

Color and Color Perception

A sample syllabus by Tiina C Rosenqvist

[This syllabus outlines a proposed advanced / senior seminar focusing on color metaphysics and the philosophy of color perception.]

1. Course Description

Color is an important part of most of our lives; it guides our actions, affects our mood, and gives us aesthetic pleasure. It's strange to think that philosophers have debated color for centuries. Color is not something abstract or recondite, but a property with which most of us are intimately acquainted every day. Color is there when we open our eyes. We use color language to communicate successfully. We've even mastered the art of *producing* color, both in the form of mixing lights of different wavelengths to give us the colors on our screens, and in the form of mixing pigments to give us surface colors.

Yet the more we think about color, the more we come to appreciate its complexity. In contemporary philosophical discussions, we find little agreement on the status, nature and location of chromatic properties. We can also ask what kind of knowledge color perception grants us and what determines the correctness standards for color experiences. Here, too, philosophical views diverge.

This is an advanced seminar in philosophy of perception with a focus on color. The course is interdisciplinary and draws from neuroscience, visual ecology, and psychophysics. We will ask what color is and how we know when our color experiences are correct (if they ever are). We will also inquire into the function of color vision and whether that function varies across the animal kingdom. Finally, we will consider what color might tell us about the nature of visual perception more generally.

2. Course Objectives

Through active participation in this course, you will develop an empirically-informed understanding of key debates in contemporary color metaphysics and philosophy of perception. You will practice unpacking, discussing, and evaluating philosophical views and arguments, both orally and in writing.

3. Course Structure & Expectations

The standard format for the seminar sessions is lecture/presentation and discussion. You are expected to do the assigned readings before class, participate actively in discussions, make discussion board contributions, present on one of the required readings, write two papers and one paper outline, participate in a peer review process, and introduce your paper idea to the rest of the seminar.

4. Assignments & Assessment

Weights

- Attendance & In-Class Participation—10%
- Discussion Board Participation—10%
- In-Class Presentation—10%
- Paper 1 (1,500-2,000 words)—20%
- Paper 2 (3000-4000 words)—45%
- Paper 2 Peer Reviews—5%

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory (please be on time!), but you are allowed to miss two sessions without prior notice, unless you are scheduled to give a presentation that day or expected to participate in the peer review. If you are going to miss more than two classes, prior notice is required. Depending on the circumstances, your participation grade might be negatively affected, or you might be asked to complete a make-up assignment.

Discussion Board Participation

You are required to make an online discussion board post about each of the required readings. In order to get full credit, you should submit your discussion contribution before the relevant class session and demonstrate meaningful engagement with the text(s). Each contribution should be at least five sentences long. You can ask developed questions, agree/disagree with reasons, draw meaningful connections to other course readings, etc. Late submissions are accepted for up to seven days for 1/2 credit.

In-Class Presentation

Each enrolled student must present on *one* of the required course readings to the seminar. Your presentation should last approximately 20 minutes, with around 15 minutes dedicated to careful exegesis and 5 minutes for critical evaluation. You should prepare a handout or PowerPoint to aid in your presentation.

- *Exegesis*: In your presentation, explain what is at stake in the debate, the author's thesis, the arguments presented, the premises supporting those arguments, any objections the author addresses, and how the author responds to those objections.
- *Critical discussion*: Evaluate the strength of the author's arguments. Consider whether there are plausible objections that the author does not explicitly address. Assess the author's exposition of alternative views for accuracy and fairness.

Papers & Peer Reviews

You are required to write one short paper and one longer paper. You are also required to submit a preliminary draft for the longer paper. Drafts are workshopped in peer review groups during class. You will review two paper drafts and submit your reviews in writing (300-500 words/review) before the workshop.

5. Course Policies

[Omitted from this sample.]

6. Resources

[Omitted from this sample.]

7. Seminar & Readings Schedule

Module I. Getting Started

- (1) Syllabus & Logistics. Introduction: The Problem(s) of Color
 - **Required:** Chirumuuta (2015), *Outside Color*, Ch. 1: "Color and Its Questions"
- (2) Historical Overview
 - **Required:** Chirumuuta (2015), *Outside Color*, Ch. 2: "What Everyone Thinks about Color and Why"

Module II. Color Metaphysics

- (3) The Landscape of Color Metaphysics
 - **Required:** Chirumuuta (2015), *Outside Color*, Ch. 3: "Realism, Antirealism, Relationalism"
- (4) Conservative and Radical Theories
 - **Required:** Logue (2016), "Metaphysics of Color 1: Physicalist Theories of Color," *Philosophy Compass*
 - **Required:** Logue (2006), "Metaphysics of Color 2: Non-Physicalist Theories of Color," *Philosophy Compass*
- (5) Reductive Physicalism
 - **Required:** Byrne & Hilbert (2003), "Color realism and color science," *BBS*
 - **Optional:** McLaughlin (2003), "The Place of Colour in Nature" in *Colour Perception: Mind and the Physical World*
- (6) Primitivism
 - **Required:** Allen (2014), "Colour Physicalism, Naïve Realism, and the Argument from Structure," *Minds and Machines*
 - **Optional:** Campbell (1993), "A Simple View of Color" in *Reality: Representation and Projection*
- (7) Anti-realism
 - **Required:** Hardin (2003), "Spectral Reflectance Doth Not a Color Make," *The Journal of Philosophy*
 - **Optional:** Maund (2006), "The Illusion Theory of Colours: An Anti-Realist Theory," *Dialectica*

(8) Traditional Dispositionalism

- **Required:** Levin (2000), "Dispositional theories of Color and the Claims of Common Sense" *Philosophical Studies*
- **Optional:** Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 8: 9-15, 22-26

(9) "Ecumenical" Relationalism

- **Required:** Cohen (2004), "Color properties and color ascriptions: A relationalist manifesto," *Philosophical Review*

(10) True Colors — The Debate! *Short Paper Topics Distributed*

- **Required:** Tye (2006), "The Puzzle of True Blue," *Analysis*
- **Required:** Cohen, Hardin & McLaughlin (2006), "True Colors," *Analysis*
- **Required:** Tye (2006), "The Truth about True Blue," *Analysis*
- **Required:** J. Cohen, C.L. Hardin & B. McLaughlin (2006), "The Truth about 'The Truth about True Blue,'" *Analysis*
- **Optional:** Tye (2007), "True Blue Redux," *Analysis*
- **Optional:** Byrne & Hilbert (2007), "Truest Blue," *Analysis*

(11) Review & Discussion; Writing Workshop

Short Paper — 20%

Module III. The Function of Color Vision

(12) The Function of Color Vision: Detection

- **Required:** Hilbert (1992), "What is Color Vision?" *Philosophical Studies*
- **Optional:** Revisit Byrne & Hilbert (2003)

(13) The Function of Color Vision: Discrimination

- **Required:** Hatfield (1992), "Color Perception and Neural Encoding: Does Metameric Matching Entail a Loss of Information?" *PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association*
- **Optional:** Gerl & Morris (2008), "The Causes and Consequences of Color Vision," *Evolution: Education and Outreach*

(14) Ecological Relationalism: Hatfield

- **Required:** Hatfield (2003), "Objectivity and Subjectivity Revisited: Color as a Psychobiological Property" in *Colour Perception: Mind and the Physical World*

(15) Ecological Relationalism: Thompson

- **Required:** Thompson (1995), "Colour Vision, Evolution, and Perceptual Content," *Synthese* (pp. 1-11, 22-27)
- **Required:** Thompson (1995). *Colour Vision: A study in Cognitive Science and the Philosophy of Perception* (excerpt)

(16) The Function of Color Vision: Akers & Hahn

- **Required:** Akers & Hahn (2015), "Color Perception" in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Perception*
- **Optional:** Wolfe et al. (2015), *Sensation & Perception*, Ch. 5: The Perception of Color (excerpts)

(17) The Function of Color Vision: Chirimuuta

- **Required:** Chirimuuta (2015), *Outside Color*, Ch. 4: "Coloring In, and Coloring For"
- **Optional:** Listen to Chirimuuta on *New Books in Philosophy*

(18) Perceptual Pragmatism

- **Required:** Chirimuuta (2015), *Outside Color*, Ch. 5: "Perceptual Pragmatism"
- **Optional:** Chirimuuta (2015), *Outside Color*, Ch. 6: "Active Colors"

(19) Review & Discussion

Module IV. Color and the Nature of Perceptual Experience

(20) Color & Representationalism #1

- **Required:** Jackson (2007), "Colour for Representationalists," *Erkenntnis*

(21) Color & Representationalism #2

- **Required:** Wright (2010), "Projectivist Representationalism and color," *Philosophical Psychology*

(22) Color & Naïve Realism: Selectionism

- **Required:** Allen (2011), "Revelation and the Nature of Colour," *Dialectica*
- **Optional:** Kalderon (2007), "Color Pluralism," *Philosophical Review*

(23) Color & Naïve Realism: Mind-Independent Appearances

- **Required:** Genone (2014), "Appearance and Illusion," *Mind*

(24) Color Adverbialism and Theories of Visual Experience

- **Required:** Chirimuuta (2015), *Outside Color*, Ch. 7: "True Colors"
- **Optional:** Gupta (2017), "Chirimuuta's Adverbialism about Color," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*

(25) "Narsissistic" and action-oriented senses

- **Required:** Akins (1996), "Of Sensory Systems and the "Aboutness" of Mental States," *The Journal of Philosophy*

Final Paper Outline

(26) Sensorimotor account of visual consciousness

- **Required:** O'Regan & Noë (2001), "A Sensorimotor Account of Vision and Visual Consciousness", *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*

Final Paper Peer Reviews

Module V. Wrapping Up

(27) Outline Workshop / Peer Reviews

(28) 5-Minute Paper Presentations; Final Review

Final Paper