



Shoemaker's Moderate Qualia Realism and the Transparency of Qualia

Renée J. Smith
Coastal Carolina University

Disputatio Vol. 2, No. 22

May 2007

DOI: 10.2478/disp-2007-0002

ISSN: 0873-626X

Shoemaker's moderate qualia realism and the transparency of qualia

Renée J. Smith

Coastal Carolina University

Abstract: Qualia realists hold that experience's phenomenal character is a non-representational property of experience, what they call *qualia*. Representationalists hold that phenomenal character is a representational property of experience — there are no qualia (in this particular sense of the word). The transparency of qualia to introspection would seem to count as reason for rejecting qualia realism and favouring representationalism. Sydney Shoemaker defends a middle ground, call it *moderate qualia realism*, which seems to provide a response to the problem of transparency that is consistent with qualia realism. According to this view, while phenomenal character is a representational property of experience, it is determined by certain non-representational properties of experience, namely qualia. Shoemaker explains the apparent transparency of qualia by claiming that, while qualia are not directly introspectible, they are *indirectly* introspectible. I argue that neither Shoemaker's moderate qualia realism nor his account of indirect introspection provide the qualia realist with a plausible solution to the problem of transparency.

1. Introduction

Imagine one sees a large, inflatable, blue ball. When one sees such a ball, there is something that it is like for one to see it; one's perceptual experience has some phenomenal character. That is, one's experience is what is usually described as *phenomenally conscious*. If one is aware of the ball, but not aware of one's awareness of the ball, then what is missing is *introspective consciousness*. Introspection is the means by which one comes to know things about one's mental states, including what those states are like — their *phenomenal character*. However, suppose one tries to attend introspectively to the experience of the ball *apart from any represented features of the ball itself*. What does one find? Nothing.

While there is *something that it is like* to see the blue ball, that feature of experience is transparent to introspection. This gives rise

to what I call the *problem of transparency* (Smith 2002 and 2005). Simply put, according to qualia realists, phenomenal character is a non-representational (or non-intentional) property of experience, so called *qualia*. Qualia are supposed to be introspectible properties of experience, and yet, as the transparency case shows, we are not introspectively aware of any properties of experience apart from what the experience is of or about — its representational properties. There is an inconsistency here between one view of the phenomenal character — the qualia realist view that says the phenomenal character of experience is a non-representational property of experience, *qualia* — and the claims that (1) qualia are introspectible properties of experience and (2) qualia are transparent to introspection — they are not introspectible.

It is my contention that this curious bit of introspective phenomenology reveals something significant about the nature of experience. Namely that its having a certain phenomenal character is a *representational* property of the experience precisely because introspection does not reveal non-representational properties of experience. It does not reveal qualia, but it does reveal phenomenal character. Thus, there is reason for thinking that phenomenal character is just a representational property of experience.

Shoemaker's response to the transparency of qualia to introspection, on the other hand, is to argue that we only *indirectly* introspect qualia thus, while there is one sense in which it is true that qualia are transparent to introspection, there is another sense in which they are not. This response to the transparency problem, however, rests on Shoemaker's rather unorthodox understanding of phenomenal character — one that lies on some middle ground between standard representationalism and standard qualia realism. My aim here is to very briefly describe this middle position, call it *moderate qualia realism*, and distinguish it from the standard views on either side — qualia realism and representationalism. Then, I will argue that neither Shoemaker's moderate qualia realism nor his view of introspection provide the qualia realist with a plausible solution to the problem of transparency.

2. Phenomenal properties and qualia

Shoemaker 1997b (also 1996 and 2002) holds that the phenomenal character of experience depends on the existence of what he calls

phenomenal properties. These are a certain sort of appearance property that objects have in virtue of being disposed to appear (or be currently appearing) to a subject in a certain way. He thinks that such properties play a role in experience since, for example, there is a way that red things can look, apart from their looking red. If looking red is a matter of a subject representing the objective colour property of being red, then, because the way red things look can vary independently of their looking red, looking red is a matter of representing objects as having certain subjective appearance properties. Experience having the phenomenal character it does is a matter of its representing certain appearance properties of objects — the property of appearing red. Thus, the phenomenal character is a representational feature of the experience.

For example, to say that one's experience of a red tomato has a certain phenomenal character is to say that one represents the tomato as having a certain phenomenal property as a result of one's having a particular quale associated with the experience of the tomato's redness. The phenomenal property is determined by the quale with which it is associated, but the quale and the phenomenal property are not identical. Phenomenal properties are properties of objects, and qualia are properties of experience.

3. Indirect introspection

Moreover, Shoemaker (1996, 1997a, 1997b) holds that we do not *directly* introspect qualia, those non-representational properties of experience that determine its phenomenal character; but we can come to know *indirectly* that our experiences have the qualia they do.

Introspection is the fact-awareness that our experience represents certain phenomenal properties. Given that these are relational properties, we can indirectly introspect the existence of qualia (one of the relata). Since phenomenal properties are properties of objects of (perceptual) experience (*viz.*, properties objects have in virtue of causing experiences with certain qualia), the relation we bear to phenomenal properties is a perceptual one — not one of introspection.¹ We perceive phenomenal properties which are relational

¹ Shoemaker 1996 says that this is unfortunate because our awareness of phenomenal properties does not fit the broad perception model of introspection in that it is an awareness of the properties themselves and not an awareness of facts about

properties represented in experience but they are not represented as relational (Shoemaker 1997: 234). They are the properties things have in virtue of their causing certain types of experiences (qualitative types); namely, experiences with certain qualia (Shoemaker 1997: 235; Shoemaker 2002).

4. Explaining transparency

Since Shoemaker (1996, 1997, 2002) endorses the view that all introspective awareness is awareness-that, or fact-awareness, he thinks that what we directly introspect is *that* our experience is of (or represents) a certain phenomenal property — we do not directly introspect any non-representational properties of our experiences themselves. So we do not directly introspect qualia. That is, he agrees that qualia are transparent to introspection by denying that qualia are *directly* introspectible. Thus, the phenomenal properties view is consistent with the transparency of qualia to introspection. Since qualia are distinct from the representational properties of experience, and only the representational properties are directly introspectible, we do not (directly) introspect qualia.

However, Shoemaker thinks that, given what we do introspect, namely that our experience is of some phenomenal property, we can come to know (or indirectly introspect) that our experience instantiates a particular quale. We know that experience has that quale that causes the perceptual experience to represent the phenomenal property it does, provided that the subject possesses the requisite concepts (the concepts PHENOMENAL PROPERTIES, QUALIA, EXPERIENCE, etc.) and (presumably) certain background beliefs (and rationality). If we reflect on what introspection does reveal (directly), we are indirectly aware that our experience has a certain quale that determines some part of the representational content, namely, the phenomenal properties represented. Since the relation we bear to qualia via introspection

these properties. However, this hardly seems unfortunate if it simply means that we simply *perceive* phenomenal properties. This would only be problematic for someone who wanted to maintain what Smith (2002: 90) refers to as a ‘cognitivist theory of perception’ (e.g. Armstrong 1968). Smith 2002 holds that perception, unlike introspection, can be simple, so does not see this as an unfortunate consequence of the phenomenal properties view.

is indirect and requires the possession of certain concepts, the knowledge we have of qualia is by description (not acquaintance).

5. Moderate qualia realism

The phenomenal properties view of phenomenal character together with characterizing the introspective access we have to qualia as indirect is meant to avoid the problem of transparency. However, there is a serious flaw with Shoemaker's view of phenomenal character that can be seen by comparing his view to both standard representationalism and standard qualia realism.

According to the *standard representationalism*, an experience's phenomenal character is nothing over and above some representational feature of the experience — its having some particular content, for example. The phenomenal character is not a non-intentional property of experience. There are no qualia. Any two experiences that are phenomenally different also differ representationally.

Shoemaker, on the other hand, is a *qualia realist* and not a representationalist in that he thinks qualia exist. According to *standard qualia realism*, phenomenal character is a non-intentional property of experience, a quale. Moreover, this character can vary independently of experience's representational properties as in cases of spectrum inversion. What makes his an unusual version of qualia realism is that he is willing to allow that the phenomenal character of an experience be attributed to the representational features of the experience — the representation of certain phenomenal properties. He describes phenomenal character as a representationalist would. He says this:

What is 'like' something in this sense is an experience, sensation, or whatever, or perhaps the having of an experience or sensory state, and being like something in this sense is a matter of having phenomenal character, which in turn is a matter of having a certain sort of representational content (Shoemaker 1997b: 235).

What distinguishes his view of phenomenal character from standard representationalism is the role he says qualia play.

The relation of qualia to this phenomenal character is not that of being it, and not that of having it, but rather of being constitutive determiners of it in two ways. It is partly in virtue of having the qualia it does that the

experience represents what it does; the qualia serve as 'modes of presentation.' And part of what it represents is the instantiation of a property, a 'phenomenal property,' which is in fact, although it is not explicitly represented as, a relational property of producing, or being apt to produce, experiences having these qualia. (Shoemaker 1997b: 235)

So while an experience has the phenomenal character it does in virtue of representing certain phenomenal properties, it represents what it does in virtue of instantiating certain qualia. Because the qualia are distinct from any representational properties of the experience, Shoemaker's view is a version of qualia realism.

Unlike standard representationalism, which does not appeal to qualia to account for phenomenal character, Shoemaker holds experience has the phenomenal character it does in virtue of its representing certain phenomenal properties. Phenomenal properties, while not being represented as relational, are relational; and, qualia make up one of the relata of the phenomenal properties in such a way that the qualia *determine* the phenomenal property and thus *determine* the phenomenal character.

Shoemaker argues that:

This account needs qualia because it needs a way of typing experiences which does not consist in typing them by their representational contents. It needs this because only so can there be properties whose identity conditions are given by saying that things share a certain property of this phenomenal type just in case they produce, or are apt to produce under certain conditions, experiences of a certain type. Such types are phenomenal types. Sameness of phenomenal type, and likewise phenomenal similarity, is a functionally definable relation. (Shoemaker 1997b, 235)

Again, this runs counter to the standard representationalist view according to which difference in phenomenal type just is a representational difference.

To see how Shoemaker's view shares certain features of both representationalism and qualia realism, we can think of these three views in terms of answering two questions.

What distinguishes Shoemaker's view from qualia realism is that he thinks the phenomenal character of experience is a representational property of experience. However, his view is still counted as a version of qualia realism because, unlike the representationalist, he thinks qualia exist.

	Do qualia exist?	Is the phenomenal character a representational property?
Moderate Qualia Realism	Yes	Yes
Qualia Realism	Yes	No
Representationalism	No	Yes

Table 1. Shoemaker's Moderate Qualia Realism

What makes his an atypical version of qualia realism can be seen in how his analysis of the concept of qualia differs from that of the more traditional qualia realist's. The 'traditional' analysis of the concept qualia might specify that, at the very least, the following three criteria are necessary conditions for something's satisfying the concept of being qualia.

- i. Qualia are the phenomenal character of experience.
- ii. Qualia are introspectible properties of experience.
- iii. Qualia are non-representational properties of experience.

While Shoemaker accepts that qualia are non-representational properties of experience, he does not accept (i) or (ii) as stated. Instead, he thinks qualia *determine* the phenomenal character of experience but that character is a representational property of experience (a property experience has in virtue of representing phenomenal properties). And, qualia are only *indirectly* introspectible properties of experience.

To distinguish his from the more standard qualia realist analysis of qualia, one that accepts (i-iii), I will use 's-qualia' to pick out those properties Shoemaker thinks satisfy these latter conditions. S-qualia are the indirectly introspectible, non-representational properties of experience that determine the phenomenal character of experience.

6. S-Qualia realism, indirect introspection, and transparency

Shoemaker's version of qualia realism (or, as we might call it 's-qualia realism') cannot provide the qualia realist with a plausible solution to the problem of transparency, however, precisely because of his rather unorthodox understanding of both qualia and introspection. In order to distinguish s-qualia from your 'run of the mill' non-intentional properties (those consistent with representationalism about phenomenal character), indirect introspection must count as a species of introspection. However, not only do we have reason to deny that introspection can be indirect in Shoemaker's sense, but even if it were, indirect introspection does not reveal a unique class of properties consistent with s-qualia realism. Thus Shoemaker's non-introspectibility solution to the problem of transparency is not a plausible solution for the qualia realist.

S-Qualia as non-representational properties

Presumably the representationalist could agree with Shoemaker that there are non-representational properties that determine the phenomenal character of experience — determine its representational properties. Setting aside those properties of objects that are represented in experience (e.g., color properties, phenomenal properties, etc.), and assuming some version of physicalism is true, then certain neurological properties (non-representational properties) could be said to determine the phenomenal character of experience (in us). How might we distinguish the special class of non-representational properties that, for Shoemaker, are s-qualia?

Shoemaker characterizes the representationalist view he opposes as holding that 'the only introspectible features of experience are their intentional or representational ones' (1997b: 236). So we might distinguish Shoemaker's non-representational properties that determine the phenomenal character, his s-qualia, from those the representationalist would allow on the basis that the former, but not the latter, are available to introspection.

Indirect introspection of non-representational properties

Shoemaker's s-qualia realism is plausible only if s-qualia are the unique class of non-representational properties of experience that are indirectly introspectible. This would allow us to distinguish s-qualia from other non-representational properties that might determine an experience's phenomenal character.

For Shoemaker, we indirectly introspect qualia by (1) directly introspecting that our experience represents a certain phenomenal property (2) having the concept of s-qualia. We know s-qualia by description, e.g. they are those properties that determine the phenomenal property the representation of which constitutes the experience's phenomenal character.

However, there is no reason to think that other non-representational properties, e.g., neurological properties, are introspectible in this sense. If one directly introspects that one's experience represents some color property, and one has a concept of a neurological property that makes this representation possible, then, it would seem to be the case that one indirectly introspects that one's experience has this property. In this sense, then, s-qualia are *not* unique in virtue of being indirectly introspectible, non-representational properties. Therefore, if s-qualia cannot be distinguished from other non-representational properties on the basis that the former, but not the latter, are indirectly introspectible, it is not at all clear that we should agree that s-qualia exist.

Indirect introspection

Perhaps the foregoing problem is not a problem about s-qualia, but a problem about indirect introspection itself. There are at least two reasons for discounting indirect introspect as a species as introspection.

First, it just seems counter-intuitive to think that beliefs derived from what is directly introspected (what we might think of as second-order beliefs) are themselves introspective beliefs. There is an analogous problem for what could be called *indirect perception*. Suppose I hear that the oven-timer is ringing and from this I infer that the cake is done. I would not want to say that I (literally) perceive (hear) that the cake is done — that would be a category mistake. Instead, I form the belief that the cake is done from what I directly perceive (hear) — the timer ringing. While it may be the case that I can form beliefs or acquire knowledge on the basis of introspection, this knowledge

and these beliefs do not themselves seem to count as species of introspective belief any more than my belief that the cake is done counts as a perceptual belief.

Given Shoemaker's characterization of indirect introspection, we might say that, for him, the belief that an experience has some quale, while derived from what is directly introspected (that one's experience represents a phenomenal property), is not itself a case of introspecting that fact just as inferring that the cake is done is not a case of hearing that it is.

Allowing indirect introspection to count as species of introspection would have the absurd consequence of being too inclusive — it would count as introspective all sorts of beliefs. Any fact one infers from what is directly introspected would count as an introspective belief. For example, if one directly introspects that one sees a blue ball in the room and infers from this and the ball one sees is not red, it would be absurd to say that one *introspects* that the ball one sees is not red. While a belief model of introspection seems the most plausible view, one should not grant that these 'indirect' beliefs (those inferred from what is directly introspected) themselves count as introspective states. Just as we can form all sorts of beliefs by making inferences from what we believe on the basis of direct perception, it may be true that we can form indirect beliefs on the basis of direct introspection. However, in neither case does it seem plausible to count these indirect beliefs as instances of perception or introspection, respectively.

A second reason to question indirect introspection, especially insofar as its providing access to (facts about) s-qualia, is the particularly stringent conceptual requirements for which it calls. If one tries to motivate the claim that s-qualia exist by appealing to indirect introspection, then because indirect introspection is construed as a fact-awareness, it requires one possess the concepts S-QUALIA and PHENOMENAL PROPERTY. However, on this account, we are never aware of s-qualia, and we are not aware of phenomenal properties as the relational properties they are. And yet, and we are supposed to be able to come to know that our experience has the s-qualia it does having directly introspected that our experience represents a certain phenomenal properties. Therefore, it is unclear how we could form the requisite concepts to introspect indirectly s-qualia.

S-Qualia and the problem of transparency

Finally, we might consider the implications of taking qualia to be s-qualia for the problem of transparency. There is a sense in which his cannot be seen as solving the problem of transparency at all since his view allows for the existence of s-qualia, not qualia, in light of the phenomenon of transparency.

The problem of transparency, after all, is a problem about the introspectibility of qualia *qua* the 'what it is like' of an experience. It is the problem of reconciling the intuition that the phenomenal character of experience is immediately accessible with the phenomenology of introspection, the apparent transparency of qualia to introspection. By allowing that the phenomenal character be a representational property of experience, Shoemaker has not so much solved the problem of transparency, but has side-stepped it.

Moreover, if the central thesis of qualia realism, namely the thesis that qualia exist, expresses the concept of S-QUALIA, it is, at the very least, at odds with the standard qualia realist position on the possibility of spectrum inversion. Since different s-qualia would, on Shoemaker's view, result in the representation of different phenomenal properties, there could not be phenomenal difference without (some) representational difference.

While we can re-interpret the problem of transparency, as Shoemaker might, such that there is no inconsistency, doing so reveals why his is not a plausible solution to the problem. Shoemaker's interpretation of the original problem might be the following: There are s-qualia (non-intentional properties that determine phenomenal character), and while they are *indirectly* introspectible, they are transparent to *direct* introspection. More formally:

T1_s. S-qualia exist.

T2_s. If s-qualia exist, they are available to (indirect) introspection.

T3_s. S-qualia are not available to (direct) introspection.

While the claims are consistent, on the face of it, there is no obvious reason for accepting T1_s. If s-qualia, on their own, are not the phenomenal character of experience, they are not that which seems to be immediately accessible to introspection, and they are not supported by inverted spectrum arguments, then none of the reasons for thinking qualia exist are reasons for thinking s-qualia exist. Shoemaker

admits that '[s=] qualia' is a theoretical term used to 'make sense of the battery of concepts people do employ in their introspective judgements' (1996: 138-139). Presumably, the qualia realist's claim that qualia exist, he would say, is a folk-psychological judgment amounting to 'experience has phenomenal character.' And, we need (S-) QUALIA to make sense of this.

However, this suggests that Shoemaker thinks we need S-QUALIA to make sense of the phenomenal character of experience. However, the fact that experience has phenomenal character is uncontroversial. The question at hand is whether this phenomenal character is a non-intentional property of experience or not. Presumably a host of non-intentional properties determine (or could determine) the phenomenal character of experience (e.g., neurological properties), but these are not the focus of the so-called qualia debate. The phenomenal character itself is the focus. Certain non-representational properties of experience are relevant in this debate only if they *constitute* experience's phenomenal character. Shoemaker's s-qualia do not do this.

What would make s-qualia significant would be if they were *introspectible* properties of experience (so in some sense qualia-like). However, the second claim (T2_s) in this reformulated version of the problem is true (i.e., s-qualia are available to introspection), only if we allow indirect introspection to count as introspection. As we have seen, even if indirect introspection were a species of introspection, it does not uniquely reveal s-qualia. Other non-representational properties might just as well be indirectly 'introspectible.' However, more importantly, there seems to be good reason for denying that so-called indirect introspection is introspection at all. Thus, the consequent of this conditional is false.

If introspection cannot be indirect in Shoemaker's sense, then there are not introspectible non-representational properties (contrary to qualia realism) unless they are *directly* introspectible. However, if only the representational properties are directly introspectible, then either qualia are not non-representational or they are not introspectible (contrary to qualia realism). The only theory of introspection that would allow for the direct introspection of non-intentional properties of experience is a perceptual theory of introspection and, while it has not been discussed here, there is good reason to reject a perceptual theory of introspection. Thus, Shoemaker's view is inconsistent with qualia realism precisely because the concepts of S-QUALIA and INDIRECT INTROSPECTION are inconsistent with the concept of

QUALIA *qua* phenomenal, introspectible, non- representational properties of experience.

Renée J. Smith
Department of Philosophy and Religion
Coastal Carolina University
PO Box 261954
Conway, SC 29528-6054, USA
rsmith@coastal.edu

References

- Armstrong, David M. 1968. *A Materialist Theory of Mind*. New York: Routledge.
- Shoemaker, Sydney. 1996. *The First-Person Perspective and Other Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shoemaker, Sydney. 1997a. Introspection. In *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy of Mind*, ed. by Samuel Guttenplan. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Shoemaker, Sydney. 1997b. Phenomenal Character. In *Readings on Color: The Philosophy of Color*, ed. by Alex Byrne and David R. Hilbert. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Shoemaker, Sydney. 2002. Introspection and Phenomenal Character. *Philosophical Topics* 28, 2: pp. 247–273.
- Smith, Renée. 2002. *Qualia, Introspection and Transparency*. Dissertation Abstracts International, 63, 06A, 2273.
- Smith, Renée. 2005. The Problem of Transparency and the Nature of Introspection. *Philosophical Writings* 29: 21–44.