Observational Properties as Superficial Properties

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Observational Properties

The color, the shape, the taste and smell of a lemon, the coarseness of its skin and the freshness of its juice.

AIM: give an account of them compatible with scientific understanding of world.
Trilemma

(a) Observational properties belong to the world we live in.

(b) The world we live in is a physical world.

(c) There is no space for qualitative observational properties in the physical world.
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Standard responses

1. Reductive Physicalism: reduce observational properties to physical properties.

2. Subjectivism/Projectivism: identify observational properties with subjective mental properties of the experience, that our mind illusorily project onto the physical world.
My Proposal

(a) Observational properties belong to the world we live in.

(b) The world we live in is a physical world.

(c) There is no space for qualitative observational properties in the physical world.
Superficiality of Observational Properties

- Knowledge of colours and other observational properties is tied to a specific source of information (in this case visual perception).

- PROJECT: formalise this intuition about superficiality in epistemic terms: certain properties are such that the ultimate ground for claims about them is perceptual.
Proposed account of superficiality:

A range of properties $P$ is superficial relative to a source of information $S$ if judgments about properties in $P$ can only be authoritatively confirmed or disconfirmed through the source of information $S$ (be it sight for colours, smell for odours, introspection for phenomenal characters).
Common Assumption: there is no seem/is distinction for superficial properties (infallibility claim)

Reductionist: denies infallibility for observational properties, but ends up denying that they are superficial.

Projectivist: wants to maintain that they are superficial, but then is compelled to accept we are infallible about them. So she identifies them with mental properties.

> Does indistinguishability entail identity for superficial properties?
My account:

- Explains what makes colours superficial, without accepting the infallibility claim.
- Accommodate simultaneously both intuitions driving (one-sidedly) the reductionist and the subjectivist:
  - they are properties of the physical objects around us;
  - they are subjective: in the sense that how we experience them depend on facts about our biology, the context in which we experience them etc.
Applications:

- use this account to solve certain puzzle re. metaphysics of colour and sound
- consider how my account accommodates data on colour perception from neurosciences
Thanks