

Philosophy 181: Color

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This course will be concerned with philosophical problems about color. The main problems are (1) how, if at all, do we know that our color experiences are similar (when you look at the sky, is your experience like mine, or like the one I have when I see an orange?) (2) do objects have colors?

Philosophical problems about color are problems in epistemology and problems in metaphysics. Epistemology is the study of knowledge: what knowledge is, and whether we have any knowledge. Epistemology studies the distinction between appearance and reality. Since visual experience is often taken as the basic way that things appear to us, color is clearly a central part of “appearance”. The problem, then, is to try to figure out whether the *appearance* of color matches up with, or is different from, the true reality of the world.

Metaphysics is the study of what there is. Here, the job is to work out a coherent and consistent picture or story of all the basic categories of things. *Physicalism* is one such metaphysical theory: it says that everything there is, is physical. Physicalism is the oldest, and most frequently encountered, reason for thinking that objects do not have colors. Physics gives a complete picture of the world in terms of particles and forces and fields. It does not describe the world in terms of colors. Therefore, it seems, there are no colors.

Besides the intrinsic interest of color, philosophical issues about color are very similar to philosophical issues about minds and about value (ethics). Physicalist philosophers and psychologists argue that there are no minds (since the real truth about what happens in and around animals like people is just a physical/biochemical story). Ethical theories sometimes hold that there is no value or worth in the world (since (again) the real truth about what happens in and around animals like people is simply physical stuff happening with no regard to value).

The goal of the seminar is to familiarize ourselves with the various positions and arguments that have been made in the philosophical literature about color, and to develop our own positions and arguments concerning color.

Texts:

Byrne, Alex and Hilbert, David R., *Readings on Color, Volume 1: The Philosophy of Color*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997).
Hardin, C.L., *Color for Philosophers* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988).
Readings from Democritus, Aristotle, Galileo, Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Smart and Jackson, available on eRes, through the Hofstra University website.

Requirements:

Seven papers (6 short (2-3pp) and 1 long (10-15pp))

Papers:

(a) The short papers. Approximately once every two weeks you will select an article; the paper will describe the argument of the paper, and offer a critical evaluation. The article can be one of the ones we've worked on in class; or you may, with consultation with me, either pick another article from our anthology, or an article from the contemporary literature. The aim of these papers is to hone your skills in finding the arguments in such articles, in describing them, and in critically evaluating them. I place more emphasis on a thoughtful imaginative critical evaluation than on description.

(b) The long paper. The aim of this paper is to work out your position and arguments on a philosophical problem about color. Your paper must work with at least three sources from the readings we are doing in class (see below), and must in addition draw on at least three other articles. There are many places to look for additional sources: one is the various footnotes of the articles we are reading; another is the *Philosopher's Index*, a database of all nearly all philosophical writing published for the last 60 years (it is available on-line through the Hofstra Library Web page); another is the Internet (for instance, the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). In the syllabus below I note some points at which you will need to turn in work toward the completion of this paper.

Good papers have three features: **good mechanics** (spelling, grammar); **good understanding** (accurate and insightful description of philosophical reasoning, especially from texts); **good thinking** (interesting, insightful, accurate critical response to the reasoning).

You will be writing about recent works in the philosophy of color. Each short paper must include at least one bibliographic reference, in the form of a footnote or an endnote; the long paper will have at least six such references. I do not have any preferences about the form of the reference, except one: the reference should as far as possible uniquely identify what you are talking about, by specifying the city of publication, the year of publication, the publisher, the page, and (where appropriate) the "standard pagination" of the text you are referring to. (For example, editions of Descartes' works always include a pagination in the margin from the standard edition of Adam and Tannery; the first line of the *Meditations* thus occurs at AT 7, 17.) You should also include a reference if you use or discuss the ideas of others, for instance ideas that have come up in class from me or from your classmates. See *Writing with Sources*, Gordon Harvey, Hackett Publishing, for information about how to use and cite sources.

All papers must be typed, using standard margins and standard typefaces and fonts. A standard page has from 250 to 275 words on it.

Policies:

- No late papers will be accepted.
- Excuse clause: of course, things happen. If for some reason you are unable to hand in work, I must be informed about it as early as possible and in some cases I will require documentation.
- If you carry a phone or a beeper, you must turn it off or leave it outside of class.

- Our class sessions are short, and normally there should be no reason for you to leave class during the session. If you must leave class early, please inform me before class starts.
- If you cannot attend class, please inform me.
- Zero tolerance for plagiarism. If I have reason to believe that any kind of plagiarism whatsoever has occurred I will request a discussion of the work. If plagiarism has occurred, I will ask for the work to be completely rewritten. If rewritten work contains plagiarism, I will award the grade of “F” for the course. If there is plagiarism in the final paper, I will award the grade of “F” for the course. I will *always* file an academic dishonesty form with the Dean of Students if I believe that plagiarism has occurred.

Date	Topic	Special
1/27	Introduction: Democritus, Atomism, and “convention”	
2/1	Aristotle, selections from <i>De Anima</i>	
2/3	Galileo, The Surveyor	
2/8	Descartes on material falsity	
2/10	Locke and primary and secondary qualities	
2/15	Berkeley, First Dialogue	SP 1
2/17		
2/22	(President’s Day – no class)	
2/24	Hardin, <i>Color for Philosophers</i> Chapter 1, pp.1-36	
3/1	Hardin, pp.36-58	SP 2
3/3	Hardin, Chapter 2, pp.59-66	
3/8	Hardin, pp.67-112	
3/10	Hardin, Chapter 3, pp.113-134	
3/15	Hardin, pp.134-145	SP 3
3/17	Hardin, pp.145-182	
3/22	Byrne and Hilbert, “Introduction” pp.xi-xxvii	
3/24	(Spring Recess – no class)	
3/29	(Spring Recess – no class)	
3/31	(Spring Recess – no class)	
4/5	B&H: essays 1 and 2 (Smart and Averill)	SP 4; One paragraph: final paper topic

4/7	3 and 4: Armstrong and Smart	
4/12	Essay 5: Peacocke	Conferences on final paper topic
4/14	Essay 6: Jackson and Pargetter	
4/19	Essay 7: Boghossian and Velleman, "Color as a Secondary Quality"	SP 5
4/21	Essay 8: Boghossian and Velleman, "Physicalist Theories of Color"	
4/26	Essay 9, Johnston, "How to speak of the colors"	Bibliography for final paper
4/28	Essay 10: Campbell: "A simple view of colour"	
5/3	Essay 13, Harman, "Explaining objective color in terms of subjective reactions"	SP 6; and draft (minimum 2pp) of final paper
5/5	Essay 14, Byrne and Hilbert, "Colors and reflectances"	
5/10	Essay 15, Hardin, "Reinverting the spectrum"	
5/19	Final paper due	