

PHILOSOPHY 101

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THE PUZZLE OF REPRESENTATION

WHAT IS A REPRESENTATION?

Representation:

something that represents something (either itself or something else)

- goes proxy; stands for; symbolizes something
- refers to something; is accurate/inaccurate; is true/false

EXAMPLES OF REPRESENTATIONAL KINDS

- Pictorial Representation
- Linguistic Representation
- Mental Representation

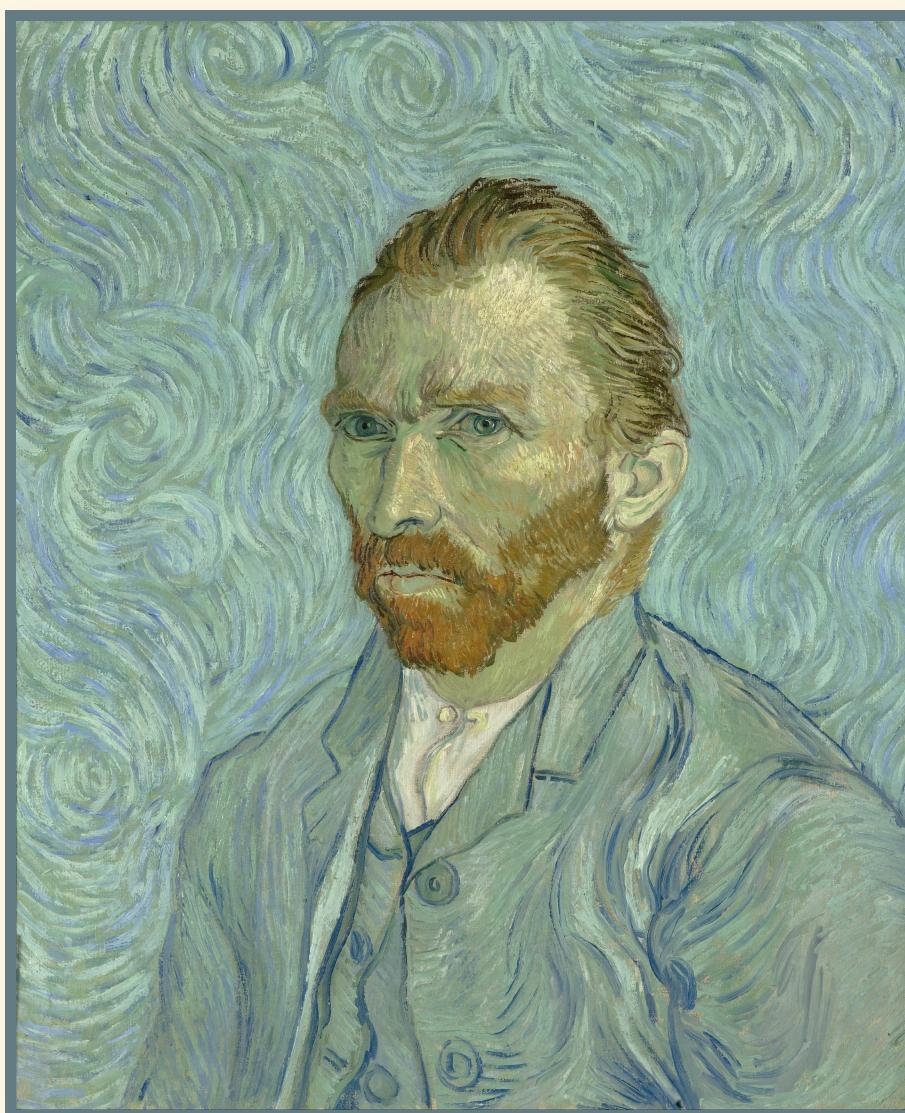
TWO QUESTIONS

1. How does a representation represent?
2. Are some kinds of representation more fundamental than others?

TEST CASES

1. How does a representation represent?
 - Resemblance
2. Are some kinds of representation more fundamental than others?
 - Pictorial representation
 - Linguistic representation

TEST CASE 1 – REPRESENTATION AS RESEMBLANCE



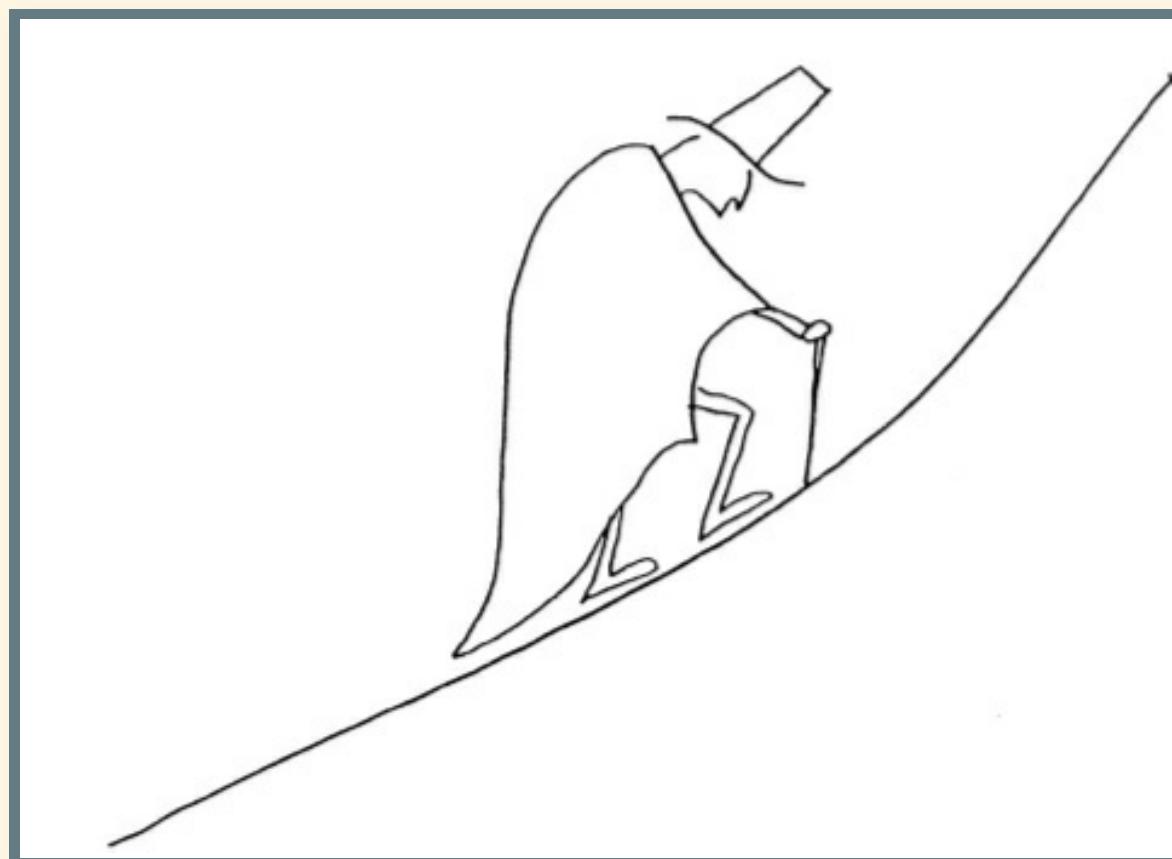
Vincent Van Gogh, 1889



Who do I resemble?

- Resemblance is neither necessary nor sufficient for representation
 - Not necessary: pictures can *represent* non-existent objects but they cannot *resemble* non-existent objects
 - Not sufficient: everything resembles something but not everything represents something

TEST CASE 2 – ARE PICTURES FUNDAMENTAL?



Walking Uphill or Sliding Down?

- Objections to pictorial fundamentality
 - 1. Interpretation
 - 2. Logical relations
 - if...then...
 - ...and...
 - either...or...
 - not...

TEST CASE 3 – IS LANGUAGE FUNDAMENTAL?

The cat is on the mat

- How does the string of symbols 'the cat is on the mat' come to represent a particular situation—viz. the cat's *being on the mat*?
- Language is not *intrinsically* representational
 - Convention
 - Expression of 'ideas' or mental states

CONVENTION

- Convention is not sufficient to explain the representation relation, only why some things represent other things
 - The word 'dog' represents dogs by convention
 - Convention cannot explain *how* 'dog' represents without appealing to the mental states of subjects *doing the representing*

CONVENTION & INTERPRETATION

words, like pictures, do not represent in themselves ('intrinsically'). They need interpreting – they need an interpretation assigned to them in some way. But how can we explain this? The natural answer, I think, is that interpretation is something which the mind bestows upon words. (Crane, p. 22)

FUNDAMENTALITY

1. Any representational system that depends on interpretation or convention is not fundamental
2. Linguistic and pictoral representation depend on interpretation and convention
3. ∴ Linguistic and pictoral representation are not fundamental

IS MENTAL REPRESENTATION FUNDAMENTAL?

MENTAL REPRESENTATION IS NOT CONVENTIONAL

- Conventions rely on the intentions of a subject or subjects
- Intentions are a kind of mental representation
- Convention cannot be used to *explain* mental representation

MENTAL REPRESENTATION DOES NOT DEPEND ON INTERPRETATION

1. If mental representation required interpretation then we would need to be able to think about the interpretations in some way, in order to use them as interpretations
2. But thoughts are a form of mental representation, so we would need a further interpretation to make sense of those thoughts
3. But a further thought would be needed to think *that* interpretation, etc.
4. ∴ We would have an infinite regress of thoughts and interpretations of them
5. ∴ Mental representations do not require interpretation

MENTAL REPRESENTATION

- According to Crane, only mental representation could plausibly be fundamental because only mental representation is *intrinsically* representational
- What kinds of things might have representational states?
 - Could machines have representational states?

