

Philosophy 101

Knowledge & Objectivity

January 21, 2014

The Status of Sensory Qualities

Two Positions on Color

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Eliminativism/Subjectivism: Colors are not qualities of physical objects (Eliminativism). If they are qualities of anything, they are qualities of conscious mental states or objects (Subjectivism).

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Realism: Colors are qualities of physical objects. They exist independently of any subject which might experience them.

Galileo's Eliminativism

To excite in us tastes, odors, and sounds I believe that nothing is required in external bodies except shapes, numbers, and slow or rapid movements. If ears, and tongues, and noses were removed, shapes and numbers and motions would remain, but not odors or tastes or sounds. The latter, I believe, are nothing more than names when separated from living beings, just as tickling and titillation are nothing but names in the absence of such things as noses and armpits (Assayer, p. 276-7).

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- ⑤ \therefore If there were no conscious beings there would be no sensory qualities (e.g. colors, tastes, smells, etc.). [from 4]

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 - required for the scientific or causal explanation of why material beings are the way that they are
 - conceptual requirements of our thinking of material beings (e.g. being extended → being located)

Relativity Arguments

Since the same bodies are sweet to some men, and bitter to others, it may reasonably be inferred that they are neither sweet nor bitter in their own nature, and absolutely speaking. The modern philosophers, though they are no sceptics...teach that all these qualities are perceptions of our mind, and do not exist in the objects of our senses. (Bayle's Dictionnaire, 1730)

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- ② No physical object can have opposing properties at the same time
- ③ \therefore Physical objects do not have the sensory qualities we naïvely attribute to them

Contemporary Eliminativism/Subjectivism

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There may be light of different wavelengths independent of an observer, but there is no color independent of an observer, because color is a psychological phenomenon that arises only within an observer. (Palmer, p. 97)

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- ⑤ \therefore Color properties are causally/explanatorily idle
- ⑥ \therefore Physical object do not have color properties, but rather only reflectance properties

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- ② Assumes that color properties cannot be identified with those physical properties which *do* causally explain our color experiences (e.g. reflectance)

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Secondary Qualities: Powers of bodies, determined by their primary qualities, to produce sensations in perceiving subjects (e.g. colors, sounds, tastes)

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 - color as a property of physical bodies
 - color as a property of color experiences (i.e. 'color-as-we-see-it' or 'phenomenal color').
 - Phenomenal colors are not properties of physical bodies
 - We would be making an error if we attributed phenomenal colors to physical bodies

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 - Colors are powers of bodies to produce color experiences in perceiving subjects
 - Bodies are colored in the sense of having a property which causes color sensations of a particular kind in normal perceivers under normal conditions

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 - color perception within (e.g.) a species may be similar

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 - the color things appear to have is highly relative to the perceptual apparatus of the perceiving subject

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Williams on Objectivity

Objectivity and Knowledge

if knowledge is what it claims to be, then it is knowledge of a reality which exists independently of that knowledge, and indeed (except for the special case where the reality known happens itself to be some psychological item) independently of any thought or experience. Knowledge is of what is there anyway (Williams, 48)

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- depends on what is meant by 'independent'

The Absolute Conception

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Suppose A and B each claims to have some knowledge of the world. Each has some beliefs, and moreover has experiences of the world, and ways of conceptualizing it, which have given rise to those beliefs and are expressed in them: let us call all of this together his representation of the world (or part of the world). Now with respect to their supposed pieces of knowledge, A's and B's representations may well differ. If what they both have is knowledge, then it seems to follow that there must be some coherent way of understanding why these representations differ, and how they are related to one another (Williams, 49).

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- ③ If a representation is to count as knowledge we need an explanation of how it 'fits' with other (possible) representations
- ④ \therefore A full explanation of how some representation counts as knowledge requires our possession of an 'absolute' representation of the world which explains why other kinds of representations get to count as knowledge

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- Some ways of apprehending the world are free of any such peculiarity of the subject
 - the world 'as it really is'

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- ③ \therefore Primary qualities are part of the absolute conception

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- ② Secondary qualities are relative to the peculiarities of perceiving subjects
- ③ \therefore Secondary qualities are not part of the absolute conception of the world

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- Only primary qualities are objectively real. Secondary qualities have their reality only insofar as they are properties of primary qualities
- The representations of secondary qualities (e.g. 'sensations') are not at all like the features of objects (the secondary qualities) that they represent