities, which (again) implies nothing about introspective or phenomenal concepts.

Yet, what if Block does mean color concepts that apply to the world? Then Marvin has a false belief about his own concepts—a strange belief, but the Evil Demon is notoriously powerful. I don't yet see how that would bear on Representationism about the sensory qualities.

8. Memory again: Block revisits *Inverted Earth* (1990), but with a new twist. You are again transported to *Inverted Earth*, but this time you are aware of that and you make a conscious effort to switch languages. Block argues on the basis of “dominant causal source” psychosemantics that your visual contents would shift too. (As in Lycan (1996), I doubt that, but let it pass for now.) The upshot is as always: Same phenomenal character despite different representational contents, and “How could the representationist explain what it is about the visual experience that stays the same?” (p. 186). Here the argument does apply to sensory qualities as well as to phenomenal character in Block's sense.

The obvious reply (Lycan, 1996) is that unnoticed by you, the sensory quality has shifted just as (and because) the representational content has. But as in (1996), Block appeals to memory: “[Y]ou remember the color of the sky on your birthday last year, the year before that, ten years before that, and so on, and your long-term memory gives you good reason to think that the phenomenal character of your experience has not changed gradually” (p. 186).¹⁵ But the obvious reply (Lycan, 1996) to this in turn is that the memory content has changed too. Whether or not we are phenomenal externalists, we should all be externalists about memory.

At this point Block makes the same (I say) mistake as in his (1996): “Why should we believe that memory is defective in this way?” (p. 187). And as before, I don't grant his assumption that on my view, the visitor's memory is *defective*. There's nothing (functionally) defective about it, nothing wrong with it at all. The reason it delivers a false memory belief is just that the environment has been switched (and externalism is true). If Block is unknowingly transported to Putnam's original Twin Earth and calls some of the waterish-looking stuff “water,” Block is wrong, but there's nothing defective about any of his faculties. Block has a very well justified false belief.

Responding to that, Block says, “The Inverted Earth argument challenges externalist representationism about phenomenal character [here, sensory qualities], so trotting in an ‘error theory,’ an externalist representationism about memory of phenomenal character to defend it is not very persuasive” (p. 187). But externalism about phenomenal memory is not per se an error theory,¹⁶ much less “trott[ed] in.” There is here no extra assumption about memory. If phenomenal character is wide, as I maintain, and memory is wide, as everyone should grant, then obviously memory of phenomenal character will be wide. The appeal to memory adds nothing to Block's case.

9. Shifted spectra (reprinted from Block (1999)): Color perception differs at least slightly according to age, gender, and race. Subjects differ in their judgments of color sameness and of uniqueness. “I emphasize gender, race, and age to stifle the reaction that one group should be regarded as normal and the others as defective” (p. 189). Now (p. 191):

Let us co-opt the word 'aquamarine' to denote a shade of blue that is as narrow as a shade can be, one that has no discriminable subshades. If Jack's and Jill's visual systems differ slightly..., then we can reasonably suppose that aquamarine doesn't look to Jack the way it looks to Jill.... But why should we think that there is any difference between the representational contents of Jack's experience as of aquamarine and Jill's?

Now, I'd have thought the shifted-spectra data were mainly an argument against color realism, not against Representationism regarding sensory qualities. But Block himself is a color realist (and so am I, though Representationism does not require that), so let's evaluate the argument, given the truth of color realism. OK, why indeed should we think that there is any difference between Jack's and Jill's representational contents? Because, by Block's own hypothesis, the chip *looks different colors* to Jack and Jill. It doesn't look "as of" aquamarine to both of them. It may look as of aquamarine to one, but then it looks as of a slightly different color to the other. Their different experiences represent different shades. (That would be behaviorally detectable, too, as Block concedes.)

Now Block says, disbelievingly, so then "color experience probably cannot be veridical for both men and women, both blacks and whites, both young and old" (p. 191). Yes; given his assumptions and given color realism, that's right. Either Jack or Jill is misperceiving. "Hence representationism is not right." —What? I don't yet see what Representationism (about sensory qualities) has to do with it; the verdict is delivered by Block's own hypotheses plus color realism. So much the worse, some will say, for color realism.

Again, pithily (p. 194): "The standard aquamarine chip is objectively aquamarine. If it looks different to men and to women, then at least one gender's visual experience is representing it as some other shade, and that is an unacceptable consequence." Unacceptable is as may be; but then he concludes that "Representationism is empirically false." Again, how did Representationism come into the matter?

Two mutually supporting responses can be found in the text. First: Here is what Representationism has to do with shifted spectra. We *insist* that color realism holds (as Block does on pp. 193-94). And we insist that neither the men nor the women, neither the young nor the old, etc., are misperceiving, because there is nothing abnormal or defective about any of them. Were Representationism true of sensory qualities, those two claims could not both hold, for the parties could not be representing the same sensory quality. Therefore Representationism is false.

The trouble with that (taken by itself) is that it just repeats that we must keep color realism at the expense of Representationism. But traditionally, shifted spectra and such phenomena have been used in direct arguments against color realism; so Block is not in a position just to insist that color realism is true, given the independent plausibility of Representationism (barring, of course, equally independent objections to Representationism).

The second response shows up when Block "counter[s]" one of my (1996) arguments (p. 194): He says the argument "ignores the distinction...between the two senses of 'looks the same'." And that really is the issue. Since Chisholm (1957), it has been common to distinguish (roughly) a representational or "normal causes" use of 'appears' or 'looks' from an intrinsic phenomenal or in Chisholm's word "noncomparative" sense. While the chip may look

differently to the two perceivers in the latter sense, it might look aquamarine to both in the representational sense, and that would constitute the counterexample Block intends, phenomenal looks outrunning representational ones.

But I didn't *ignore* the Chisholmian distinction; I explicitly reject it. I deny that there is any second sense of the sort Chisholm and Block think there is. (See also Leeds (1975).) That is one of the main issues that divides us.

(Qualification: In well-known cases of color constancy, a surface may look both, say, tan and white. According to me, in such a case the surface looks white in the context *by* looking tan. And/but each of those looks is representational; visual representation is layered (Lycan, 1995, Ch. 7).¹⁷ I would not posit two senses of the word 'looks'; it's just that different layers may be indicated in the context.)

In any case, at this point (*ibid.*), surprisingly Block seems to concede the core of the point: "Perhaps Jack sees aquamarine as greener than Jill does, so there is a representational difference after all." --Just so. He replies, "[G]iven that there are tens of thousands of shades of greenish blue that persons of normal vision can discriminate, it is unlikely that we (or our visual systems) have available to us (as part of our normal visual competence) representational resources that would distinguish close shades of greenish blue."

Obviously our visual system's power of resolution regarding shades is an entirely empirical question, but how does Block suppose that we can discriminate two shades without mobilizing systems that represent them differently?

VII BLOCK'S MOST RECENT OBJECTIONS

Block has recently and very profitably turned his attention to attending. His (2010) focuses on the indisputable fact that shifts of attention change phenomenology and phenomenal character. That per se does not bear on the present issue, but he offers examples in which shifts of attention change what seem to be sensory qualities in particular. Of moment are the studies by Marisa Carrasco and her various colleagues.¹⁸ “The effect of attention is experienced in terms of appearance of contrast, speed, size, color saturation, etc. Attended things look bigger, faster, more saturated, and higher in contrast...” (p. 44). Contrast, speed and the rest are actual, objective properties of worldly objects or displays; what attentional shift changes are, rather, perceived (apparent) contrast, speed et al.

Such realism being assumed, it would seem clear that if an attended thing looks bigger than its actual size, that is a false or inaccurate representation. And if two things are experienced as differing in their degree of contrast, as in Carrasco's experiments using Gabor patches,¹⁹ then at least one of the experiences must be false or inaccurate. But Block takes pains to forestall those inferences.

Consider two side-by-side Gabor patches, the one on the left having objectively 22% contrast and the one on the right having 28%. Attending to the left one can boost its apparent contrast to make it seem equal in contrast to the right one. Or, if two patches are objectively equal in contrast, attending to one can make it seem higher in contrast than the other. In such cases, Block asks how we should tell which of the relevant two percepts, the attended or the unattended, is the illusory one. In particular, regarding the 22% patch, is the attended

perception of its contrast as equal to that of the 28% patch illusory, or is the comparatively unattended perception illusory (when you are attending to the fixation point midway between the patches)?

Block maintains that “there is no way to pick which distribution of attentional resources engenders veridical perception and which engenders illusion” (p. 45). I certainly don’t have one, so I cannot contest that point. But neither do I see how it is supposed to deny us the inference that at least one of the percepts is illusory. (Possibly, of course, both are.) If we continue to maintain that the left-hand patch does objectively have 22% contrast but for the subject the perceived contrast changes depending on attention, then at most one of the relevant percepts can be veridical. Remember, though the changes induced by varying attention are phenomenological, they are not merely phenomenological; to the subject, a given patch appears *to have* such-and-such a contrast value. (Proponents of the Chisholmian distinction often allege a difference between looking red and looking *to be* red; but in the Gabor case, the patches look *to be* greater or lesser in contrast, depending.)

Much earlier in the paper (pp. 24-25), Block had offered a model to show that “there is no paradox.” Consider the phenomenal or perceived loudness of a sound. It

is a function of a number of variables, aside from actual intensity, namely frequency, bandwidth and the duration of the sound. Although loudness in some sense presents intensity and is experienced as presenting intensity, the same intensity can sound differentially loud depending on other variables....

[T]here can be two phenomenally different but non-illusory presentations of the same sound intensity....

I wouldn't know whether the sensory-quality component of loudness does represent intensity, but *arguendo* we must assume so, for otherwise the example is not an example of what Block says it is. Intensity is an objective physical property of the sound. And so I have the same problem as with the Gabor patches. Either the other variables change the perceived loudness or they don't. Presumably they do, and we must suppose this is a case in which the perceived loudness differs from the actual intensity it represents. But then the perceived loudness is greater or smaller than the actual intensity, hence inaccurately perceived. Why is this not an illusion?

Perhaps Block means something more specific by "illusion" than I realize. But even if so, the perceived loudness is still a *misperception*, and that is enough for my purposes.

(It may be that aspect perception is playing a role in these examples. As Block notes, aspect-perception cases have been wielded against Representationism by Peacocke (1983), Macpherson (2006) and Nickel (2007). A number of defensive strategies are available to the Representationist in the face of aspect perception (Lycan, 2000); I will not repeat that discussion here, but I note that I am inclined to take aspect perception itself to be an attentional phenomenon.²⁰)

Regarding the Gabor patches, Block makes a further appeal, to phenomenology more specifically (pp. 53-54): "The change invoked by changing attention does not *look like a change in the world*—at least not to me.... It does not look as if anything is *really* changing in contrast"

(italics original). Usefully, he compares that “unreality” to “the way an after-image grows and shrinks as the surface you project it on moves further away or closer.... [I]ts growth looks somehow unreal or unobjective.”²¹

The growing-and-shrinking phenomenon is indeed a tip-off that the after-image is not real, i.e., not an actual physical object in front of the subject; such an object however flimsy and filmy would not behave in that way. And doubtless that itself affects the overall phenomenology. But it does nothing to show that the after-image and its shape and color are anything but representata. After-images are illusions. Similarly, we know that nothing would be making the Gabor patches actually increase or decrease in contrast, so it might not feel to us as though we were experiencing objective change. (Actually, for the record, I myself do get a sense of worldly change when I shift my attention back and forth, but it would be pointless to bicker about that.) Here too, the knowledge that a property or relation is illusory and not real does nothing to show that it is not a representatum and only that.

I do not claim victory in the attention wars, because I may have misunderstood Block’s main argument. But I too remain unvanquished.

VIII CONCLUSION

I hardly expect this paper to make Block cry out, “I’ve been wrong, so wrong!” But I would like to hear his own materialist response to the after-image argument of sec. IV above.

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Footnotes

¹ More conservatively, the qualities are *intentional* objects or intentional contents of the sensory states. Throughout this paper I shall assume that intentionality is representation; Block will not disagree.

² But it does not; see Lycan (2000), sec. 4.1, and Pautz (2006).

³ In the opening footnote to Block (2005), he notes that many of us say “*Representationalism*”; for purposes of reducing ambiguity, he prefers just “*Representationism*.” The present volume being honorific, I shall honor his preference within its covers.

⁴ I detest all philosophical neologisms, especially this one, but I can no longer fantasize that the “q”-word had previously had a single clear meaning; see Keeley (2009). I shall try never to use it again.

Note that here “qualia” are properties of *experiences*. That introduces at least a slight tension, since experiences are *events* or processes, while otherwise Block speaks of his visual “qualia” as though they are sensory qualities such as *colors* or something closely analogous. (Events don't have colors.)

⁵ I shall point out a further taxonomic problem in sec. VI below.

⁶ There is a known physiological basis for the separation: there are two pain systems, one sensory and one inhibiting; see Hardcastle (1999).

⁷ Diet gurus sometimes advise concentrating one's attention on the purely physical-sensation component of hunger and reminding oneself that that sensory core in itself is entirely bearable.

⁸ Armstrong (1968), Rosenthal (1991), Lycan (1996), and others.

⁹ In addition: sensory qualities are presented in experience (veridically or not) as belonging to external objects. The apparent redness of a stop sign is that *of the sign*, and that of a merely hallucinated stop sign is a property of that nonexistent sign. As Carruthers (2000) has pointed out, so far as the “what it's like” locution applies to a sensory quality itself, it means what the relevant part of *the world* is or seems like. But “what it's like” in Block's and our higher-order sense applies to experiences, to the merely mental.

¹⁰ Strawson (1994), Siewert (1998), Pitt (2004), Lycan (2008). Block (1993) sympathizes: “Perhaps thoughts, beliefs, and desires also have characteristic phenomenal conscious aspects” (pp. 181-82). But for opposition, see Lormand (1996) and Prinz (2010).

¹¹ As Wesley Sauret has pointed out to me, that is a larger difference than it may sound. More on this in a joint paper, in preparation.

¹² E.g., Loar (1993).

¹³ On p. 175 Block contradicts his original definitions: “Those who deny both mental paint and mental oil are representationists; those who countenance one or the other are phenomenists.” (He also misclassifies me as a “representationist” in this sense, i.e., a pure Representationist.) One can be, as I am, a functionalist about both paint and oil, and so not qualify as a phenomenist in the sense quoted in sec. I above.

¹⁴ Similar remarks apply to Block's renewed discussion of Bach-y-Rita (pp. 178-79).

¹⁵ Lycan's (1996) discussion of Block's Memory argument was hideously complicated, owing to dialectical nuances. I won't try to put any of that right here. For a good discussion, see Tye (1998).

¹⁶ Block says "it postulates that ordinary memory, for example about what it was like to see the sky a few minutes ago, is inherently defective" (p. 188). No, it doesn't. As before, there is no defect.

¹⁷ For the record, I have since abandoned my particular version of the layering view in favor of Schellenberg's (2008) superior version.

¹⁸ E.g., Carrasco et al. (2000), Carrasco (2006).

¹⁹ For the operationalization of "contrast," see Block's fn 12.

²⁰ Chastain and Burnham (1975), Ricci and Blundo (1990), Kleinschmidt et al. (1998).

²¹ Block cites precedent similar observations by Gustav Fechner and William James.