

Qualia: They're Not What They Seem

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What is the relation between the philosophical notion of qualia and the ordinary notion of how things seem? There's a strong inclination to identify the two.^[1] But even among qualiaphiles, there's some inclination to distinguish them.^[2] I leave open both possibilities. I will argue that whether or not qualia are ways things seem, the view that qualia have the properties typically attributed to them is unjustified. My argument begins by setting aside the philosophical notion of qualia and focusing on the ordinary notion of how things seem. Surprisingly enough, ways things seem do not have many of the properties commonly attributed to them. Inverted ways things seem are impossible. How things seem to you is not determined by the intrinsic properties of you or your present experience. And how things seem to you can change without your noticing. In arguing for these claims, I do not assume physicalism or functionalism. I will assume that sometimes people mean what they say and that if you can see what color something is you don't need to think about that color under a description. But I'm not working with a theory of anything. I simply rely on your intuitions about cases.

If ways things seem do not have the features commonly attributed to them, and qualia do have those same features, this looks like good reason to distinguish the two. But if your reasons for believing that qualia have the features are epistemically on a par with reasons for believing that ways things seem have the features, and you know that ways things seem do not have the features, then those reasons cannot justify your belief that qualia have the features. I'll argue that the reasons are epistemically on a par in this way. In the final section of the paper, I look for reasons for believing in qualia if qualia are not ways things seem. But I restrict my attention to reasons that would make it obvious that there are qualia and show that there are none. This does

not show that there are no qualia over and above ways things seem. Nor does it show that there are no reasons for believing in qualia over and above ways things seem. But it does show that qualia are not what they seem. Either they don't have the features commonly attributed to them, or they're not the obvious features of experience qualiaphiles typically suppose them to be.

A Surprising Impossibility

Consider the following hypothesis:

(Hype) As far as their colors are concerned, fire hydrants seem to Laverne the way grass seems to Shirley.

We're not to imagine that Laverne and Shirley live in different neighborhoods where the colors of things are different. We keep fixed, if we can, the colors of things. We're not to imagine that Laverne and Shirley are colorblind and that red things and green things seem the same to each of them. We're not to imagine that there's something specifically peculiar about grass and fire hydrants. To anticipate slightly, everything Laverne and Shirley both call "red" seems one way to Laverne and another way to Shirley. And the same goes for things they both call "blue" and the rest of the colors. We imagine that the shift is total but systematic. All of the things they both call "orange" look the same or similar to Laverne, and those things all look the same or similar to Shirley. It's just that the way those things look or seem to Laverne is different from the way those things look or seem to Shirley. Let's assume that things have always been this way.

We need not assume that Laverne and Shirley are physically or intrinsically or even functionally indistinguishable. It may turn out, as a consequence of our hypothesis, that Laverne and Shirley are, in some sense, behaviorally indistinguishable. It may or may not turn out that Laverne and Shirley are functionally indistinguishable, but if so, that will be a consequence of our hypothesis rather than something we assume at the beginning. You may assume, if you like, that there is some physical difference between Laverne and Shirley, perhaps in the brain or on the

eyes, that causes or accounts for the difference in how things seem.

There's one further thing you should not assume. You shouldn't assume that you've heard this story before. Presumably you've heard all about inverted qualia, absent qualia, unimaginable qualia and so on. This is a story about how things seem. The story does not require any technical terminology or philosopher's distinctions either to tell or to understand. All expressions should be understood in their ordinary, non-technical, English senses. "Blue" means *blue*. "Seems blue" means *seems blue*. We'll look at the relation between this story and qualia later. ^[3]

The hypothesis I've asked you to consider, understood in the way I've asked you to understand it, is impossible. There's no possible world in which it's true. It leads to a contradiction. Of course, there's no denying that our hypothesis *seems* possible. But then, it seems possible for every meaningful predicate to determine a set, empty or non-empty. This hypothesis about sets isn't just false. It's self-contradictory. It's just not obviously self-contradictory. The same goes for Hype.

To see the contradiction, we look at the consequences of our hypothesis. To do that, we suppose that it's true. One of the things that makes Hype so much fun is the idea that if it were true, we'd be very unlikely to know that it was true. After all, Laverne and Shirley will have learned their color words in pretty much that same way, by reference to the same things, or at least, things of the same color. So, as anticipated, Laverne and Shirley will use their color words in pretty much the same way, as names for the same colors. This is the behavioral indistinguishability that makes detection so difficult.

But something more significant and less epistemic follows from the fact that Laverne and Shirley use the same color words as names for the same colors. If both Laverne and Shirley utter the sentence "Fire hydrants are red," there's a strong inclination to think that what each of them says is true. Neither is in a better epistemic situation with respect to fire hydrants than the other.

If we suppose that half of the community is like Laverne and the other half like Shirley, there are no grounds for thinking that one rather than the other stumbled on the truth. In fact, neither Laverne nor Shirley is epistemically worse off than us. There's a way red things seem to each of them. They tell red things on the basis of the way things seem. If we can get it right about fire hydrants, so can they.

Given the truth of the utterances, and assuming that fire hydrants only have one color, there's a strong inclination to say that in making the utterances, Laverne and Shirley both attribute the same property to the same objects. And if we assume, as I've suggested, that unlike "the color of my true love's hair," "red" is not a description of a color, there's a strong inclination to say that Laverne and Shirley both express the same proposition when they utter the same sentence about fire hydrants. Given this, there's a strong inclination to say that they mean the same thing by the word "red."

In deriving a contradiction from Hype, I'll be relying on certain background assumptions. I think these assumptions are fairly obvious. To the extent that we understand the distinction between names and descriptions as it's applied to predicates,^[4] "red" is an obvious case. But when push comes to shove, someone may go looking for something to deny in order to avoid the contradiction. So I'll try to keep my assumptions explicit.

Laverne and Shirley both say, "Fire hydrants are red," and they both say that fire hydrants are red. Neither is attempting to deceive. Each is trying her best to say what she believes. It doesn't have to be easy to say what you think or to mean what you say, but if it's possible for people in Laverne and Shirley's situation to say what they believe, that's what's going on in this case. I think it is easy to say what you mean, but I'll just make explicit my assumption that if Laverne and Shirley's situation is possible, it's possible for them to express their beliefs. So, if they say the same thing, and they believe what they say, they believe the same thing. This is not

surprising. They each acquired the concept of red by reference to things the color of fire hydrants. Their ability to tell when things are the same color is on a par with ours. So of course each of them is in a position to know, and so believe, that fire hydrants are red.

So far so good. But I promised you a contradiction, and so far, all we have are some intuitions about the content of words and thoughts about the external world. Laverne and Shirley mean the same thing by the word "red," and they both believe that fire hydrants are red. Now suppose that Laverne and Shirley are in a situation where they believe the lighting is abnormal. Each of them says, "I don't know what color fire hydrants really are, but they seem red to me." Here there's a strong inclination to think that what each of them says is true.

Why should we believe that the utterances are true? We can suppose that neither Laverne nor Shirley is lying. Each is trying to say what she believes. Of course, it's possible for them to lie. But if it's also possible for them to express their beliefs, we suppose that that's what's going on in this particular instance. So each says that it seems red to her; each believes what she says; so each believes that it seems red to her. Here our intuitions about first-person authority or privileged access come into play. Of course it's possible for people to be wrong about how things seem to them. But if it's possible for them to get it right, once again, we assume they do. And it certainly seems possible. Neither Laverne nor Shirley is epistemically worse off with respect to the goings on in her own mind than you are with respect to yours. If you can know how things seem, so can they.

Laverne and Shirley both say that fire hydrants seem red to her. Since they believe what they say, each believes that fire hydrants seem red to her. Since each is in a position to know what's going on in her own mind, both beliefs are true. So fire hydrants seem red to both Laverne and Shirley. So, as far as their colors are concerned, fire hydrants seem the same way to both Laverne and Shirley. A similar argument will show that grass seems the same way to them

both as well. It's part of the story that fire hydrants and grass do not seem the same way either to Laverne or to Shirley. And it follows from this that as far as their colors are concerned, fire hydrants do not seem to Laverne the way grass seems to Shirley. This is the negation of Hype.

There's something about a hypothesis that entails its own negation: it's impossible. There's no way for it to be true. Hype is like that: it's impossible. I don't believe Hype is impossible because I love functionalism. I don't love functionalism. I don't believe it's impossible because I love physicalism. Physicalism is fine with me, but it's an empirical hypothesis. If we have evidence for nonphysical things, we should reject the hypothesis. I think Hype is impossible because when you think about what it would take for it to be true, you realize that one of the things it would take is its own negation. And you know that that's the kind of thing that can't happen.

Regardless of its relation to more beloved hypotheses, the impossibility of Hype is interesting and important in its own right. Hype is a claim about how things seem. You can know on the basis of introspection that there are ways things seem, and you can have a fairly clear conception of what it is for things to seem a certain way to you. Given this conception, it looks for all the world as though Hype is possible. But this possibility is merely apparent. And merely apparent possibility is not a kind of possibility. Whether or not the surprising impossibility of Hype tells us anything about physicalism or functionalism, it might, if we pay attention to it, tell us something about ways things seem.

The impossibility of Hype is the impossibility of inverted ways things seem. But this impossibility might not rule out the possibility of inverted qualia. That all depends, of course, on the relation between qualia and ways things seem. If qualia just are ways things seem, then you have a fairly clear conception of them and good reason to believe in them, but inverted qualia are impossible. If qualia are not ways things seem, it becomes unclear what they are and why we

should believe in them. But one thing is clear. If qualia are not ways things seem, you can't use your intuitions about the possibility of inverted spectra to argue for the existence of qualia.

One of the basic intuitions about inverted spectra is that Hype is possible. At least our initial intuitions about inverted spectra are intuitions about inverted ways things seem. But these intuitions are simply mistaken. Now if qualia are not ways things seem, they are at least very similar to ways things seem, so similar, in fact, that people tend to confuse the two. If you have, in addition to your intuition about inverted ways things seem, an intuition about inverted qualia, you should be deeply suspicious of this intuition. If you know that one particular intuition is mistaken, and you have a nearly indistinguishable intuition about a nearly indistinguishable subject matter, it would be unreasonable of you to take the later intuition at face value in the absence of some independent confirmation. So you have to know what qualia are and what they're like first, before you can figure out whether or not you can invert them. But this means that you can't use your intuitions about the possibility of inverted spectra to argue for the existence of qualia.

A Surprisingly Unstable Situation

Hype was supposed to be a situation in which the colors of things remain fixed while the way those things seem to people is different. Now I want to consider one particular situation in which the colors of things are different, but the way they seem to people is the same. I want to consider the story Ned Block tells in "Inverted Earth."^[5] Though the story is the same, the questions I'll ask about the story might be different. I'll be asking about how things seem. If, as many qualiaphiles believe, qualia just are ways things seem, then my questions and Block's questions will come to pretty much the same thing. Only the answers will differ. But if, as Block believes, qualia are not ways things seem, then my initial questions are simply about something else. In any case, I'll ask about ways things seem first and worry about the relation between

qualia and ways things seem later.

Here's the story. Suppose there's a planet, Inverted Earth, which is very similar to Earth in terms of the shapes and sizes and locations of the objects. Every pencil in every desk on Earth has a corresponding pencil of the same shape and size in a corresponding desk in the corresponding place on Inverted Earth, and so on. In addition to these similarities, there is a significant and widespread difference. The colors of things on Earth are different from the colors of things on Inverted Earth. If something on Earth is one color, the corresponding thing on Inverted Earth is the complimentary color. On Inverted Earth, the sky is yellow; grass is red; and fire hydrants are green. [\[6\]](#)

There's one further significant difference between Earth and Inverted Earth, and this is a difference in the meanings of words. On Earth, "red" is the name for the color red. On Inverted Earth, "red" is the name for the color green. Corresponding words are used for complimentary colors. This is not because someone makes a mistake. This is because the meanings of words are conventional, and they have different conventions. Though this might go without saying, if we can mean what we say, they can mean what they say.

If you were surreptitiously switched to Inverted Earth, and no compensating measures were taken, you might think there was something wrong with your eyes, especially when you hear people say things like, "The sky is blue." But there's nothing wrong with your eyes. You're thinking and talking about different things, things of a different color. And though people on Inverted Earth say, "The sky is blue," they do not say that the sky is blue. The sky is yellow and they know it. Since their word "blue" means *yellow*, that's how they express their knowledge. Now suppose you are surreptitiously switched to Inverted Earth, and compensating measures are taken. Complimentary colored dyes are injected into your skin and blood and so on, and special lenses are implanted in your eyes. These not only change how your eyes appear to external

observers, they change how external things seem to you. With the lenses, red things seem green to you, and blue things seem yellow. This change in the ways things seem is the result of a purely physical change in the eyes or brain.

Unlike the case in which no measures are taken, in this case when you're switched, you won't notice the change. You'll wake up in a house that you think is yours. Of course, it's not yours, and though you think you have, you've never been in it before in your life. When you go into work and see someone who looks familiar to you, you'll think it's your friend. But that's not your friend. You've never met that person before in your life. And though you think you know what that person likes, your belief that, e.g., that person likes chocolate ice cream is only accidentally true. Facts about your friend make you justified, while facts about this stranger make your belief true. So your fortuitously true belief does not constitute knowledge. Just as an idle curiosity, if you remain on Inverted Earth for some time, this person you think is your friend will become your friend, and the belief you think constitutes knowledge will come to constitute knowledge, and the place you call "home" will become home. These changes are extremely subtle. You will not notice them. But they are changes nonetheless.

When you first arrive on Inverted Earth, the sky seems blue to you. Since you have no reason to suspect that anything is amiss, you believe that the sky is blue. This belief is perfectly reasonable. It's based on how things seem in the absence of grounds for doubt. Though reasonable, the belief is false. The sky on Inverted Earth is yellow. And there's nothing specifically peculiar about the sky. Things typically and regularly seem to be ways that they're not. There's a set of properties that we ordinarily think of as obvious: the colors of ordinary, unobstructed objects in broad daylight. When you first arrive on Inverted Earth, you're systematically wrong about which things have these properties. Though restricted to colors, this is a case of massive, systematic error.

If we set aside, just for a moment, the question of what influence this story ought to have on our views about qualia and think about the story for its own sake, what's interesting and surprising about the story is not its impossibility. Unlike Hype, this is a genuine possibility. What's surprising about the story is its instability. Unless you're moved to another planet or put in a different situation, the people on Inverted Earth that you incorrectly think of as your friends will eventually become your friends. Merely apparent friendship is inherently unstable. Merely apparent friendship is not a kind of friendship. Unlike apparent friendship, which may or may not be what it seems, *merely* apparent friendship is no friendship at all. If I want to keep up the appearance of friendship, I need to spend time with you. If we spend enough time together, either we'll end up friends, or I'll get sick of the deception, or you'll get sick of me.

Inherently unstable situations are not impossible. It's not even impossible to perpetuate an inherently unstable situation indefinitely. They just require a lot of work and some outside help. They don't perpetuate themselves. Unlike cases where you know a lot about the world around you and very much like cases of merely apparent friendship, cases of massive and systematic error are inherently unstable. How interesting.

How do we know that cases of systematic error are inherently unstable? Well, let's just look at this one. When you first arrive on Inverted Earth and see someone who looks to you just like your old friend Laverne, you will, reasonably enough, think that it is Laverne. But it's not. It's some stranger you've never met whose name you don't know. Given this reasonable but false belief, you will try to use your word "Laverne" to refer to this stranger. But you can't. Your word "Laverne" refers to your old friend. So when you say, "Laverne just went next door," what you say is false. Laverne, your old friend, is not next door. She's thousands of miles away.

After you've been on Inverted Earth for some time, perhaps ten years, perhaps fifty, things will have changed. Now the person you thought was your friend has become your friend.

And now you know her name. You still try to use your word “Laverne” to refer to this individual. But now that you know her and her name, there doesn't seem to be anything to prevent you from succeeding in this attempt. It's not obvious that you can't use “Laverne” to refer to your old friend. But it is obvious that you can use the name to refer to your new friend. ^[7] Now when you say, “Laverne just went next door,” if you think this because your new friend just went next door, then what you say and what you think are both true. The earlier and later utterances of the sentence containing the name, like the beliefs they express, don't just differ in truth value. They differ in truth conditions. The truth of the earlier utterance depends on the activities of one individual while the truth of the later utterance depends on those of another. There may be more to meaning than truth conditions, but a difference in truth conditions is a difference in meaning.

Just by staying on Inverted Earth for some time, you meet new people, learn their names, and come to mean different things by your words. And all of these changes occur without your noticing them. This is somewhat surprising. But it's not the end of the world. What goes for “Laverne” seems to go for “red” as well. When you first arrive on Inverted Earth and look at a fire hydrant, it will look red to you, and you'll believe that it is. But this belief is mistaken. Things are not as they seem. Given this reasonable but false belief, you'll try to use the word “red” simply as a name for the color of fire hydrants, ripe tomatoes, and things like that in your new neighborhood. But you can't. You don't know anything about the colors of things in your new neighborhood.

If you remain on Inverted Earth for some time, you will acquire knowledge about the colors of things in your environment. Now when you confidently predict that the next fire engine will be the same color as the next fire hydrant, your evidence is not accidentally connected to the fact that makes your belief true, and now you know. So you've seen the color of ripe tomatoes

and fire hydrants in your new neighborhood a number of times, and you can recognize it. You know it when you see it. Given your ignorance of the switch, you will try to use “red” as a name for that color. Given your epistemic access to the color and your intention to refer to it, there seems to be no reason why you can't.

Now when you say, “Fire hydrants are red,” what you say is true. Of course, when you utter that sentence, you don't mean that fire hydrants are the color of fire hydrants. You can tell from the inside that you don't mean anything even remotely like that. Since you can see the color, there's no need to describe it. If someone else can't see what color you're talking about, and you want to let them know, you might pick a description to let you do this. But pretty much any description will do. None of the descriptions gives the meaning of your word “red,” and none of them fixes the reference, if fixing the reference means making it the case that you refer to one thing rather than another. You're talking about one color rather than another because that's the color you can see and recognize, not because you think of it as the color you see and recognize.

Fire hydrants and ripe tomatoes in your new neighborhood are green. The color you see, recognize, and use the word “red” to refer to is the color green. So, of course, when you say, “Fire hydrants are red,” what you say is true because what you say is that fire hydrants are green. And you don't say this to deceive someone. You believe what you say. So what you mean and think, like what you know and can recognize, has changed without your noticing. But in all relevant respects, you're the same on the inside at the beginning of your stay on Inverted Earth and at the end. So what you say and mean and think is not completely determined by what you're like on the inside.

So much for what you think and mean. What about how things seem? When you first get to Inverted Earth, you say, “Whatever color fire hydrants really are, they seem red to me.” What

you say is true. Merely being transported to another planet does not obstruct your privileged access to facts about how things currently seem. This is unsurprising. After you've been on Inverted Earth for some time, you say, "Whatever color fire hydrants really are, they seem red to me." What you say is true. Merely learning things about the colors of objects in your new neighborhood does not obstruct your privileged access either.

Here's what's surprising. When you now say, "Fire hydrants seem red to me," you mean, and believe, that fire hydrants seem green to you. Since this belief is true, fire hydrants seem green to you. How things seem to you has changed without your noticing. Since you are the same on the inside in all relevant respects before and after the change, how things seem to you is not completely determined by what you're like on the inside.

I wish I had a theory about ways things seem, a theory that would tell me what they are, what makes it the case that things seem one way rather than another, and when you have one and when you have two. Unfortunately, I do not have such a theory. All I have are my intuitions about cases. And my intuitions about cases tell me that ways things seem are uninvertible, i.e., that Hume is impossible. My intuitions tell me that ways things seem do not supervene on intrinsic, neurophysiological properties. And my intuitions tell me that ways things seem to me can change without my noticing.^[8] Understood simply as claims about ways things seem, these are all interesting and surprising in their own right.

I don't want to deny that we have an intrinsicness detector, or that ways things seem seem to be intrinsic. I don't know what our intrinsicness detector is. Perhaps it's a theory, or a paradigm, or a motley disjunction of different things on different occasions. But there's something in us, i.e., philosophers who care about such things, that makes certain properties seem intrinsic to us. Look at the color of a wall. Doesn't that color seem like an intrinsic property of the wall? I'm not asking if you believe that it is intrinsic. If I were asking that, I'd ask you to

imagine an intrinsic, molecular duplicate of that wall in a world where the laws of nature are different so that the light bouncing off it in that world is different from the light bouncing off it in this. I'm just asking if it seems intrinsic. And I think we should admit that it does.

Think about the content of one of your own conscious, occurrent thoughts. It seems as though the content is an intrinsic property of that very thought. It seems as though that thought could exist in a vacuum and still be about the same things, or at least represent the world as being some way or another. There's no need to deny that this is how it seems. But according to any plausible theory of content, and most implausible theories, relations determine content. Perhaps they are relations between the thought and other things in or around the head: other thoughts, inputs, and outputs. Perhaps relations between the mind and the world matter as well. Making the content intrinsic to something else, the possible world in which it occurs, the planet on which it occurs, or the brain in which it occurs, will not capture the intuition. The intuition is that the content is intrinsic to the thought itself.

There's no doubt that we have an intrinsicness detector. And there's no doubt that our intrinsicness detector is highly unreliable. Regardless of any relation to qualia, there's a strong intuition that how things seem is determined by the intrinsic nature of experience. It seems as though this experience could occur in a vacuum in the absence of any other events, mental or physical, and the way things seem would be exactly the same. This is the intuition. No one really has intuitions about what's intrinsic to a brain. But this deliverance of the intrinsicness detector, like so many others, is simply mistaken. How things seem to you is not determined by the intrinsic properties of you or your experiences.

If qualia are ways things seem, then qualia are not what they seem. They don't supervene on neurophysiology; they can change without your noticing; and inverted qualia are impossible. If qualia are not ways things seem, then you should be very worried about what justification you

can have for believing that qualia, unlike ways things seem, are intrinsic, invertable or what have you. If you believe that qualia are intrinsic for the same reason that most people believe that ways things seem are intrinsic, namely, that they seem intrinsic, and you know or have good reason to believe that despite appearances, ways things seem are not intrinsic, then you should be very worried about any belief about qualia formed on the same basis. I'm not assuming that reliability is a necessary condition for justification. Maybe it is, and maybe it's not. But known unreliability constitutes genuine reason for doubt. Perhaps this reason for doubt can be overcome. But it must be overcome in order to reasonably believe that qualia are intrinsic. This means that you need independent reasons for thinking that qualia, unlike ways things seem, really are intrinsic.

Should We Believe in Qualia At All?

If qualia are ways things seem, then you should believe in them. You just shouldn't believe the hype about them. If qualia are not ways things seem, two questions naturally arise: what are they, and what reason do we have for believing in them? As far as the first question is concerned, I'm a little hesitant to guess. But I think that if qualia are not ways things seem, then qualia include things like the redness that's in the mind. The redness that's in the world, out there on the surfaces of objects, is not a qualitative feature of experience. It's not any kind of feature of experience. It's a feature of ordinary, mind-independent objects.

I'm extremely hesitant to attribute this view to anyone.^[9] This is my best attempt to make sense of the hypothesis that there are qualia, but they're not ways things seem. In this attempt, I'm hampered by my own conceptual limitations. I can only discuss what I can understand. While I have absolutely no idea what "the redness of red" is supposed to mean, I think I understand the expression, "the redness that's in the mind" well enough to know that it's non-denoting. Qualia are features of experience. So they're in the mind. Whether you call it "the

redness of red” or “red',” it’s not an accident that you reach for the word “red” to get at what you’re talking about, either directly or indirectly. We’re not now talking about a feature of your experience that has something to do with shape or motion. We’re talking about the color, not the color that’s in the world, and not just any color, but the redness that’s in the mind.

So here’s our working hypothesis. If there’s redness in the mind, there are qualia. So what reason do we have to believe in the redness that’s in the mind? I hope to have shown so far that your intuitions about the invertability and intrinsicness of qualia are highly suspect. You should treat your own intuitions on this matter with suspicion. You should treat these specific intuitions with suspicion because you have the very same intuitions about ways things seem, and those intuitions are misleading. This does not show that qualia are not invertable or intrinsic. Nor is it intended to show that. The point is purely epistemic.

When looking for reason to believe in the redness that’s in the mind, over and above both the redness that’s in the world and the ways things seem, you can’t depend on intuitions that are, from your point of view, just like intuitions that you know are unreliable. If you have independent reasons for thinking there is some redness in your mind, and independent reason for thinking that this redness is an intrinsic feature of you, then you can use Block’s story to show that qualia inversion is possible. If you have those independent reasons, then you should think that your qualia intuitions, unlike your intuitions about ways things seem, are not mistaken. My only point is that you need the independent reasons.

Many who believe in qualia think it’s obvious that there are qualia. I disagree. I think you need reason to believe in them. This is the point of showing the unreliability of your intuitions in this area. I also believe that if you honestly go looking for reasons to believe, you will not find any. This is difficult to show, but we can look at some obvious candidates: introspection and the argument from illusion. If these sources don’t give us reason to believe in qualia, it certainly

doesn't follow that there are none. It doesn't even follow that you have no reason to believe in them. Perhaps there is some much more subtle and complicated argument for the existence of qualia.^[10] But in addition to seeming invertible and intrinsic, qualia also seem obvious. If qualia are ways things seem, then they're neither invertible nor intrinsic. If they're not ways things seem, then they're not obvious. Either way, they're not what they seem.

We're looking for reason to believe in qualia, or the redness that's in the mind. Let's start with introspection. First, we need to distinguish two questions. The first question is this. Where is the closest red thing to you? I only raise this question to distinguish it from the second question and then set it aside. Here's the question that matters. Where does the closest red thing seem to be? If you're not visibly bleeding, and you're like the rest of us, it will seem to you as though the closest red thing is at some distance from you. It seems to be outside of you. It does not seem to be inside of you. Of course, it doesn't follow from this that it really is outside of you. You know your blood is red. But unless you're seriously injured, you don't know the color of the blood that's still inside you on the basis of how things visually seem right now.

Regardless of where the redness really is, it seems as though the redness is outside us. How do we know this? We know this fact about how things seem on the basis of introspection. This is not a complicated intuition. Block, replying to Harman's appeal to introspection, suggests that we shouldn't rely on complicated intuitions about simple cases. He prefers simple intuitions about complicated cases.^[11] But this is a simple intuition about a simple case. Where's the redness seem to be? "There!" you say, pointing to the external world. Of course it might not really be there. That's just where it seems to be. This is the simple intuition.

Perhaps when you are aware of that apparently external red thing, you are also aware of your own awareness of it. This is somewhat complicated.^[12] But if I'm aware of a red thing,

and I'm thinking about philosophy, it does seem as though I can become aware of the fact that I'm aware of a red thing. I don't know what your awareness of red things is like for you. But whether it's a case of illusion, or hallucination, or (veridical) perception, it seems to me, from the first-person, subjective point of view, just like a case of perception. If illusion were not introspectively indistinguishable from perception, we'd never be taken in. Whether this awareness really is or not, the awareness certainly seems like a genuine relation between me and the world: seeing a red thing, something that requires the existence of an external red thing. But this relation doesn't seem red. And the relation doesn't seem to be inside me. It seems like a relation between me and a red thing. So even if you are aware of your own awareness, if that awareness itself doesn't seem red, then the closest red thing still seems to be outside you.

This claim about how things seem is not merely a quibble about qualia. It has genuine epistemic consequences. If it really did seem to you as though you were looking at mental images, if the passing show really did seem to be in your mind, then the question of skepticism would be simple. If it really did seem that way, should you believe that there are some invisible, physical, something-or-anothers casting these mental shadows? Absolutely not. Whether or not you could even conceive of such a thing in such a situation, you certainly couldn't find evidence for them. On the other hand, if it seems to you as though you're already in the world, one object among others, it at least makes sense for you to believe there's a book on the table because there seems to be one, at least if you have no reason to think that there isn't. And it at least makes sense for someone to think that believing in this way is not necessarily a bad thing.

It seems as though all the redness is out there in the world. It doesn't seem as though there are any red things in the mind. It doesn't follow from this that all the redness is in the world or that there is no redness in the mind. Things are not always as they seem. It does follow from this that your evidence for believing in the redness that's in the mind is not based on how

things seem; it's not based on anything you're obviously aware of; and it's not based on introspection. Though its seeming that way doesn't guarantee that it is that way, its seeming that way might provide some evidence that it is that way. If that's right, then introspection is not neutral on the question of qualia. You know on the basis of introspection how things visually seem to you right now. It visually seems to you that the redness is in the world and not in the mind. This is some evidence, not conclusive evidence, but some evidence that there's no redness in the mind. If we make further assumptions about qualia, e.g., that you'd notice them if they were there, the case against qualia gets stronger.

So you don't believe in qualia on the basis of introspection, even if you think you do. If you're like me, you believed in qualia as an undergraduate. You didn't come to this view late in life after careful study. If you were like I was as an undergraduate, you not only believed in the redness that's in the mind, you also believed in the rocks and trees and plants and things in the mind. The argument was pretty much the same in both cases. If you are merely hallucinating a red rock, neither the redness nor the rockness is in the world. So they must be in the mind. By now, I'll assume, you no longer think you have rocks in your head. But then, you're faced with the difficult question of why the argument for mental redness works, if it does work, while the argument for mental rockness doesn't. There must be a distinction between properties like redness and properties like rockness. A property is like redness when, if it seems to be exemplified in the world, but isn't exemplified in the world, then it must be exemplified in the mind. A property is like rockness when it can seem to be exemplified without actually being exemplified anywhere in the neighborhood on that occasion, neither in the world nor in the mind.

Maybe you never believed in mental rocks. But the problem is real. However you try to draw the distinction between properties like redness and properties like rockness, it's clear that it won't line up with the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. If there really is

some redness in the mind, that apparent redness is going to have some apparent shape or another. You just can't have an exemplification of redness, any kind of redness, without its having some kind of shape. If it fills the visual field, it's the same shape as the visual field. If this redness has a shape, it must be in space, if not physical space, then in mental space.

If mental space is not too much for you, there's more where that came from. When you hallucinate a red rock, the rock, the redness, and the roundness aren't really out there in the world. But they certainly seem to be out there in the world. And this apparent out-there-ness, or apparent objectivity is as much a feature of your experience as the apparent redness and roundness. If the apparent redness is a kind of redness, subjective redness, then maybe the apparent objectivity is a kind of objectivity, subjective objectivity. No matter what else you believe, no one should believe in subjective objectivity.

I think that all properties are like rockness. If you hallucinate a red rock, the redness, like the rockness, is merely apparent. Merely apparent redness is not a kind of redness. This is not supposed to be a deep insight into the nature of reality. This is supposed to follow from what "merely" and "apparent" mean when they're put together in the ordinary way. But we're looking for reasons to believe in the redness that's in the mind. Introspection won't help. Perhaps a fixed up version of the argument from illusion will do. The argument needs fixing up because it appears at first to be as plausible for redness as it is for rockness, and it appears to be absolutely implausible when it comes to rockness. We know what it would take for rockness to be exemplified. There'd have to be a rock. And no mere appearance is sufficient for that.

In order to fix up the argument, you need to draw a distinction between properties, perhaps like redness, for which the argument works and properties, probably like rockness, for which it doesn't. Without the distinction, your reasons for believing in qualia are, for all you know, just like reasons for believing something we know is false, e.g., that there are mental

rocks. This is a situation you ought to avoid. Perhaps the distinction is this. You have to infer the rockness, but you can just see the redness. But this can't be it. Something can seem like a rock to you even when you know that it's not. The appearance persists in the face of knowledge that it's not veridical. If you don't think it's a rock, you don't infer the rockness. And you don't infer the objectivity, but you shouldn't believe in inner outness.

Perhaps the distinction comes to something else. But the epistemic situation for the qualiaphile seems quite precarious. If you already know that there are qualia, and you know what they are, you have some way of figuring out the difference between properties like objective redness that do have mental counterparts and properties like objective rockness that don't. Given sufficient examples, it's simply an exercise in conceptual analysis to find the principle that distinguishes the cases correctly. But if you already know that there are qualia, and you know what they are, then you don't need the argument from illusion. So you don't need the principle to fix the argument. On the other hand, if you do need the argument from illusion because you don't have independent reasons for believing in qualia, and you thought the argument from illusion might help, then you don't have any examples to go on in figuring out the principle.

Unconstrained use of the argument from illusion leads to rocks in the head. In order to constrain the use of the argument, you need a principle. To find the principle, you need some examples to go on. But in order to find the examples, you need to already know what the constrained argument from illusion was supposed to show you: that there is mental redness, but there are no mental rocks. But isn't this heavy-handed, overly foundational, stodgy, old-fashioned, and bad? I'm not so sure. In the usual case, you start with some intuitions about cases, some principles that seem like they might be on to something, and you go from there, juggling everything, trying to come up with the best fit with the facts that you can. You might have very general or abstract worries about how the philosophical method could be reliable. But

in the absence of specific, genuine reason for doubting the particular intuitions you're going on, philosophical method is a matter of believing that p because it seems to you that p. I have no problem with that.

The case of qualia is not the usual case. In the case of qualia, we have genuine, specific reason for doubting these particular intuitions. Our intuitions about qualia are, from the first-person point of view, just like intuitions that we know are misleading. Ways things seem, just as much as qualia, seem both invertable and intrinsic. But they're neither. When you hallucinate a red rock, the rockness seems as real as the redness. If we don't think that the rockness is real but not objective, shouldn't we treat with suspicion our nearly indistinguishable inclination to believe that the redness is real but not objective? I'm not an overly cautious individual. But if I can't see the difference between x and y, and I know that x is no good, I'm inclined to reserve judgment on y. This is all I'm suggesting. Until you can see the difference between the ones you know are bad and the ones you hope are good, you ought to withhold judgment.

Neither inversion intuitions, introspection, nor the argument from illusion can justify belief in qualia. In the cases of inversion and illusion, we have undermining defeaters. We have reason to believe that our evidence is not up to the task of justifying the belief it's evidence for. The structure is the same in both cases. In the case of inversion, we have the intuitions that it's possible that my qualia are inverted relative to yours; that qualia are intrinsic properties of experiences, or at least subjects of experience; and that qualia can't change without the subject's noticing. These intuitions constitute our evidence that qualia are invertable, intrinsic, and so on. The defeater for this evidence comes in two parts. The first part is of a set of intuitions. Perhaps these are the same intuitions under another name. Perhaps they are distinct but quite similar intuitions about a distinct but quite similar subject matter. These are the intuitions that it's possible that the way things seem to me is inverted relative to the way things seem to you; that

ways things seem are intrinsic properties of experiences, or at least subjects of experience; and that ways things seem can't change without the subject's noticing.

The second part of the defeater consists in showing that these latter intuitions are mistaken. If qualia are ways things seem, this is equivalent to showing that the former intuitions are mistaken as well. But we need not assume the identity to make the epistemological point. The epistemological point is that if you can't trust your intuitions about ways things seem, then given the similarity in subject matter, you can't trust your intuitions about qualia either. They need independent confirmation. Otherwise, we'd be treating the two sets of intuitions differently, accepting the ones about qualia while rejecting the ones about ways things seem, without being able to point to an epistemically relevant difference between them.

The case of the argument from illusion is structurally similar, but instead of intuitions, we have uses of the argument. To begin with, we have the following use of the argument. If you hallucinate a red rock, the redness isn't in the world, so it must be in the mind. This is our evidence for believing in mental redness, or the redness that's in the mind, which is my best guess about what qualia might be if they're not ways things seem. Again, the defeater comes in two parts. The first part is a set of other uses of the same argument. If you hallucinate a red rock, neither the rockness nor its objectivity is in the world, so they must be in the mind. The second part consists in showing that these uses of the argument are not sound. Given the obvious falsity of the conclusion, this is not too difficult. And again, the epistemological point is similar. If you shouldn't believe in subjective objectivity or mental rocks on this basis, then you shouldn't believe in mental redness on this basis either.

The case of introspection is quite different from the cases of inversion and illusion. In the latter cases, there is some evidence for qualia, but this evidence is undermined. In the case of introspection, there is only evidence against qualia, at least if qualia are not ways things seem.

However things turn out to be, it certainly doesn't seem as though there are red, mental intermediaries between us and the world. Even if it turns out that things are not as they seem, it still seems as though the closest red thing is outside of us. These claims about how things seem are knowable on the basis of introspection, and they are evidence, some evidence, against the existence of mental redness. This evidence is by no means conclusive. But if all the introspective evidence suggests that there are no qualia, then you can't know there are qualia on the basis of introspection.

Scepticism about qualia need not be motivated by physicalism or functionalism. Scepticism about qualia can be motivated by reflection on the nature of experience. The skepticism I've tried to motivate is fairly moderate. I haven't shown that there are no qualia. I haven't even shown that there are no reasons for believing in qualia. I haven't looked at any subtle or complicated arguments for qualia. I've simply looked at a few sources of evidence that might have made it obvious that there are qualia. If I've shown anything, I've shown that it's not obvious that there are qualia. This modest conclusion is important for two sorts of reasons.

First of all, when we look at the complicated arguments for qualia, a similar argumentative strategy is available. If, and this, of course, remains to be seen, but if the complicated arguments for qualia are epistemically on a par with complicated arguments for narrow content, a theoretical construct no one has yet constructed, then that counts as genuine grounds for suspicion. The second, more important reason for caring about the modest conclusion is that many people who believe in qualia think it's obvious that there are qualia and see no need for complicated arguments. This is a mistake even if there are qualia. If you believe something obvious in the absence of much in the way of reasons, you might be epistemically in the clear. But if you believe something that's not obvious in the absence of reasons, that's not so good.

You need some kind of argument in order to justifiably believe in qualia, at least if qualia are something over and above ways things seem. I haven't shown that no such argument is available, but I have my suspicions. Block,^[13] talking about what qualia are, quotes Armstrong talking about what jazz is. "If you gotta ask, you ain't never gonna get to know." With this, I'm in complete agreement. I just think you gotta ask.

[1] I assume that the way things look is a special case of the way things seem and that someone who introduces the notion of qualia on the basis of examples about ways things look or smell or feel is implicitly identifying qualia with ways things seem. I think some identifiers include Frank Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia," *Philosophical Quarterly* (1982), pp. 127-136; Brian Loar, "Phenomenal States," in *The Nature of Consciousness* eds. Block, Flanagan, and Guzeldere, (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1997); Terence Horgan and John Tienson, "The Intentionality of Phenomenology and the Phenomenology of Intentionality," in *Philosophy of Mind* ed. David Chalmers, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Charles Siewert, *The Significance of Consciousness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

[2] Ned Block clearly distinguishes qualia from ways things seem or look when he says that *looking red* is an intentional, not a qualitative content. See "Inverted Earth," reprinted in *Mind and Cognition* 2nd edition, ed. William Lycan, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999). It might be suggested that "looking red" is ambiguous. As a claim about English, this sounds implausible to me, but this may be a merely terminological matter. Whenever I talk about something looking red, I mean whatever sense of "looking red" that makes it true that if something looks red to you, that's some *prima facie* reason for thinking that it is red. If there is another sense of "looking red" that is not even intended for use in talking about things and how they look (this is the part I find implausible) but is used to talk about the intrinsic, qualitative features of experience, I use "qualia" to express that sense.

[3] Gilbert Harman tells the inverted spectrum story in terms of how things seem, so you may well have heard this story before. See "The Intrinsic Quality of Experience," in *Philosophical Perspectives* 4 ed. James Tomberlin, (Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1990). Harman's argument for the impossibility of the inverted spectrum is fairly brief and at least appears to assume functionalism. Block, in "Inverted Earth," criticizes Harman for telling the story in this way on the grounds that qualia are not ways things seem. In addition to providing a better argument for the conclusion that inverted ways things seem are impossible, I hope to show the relevance of this fact to the belief in qualia whether or not qualia are ways things seem.

[4] If someone says, "Their walls were the color of a ripe mango," the expression "the color of a ripe mango" looks like a description used as a predicate. If descriptions can be used as predicates, I don't see why names can't be used that way as well, at least if the names and descriptions are names and descriptions of properties.

[5] The story of inverted Earth comes from Harman, "(Nonsolipsistic) Conceptual Role Semantics," *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* 23 (1982). Harman's discussion of Inverted Earth is even briefer than his discussion of the inverted spectrum. It also more clearly relies on the assumption of functionalism, or conceptual role semantics.

[6] We ignore possible asymmetries in the color wheel for the sake of argument.

[7] Intuitions like these underlie the original Twin earth case. For Twin Earth, see Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning'" in *Mind, Language, and Reality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 215-271 and Tyler

Burge, "Individualism and the Mental," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* vol. 4, eds. French et al, (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1977), pp. 73-121.

[8] I'm not sure this conclusion is that surprising. If you put on a pair of rose-colored glasses, the world looks a little rosier than usual. Once you get used to the glasses, the world looks perfectly normal. The way things look has changed without your noticing.

[9] Though perhaps Ned Block wouldn't mind. The idea that there is redness in the mind is not that much different from the idea that there is mental paint. Real red paint represents red things by being red. According to Block, experiences represent things at least partly in virtue of their intrinsic, qualitative features. But experiences have lots of these features. So perhaps the idea is that an experience represents a red thing at least partly in virtue of being red, or being mentally-red, or being red'. In any case, the idea that there is some kind of redness in the mind is strongly suggested by the analogy of mental paint.

[10] For subtle and complicated arguments for the existence of qualia, see Christopher Peacocke, *Sense and Content* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), chapter 1.

[11] "Inverted Earth," p. 495.

[12] Self-reference doesn't always stop a regress. If your awareness of the little red rubber ball requires awareness of the awareness of the little red rubber ball, why doesn't awareness of the awareness of the little red rubber ball require awareness of the awareness of the awareness of the little red rubber ball?

[13] In "Troubles with Functionalism," reprinted in *The Nature of Mind* ed. David Rosenthal, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) p. 217.