

Appearance properties

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1 The role of appearance properties

If we think that spectrum inversion/spectrum shift of certain sorts is possible, and that neither of the inverted subjects misrepresents the relevant color, and that the relevant object has just one color (i.e., that color relativism is false), it follows that the inverted subjects must be perceptually representing the object differently with respect to some sort of property other than its color.

Shoemaker (1994) is someone who holds all of these views:

“For suppose Jack and Jill are spectrum inverted relative to each other. When both are looking at a ripe tomato, their experiences will be markedly different in phenomenal character ... Yet I would want to say ... that the experiences of both represent the tomato, and represent it correctly, as being red.” (26)

Since Shoemaker endorses intentionalism, he must find *some* difference in the contents of Jack and Jill; that is, he must find some property which is such that the experiences of one but not the other of Jack and Jill represent the tomato as having that property. And we know from the above that this property will not be a color property. Moreover — if we take seriously the idea that these are really cases in which neither of the perceivers misrepresents — the properties those perceivers represent the object in question as having must be properties the object really has.

‘Appearance properties’ are the properties which are supposed to play this role; intuitively, they are properties of a thing looking a certain way. So, on this sort of view, we perceptually represent objects as having certain colors, and also represent them as looking a certain way to us.

The natural next question is: what are these appearance properties, exactly?

2 Candidates for appearance properties

3 Shoemaker on appearance properties

Shoemaker explains what these properties could be in the following passage:

“Once these desiderata for a solution to the problem have been made clear, it begins to be clear what sort of solution it must have. How can the experiences of Jack and Jill represent the tomato differently and yet neither of them misrepresent it, given that the same information about its intrinsic nature is getting to both? They can only because the different properties their experiences attribute to the tomato are *relational* properties. So the bare bones of the solution is this. Let Q1 be the quale associated with redness in Jack, and let Q2 be the quale associated with redness in Jill. There is a relational property consisting in producing or being disposed to produce experiences with Q1. And there is one that consists in producing or being disposed to produce experiences with Q2. Jack’s experience represents the tomato as having the first of these relational properties, and Jill’s experience represents it as having the second of them. And in fact it has both. Neither property is the property of being red, which is also attributed to the tomato by the experiences of Jack and Jill. . . .” (27)

This gives us two different views about appearance properties.

3.1 *The property of now producing an experience with a certain phenomenal character*

Some worries about this sort of property:

- Nothing has it unless it is being perceived. Shoemaker (2000) takes this to be a reason to reject this view.
- Representation of these properties is ‘omniscient’: it is impossible for a property of this sort to be instantiated without its being perceptually represented as such. But this is the kind of thing which should make us worry about simply relabeling an aspect of phenomenal character as a kind of content. Shoemaker (2006) (467) sees this, but doesn’t think that it is too worrying.
- Representation of these properties is (almost) infallible. As Shoemaker (2006) points out, we could still hallucinate that an appearance property of this sort is instantiated.

3.2 *The property of being disposed to produce an experience with a certain phenomenal character*

Some worries about this view of appearance properties:

- Same limited worry about infallibility as above.
- Everything has every appearance property, given plausible assumptions about the scope of possible variability in perceivers. (See Egan (2006).)
- Because of the above, necessary something has one appearance property iff it has the other. But then these properties are identical, and we lose the representational difference between Invert and Nonvert that we were looking for.

3.3 Centering features

Egan (2006), §4 gives a nice discussion of the problems with different interpretations of the dispositional view of appearance properties; the problems are, in part about specifying in whom the objects are disposed to produce the relevant experiences. Egan suggests that we identify appearance properties with ‘centering features.’ If properties determine functions from worlds to extensions (the extension being the set of things that has the property) then centering features are or determine functions from centered worlds (a world + a designated place and time) to extensions. Intuitive example: ‘is nearby.’

(It’s important to note one commitment of this view: we should be clear to distinguish the property, *_ is nearby Jeff Speaks*, from the relation, *_ is nearby _*. But centering features are neither properties nor relations. So, in addition to the above properties and relations, there is the centering feature *_ is nearby*. Is this odd?)

In any case, Egan identifies appearance properties with centering features like ‘being disposed to produce a phenomenal-green experience’.

Some worries:

- It is not totally obvious to me that this solves the ‘everything has too many properties’ problem with the dispositional view – though this may be a confusion of centering features with the properties obtained by existentially generalizing on centering features. Every object is such that there is some situation in which it caused a phenomenal-green experience; does this mean that every object has the appearance property? I’m guessing that the right thing to say is that we can’t talk about objects having appearance properties, on this view, unless we’re relativizing that talk to an observer.
- The problem about limited infallibility remains.

...

There is logical space for a number of other views of what’s going on in cases which are similar to Shoemaker’s in that they find a difference in representational content in the perceptions of Invert and Nonvert which is not a difference in the colors their experiences represent objects as having. Thau, e.g., defends a view like this in *Consciousness and Cognition*, though there the represented properties are unnameable intrinsic features of objects.

4 General problems with appearance properties

4.1 The ‘hidden colors’ worry

There is a sense, which is hard to express in an uncontroversial way, in which this view seems to make colors inaccessible to visual experience. This seems counterintuitive.

4.2 Relationality and the appearance of an intrinsic property

Whether appearance properties are relational properties, relations, or centering features, what Jack’s experience but not Jill’s ascribes to the tomato appears to be none of these, but rather an intrinsic property of the tomato. Shoemaker’s reply: the example of ‘to the right of’.

4.3 Circularity

A worry about the conjunction of views of appearance properties on which they are dispositions to produce experiences with certain phenomenal characters with the view that phenomenal character is to be explained in terms of perceptual representation of appearance properties. What we seem to get is that having an experience with phenomenal character P is to be explained in terms of representation of dispositions to produce experiences with P . Could this be a plausible explanation?

Let R -quale be the phenomenal character that you and I experience which looking at ripe tomatoes. Then the intentionalist might want to find some content p which is such that what it is to have a visual experience with the R -quale is to have a visual experience with content p . On the present view content p would be (say) the property of producing an experience with the R -quale. So we have:

an experience has the R -quale \equiv_{df} the experience has the content
that some object is producing the R -quale.

But it is difficult to understand what the content of this experience is:

- Suppose we are Russellians, and think of properties as the constituents of propositions. On this view we are explaining the nature of a property in terms of a relation to something which has that property as a constituent. This seems incoherent. (This is a general problem with combining Russellian views of content with ‘response-dependent’ analyses of properties, where the responses include propositional attitudes which represent those properties as instantiated.)

(We can also do this without ‘constituents’ talk if it makes you queasy. Suppose you asked me what it is to be F , and I tell you that it is to be such that ... F ... No matter how the ellipses are filled in, it seems very plausible that this can’t be an explanation of what it is to be F .)

- It seems that we can avoid this problem by becoming Fregeans. (Though see Johnston (2001) for an argument to the contrary.) But then we have to be Fregeans. Then we are forced into rejecting Transparency (argument to come) and might as well have explained the relevant phenomenal differences in terms of difference in mode of presentation of a single color property.

4.4 *Psychedelic phenomenology and constant content, again*

Proponents of this version of intentionalism face exactly the same challenges as anti-intentionalists: they must specify an external relation between phenomenal character and representation of color which allows spectrum inverted subjects (of certain kinds) to agree in their perceptual representation of color but does not permit the possibility of psychedelic phenomenology + constant content, constant phenomenology + psychedelic content, or full phenomenology + no content.

Proponents of appearance properties might also, like the quietist moderate anti-intentionalist, refuse to specify such a relation; but then they face just the same problems as the moderate anti-intentionalist. They have to endorse one or the other of the following two claims:

- Two subjects can have experiences which are different with respect to their representation of appearance properties but alike with respect to representation of color properties, but no one subject can have two experiences different with respect to representation of appearance properties but alike with respect to representation of color properties. (This is the analogue of Time-Unrestricted Intrapersonal Intentionalism.)
- One subject can have experiences which are different with respect to their representation of appearance properties but alike with respect to representation of color properties, so long as these experiences are separated by some interval of time t ; but no one subject can have two experiences separated by a time less than t which are different with respect to representation of appearance properties but alike with respect to representation of color properties. (This is the analogue of Time-Restricted Intrapersonal Intentionalism.)

The former risks collapse into the view that no pair of experiences of two subjects can differ with respect to representation of appearance properties without also differing with respect to representation of color properties, which undermines the purpose of introducing appearance properties in the first place. The latter risks collapse into the analogue of radical anti-intentionalism: the view that *consecutive* experiences of a subject might differ with respect to representation of appearance properties while being alike with respect to representation of color properties. But this is just to grant the possibility of psychedelic phenomenology + constant content.

The theorist in question might insist that this case be described as one in which psychedelic *appearance property* phenomenology accompanies constant representation of color. Does this help?

References

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