

The Concordia Philosophy 2010/2011 Colloquium Series Presents:

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Colour constancy and the relativities therein

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Abstract:

Typically, when one looks at one's tuque while indoors and then while outdoors, in some sense its perceived colour changes, and in another sense it remains constant. This is, albeit loosely described, an instance of colour constancy, a phenomenon which is now an integral part of the science of colour, and has been used by philosophers to help justify the objectivity of colours. In its broadest form colour constancy is the idea that to some extent one can perceive a thing to have an unaltered or 'constant' colour throughout its relevant parts or across the relevant times despite the presence of 'variability' in some aspect of one's colour perception of that thing. The challenge is to articulate what these senses of 'constancy' and 'variability' are and how they connect to or combine with each other both representationally and phenomenally. My answer is largely contained in a *Color Layering Thesis* and a *Content Ambiguity Thesis*, which I will propose through a sketch of recent accounts of colour constancy and their shortcomings. The Layering Thesis asserts that during constancy experiences we perceive two distinct colours, an environmentally variable one (e.g., an illuminant colour), and an environmentally constant one (e.g., a surface colour), and experience them as layered, the latter through the former. The Ambiguity Thesis asserts that constancy experiences are very often not *given* to us, but are instead the result of interpreting what is given in accordance with a commitment to colour constancy, a skill that can be developed and undermined through perceptual training. I conclude with an application of the account to colour objectivism, arguing that constancy is somewhat supportive of such views, but that objectivists have now even less motivation to exclude illuminant colours from their colour ontologies.

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