

Color as a Mode of Perception: A Philosophical Defense of Adverbialism

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Abstract

What is color? Is it an aspect of the world or our minds? Although it may seem superficial and immediate given our everyday experience of color, philosophical scrutiny has uncovered deep ambiguities. Physicalism takes color to be physical, whereas anti-realism assimilates colors to a mass-spread projection of subjectivity. However, neither account adequately accounts for the empirical complexity of color perception. In this paper I return to the ontology of color and provide an account of adverbialism, the idea that color is not something that is sensed but a way of sensing.

Keywords

Adverbialism; Ontology of color; Plastic philosophy; Psychology of perception; Cognitive-visual experience

1. Introduction

Adverbialism takes us to suggest that perceiving a "red apple" we are observing not an object of "redness" but redly. A shift in focus from entities to experiential structures provides a compelling framework for the explanation of perceptual phenomena such as color constancy, afterimages, and synesthesia. Furthermore, it meshes with distributed and constructive cognitive science models of perception.

In the remainder of this post, we delve more into the philosophical foundations of adverbialism; its empirical basis support and respond to common criticisms.

2. Realism to Adverbialism: Reflections on the Ontology of Color

Definition in common judgments of color (that is, color realism or classical color realism): colors are natures of things just as shapes or sizes are powering properties—reflectance profiles or physical wavelengths. This is the view that lies at the core of our everyday discourse about the colors of things and found a home in industrial functionality requiring colour constancy.

Yet, this way of thinking makes it hard for appearances to be correctly described and thus we struggle to explain how our color language manages to stay reliable across an intersubjective, over-representational domain.

Relations-based theories, like Jonathan Cohen's relationalism [3], provide a compromise by holding color to be a relationship between observer, thing and context. Adverbialism extends this idea, but in a much larger way: colors are not things or relations but modes –adverbial modifications of the perceptual events.

Jackson and other philosophers (for instance, see his conclusion to Jackson, Putting together the Jacksonian and Putnamian theses note 4) have argued how we can understand perceptual reports without mysterious qualia. Hence, if “I see red” is best interpreted as “I perceive redly” [4]. This possibility dissolves several ontological puzzles simply by rendering color as a mode of experience instead of an independent property. Both Cognitive and Empirical Basis for the Adverbialist Hypothesis

Recent neuroscience and visual psychology findings align with the notion that color perception is highly context-dependent and a dynamic construction. Shevell and Kingdom (2008) [6] determined that the perceived color varies with context, borders, movement and visual attention. Our current understanding from Semir Zeki's researches [7] means that color, shape and motion are processed together in visual cortex showing that its integrative nature.

Edwin Land Retinex theory [5] shows that the brain reconstructs seemingly stable color experiences from the spatial structures in bits of limited spectral information at the level of retinoplasm. This more so aids the claim that our seeing colors which exists is not passively received, but becomes generated. Color afterimages and contrast illusions evidence that colors are not in the stimulus but extra as by the perceptual scramble.

Synesthesia colors are purely mental and do not require an external object to exist, as in hearing colors when one hears sounds.

Together, these results are consistent with adverbialism: color perception is a function of not only what we perceive but how we perceive it. If perception is refracted through the perceiver's architecture, attention and context then calling color a mode of perceiving rather than an attribute of objects is a much better word choice.

3. Responding to Criticisms: Publicness, Language and Logical Form

Adverbialism is attacked on the grounds (at least for one of its central tenets) that color terms cannot be maintained in the public and communicable function they have once served. If the color is simply what one sees how we all agree upon that an apple is red? The adverbialist challenges: color terms are not rigid designators but malleable means for aligning experiences within an individual community.

Wittgenstein's dictum, the meaning of a word is its use in language. Color terms enable coordination instead of referring to fixed properties, as they develop performa-

ble expectations and calibration. Cross-cultural research on color terms [1] (Berlin and Kay) shows the high variance in color names, indicating that both language and perceptual training are the major determinants for color concepts stability.

At a more meta level, aside from linguistic coordination (Use of adverbials), additional difficulty arises with this logic of distributing adverbial expressions. Critics claim we can analyze no further “seeing redly” than we can “seeing red”. However, novel models in predictive coding and distributed cognition regard perception as active construction, in favour of variable modes of experience. Even to the extent that Clark and Chalmers’ theory of the extended mind [2] stands firm cognitive state, drawn to be distributed across environment and context with the goal that their core idea has many theoretical legs.

Adverbialism does not provide logical clarity; it gives philosophical adequacy to subtle experiential reality.

4. Conclusion

Adverbialism promises radical change to color ontology by reducing objects into experiences and attributes to actions. It has robust empirical grounds and provides a parsimonious account with which to explain perceptual phenomena that are resistant to realist or anti-realist analyses. Of course, there is a lot of work to be done; but I think adverbialism holds real promise as an important bridge between meta-physicals and the interdisciplinary. In this paper, I have defended an adverbialist position as the best color ontology to stand in-between realism and anti-realism and have shown that we ought not be concerned if, in fact; we were just. In addition, adverbialism offers at least a fascinating slippage for reworking central metaphysical issues related to our experiences and skeptical project concerning reality.

It shifts philosophical attention away from object-bound color properties and over to percepts modes re-framing long-standing debates about experience as merely epistemic relation to reality in place of metaphysical commitments to view things as it proceeds.

Such a realignment will engage it in useful conversation with contemporary articulations of enactivist and embodied cognition, in which both are re-describing the problem in terms of what this organism does with its environment.

From a philosophical standpoint, this model not just contributes to the ongoing discussion of color ontologies but has repercussions that perhaps extend even further: a broader understanding perception. Because if we think of perceptual experiences as mannered sorts of engagements, and not just as fancy words or objects yet unattached them to the external, then there is some leverage to apply this adverbial vocabulary beyond mere sight (i.e., to hearing, tasting and touching).

Moreover, adverbialism as a heuristic allows to access the aesthetics of perception. Color is not an afterthought in arts and design, it is formed to make seeing happen in this way. This is somewhere one can find the experience of color all adverbial-

al—what we experience depends on who we are (the observer), not what it is depicted. Adverbialism also aids in enriching and rendering a more phenomenologically correct (as well ethnographically accommodated) account of visual experience. Perhaps then we might ask: what if the thing we attempt to describe isn't things, but our relation to them? Adverbialism provides a description not just of color, but an invitation that the horizon of perception is open to philosophy which is modest and brave at once — modest in recognizing how constructed experience is, and brave in shifting metaphysical attention.

At the end of adverbialism is a more than simple metaphysical thesis, as it is a hermeneutical requirement upon which one adjusts expectations of experience, communication and reality itself. Its naturalness both to empirical evidence and to the integrated nature of knowledge means this is not only defensible now, but is becoming increasingly important in an integrated knowledge world. Given that perception is increasingly being mediated by technologies, environments and social practices, theories which emphasize the “how” rather than the “what” of experience have an unparalleled opportunity to offer the most granular but also reflexive perspective on human cognitive life.

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