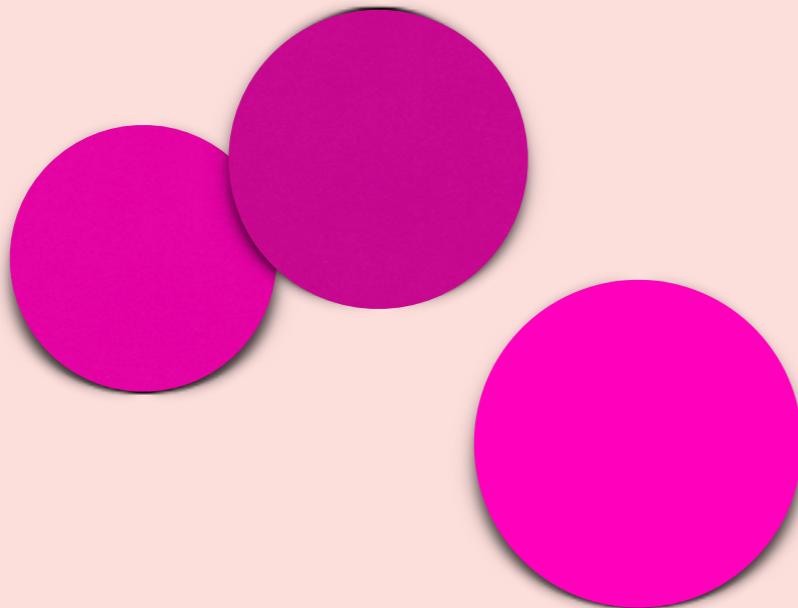


3

Qualities

Lent 2018



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<http://msteenhangen.github.io/teaching/2018qua/>

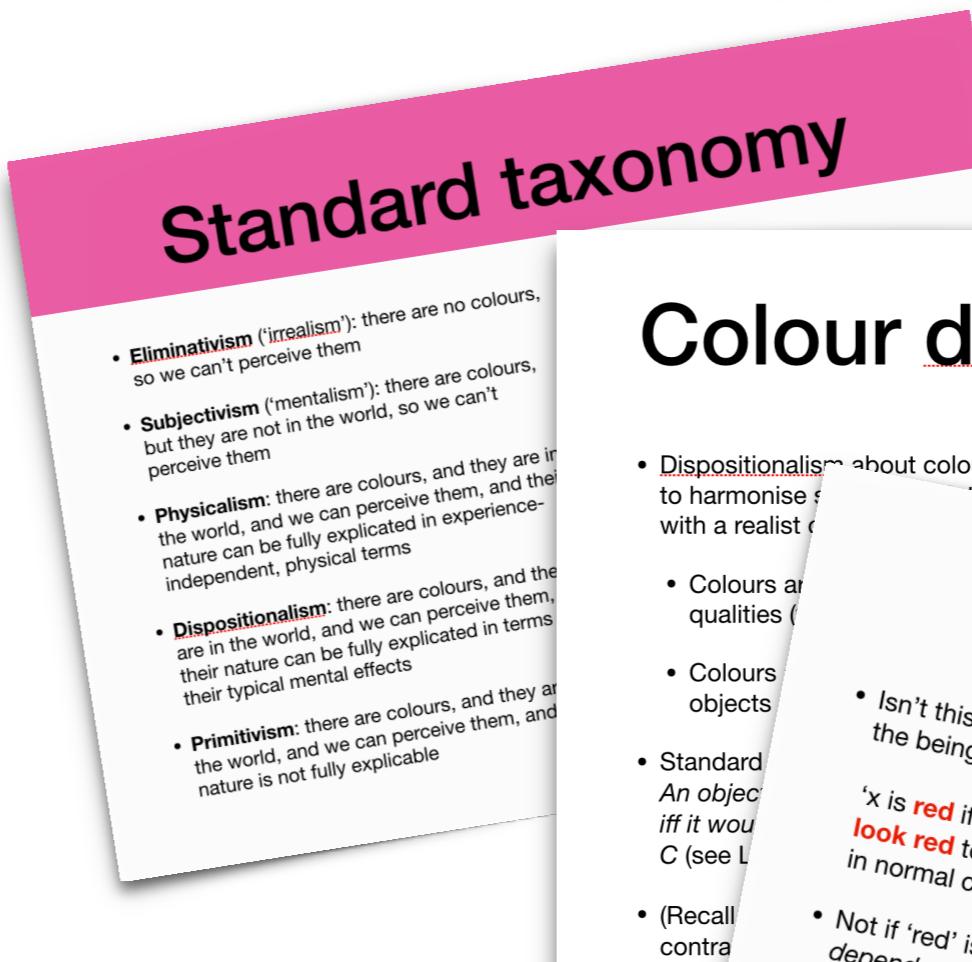
Overview of lectures

1. ~~Drawing distinctions:~~
~~Primary and Secondary~~
~~Qualities~~
2. ~~Dispositionalist theories of~~
~~colour and response-~~
~~dependent concepts~~
3. The Missing Explanation
argument



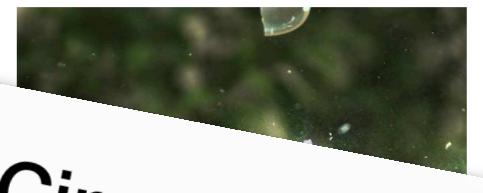
Last time

- Roadmap of the metaphysics of colour
- Colour dispositionalism
- Response-dependent concepts



Colour dispositionalism

- Dispositionalism about colour tries to harmonise standard colour definitions with a realist ontology
- Colours are dispositional qualities (not qualities of objects)
- Colours are properties of objects
- Standard An object is red iff it would cause C (see L)
- (Recall contra)



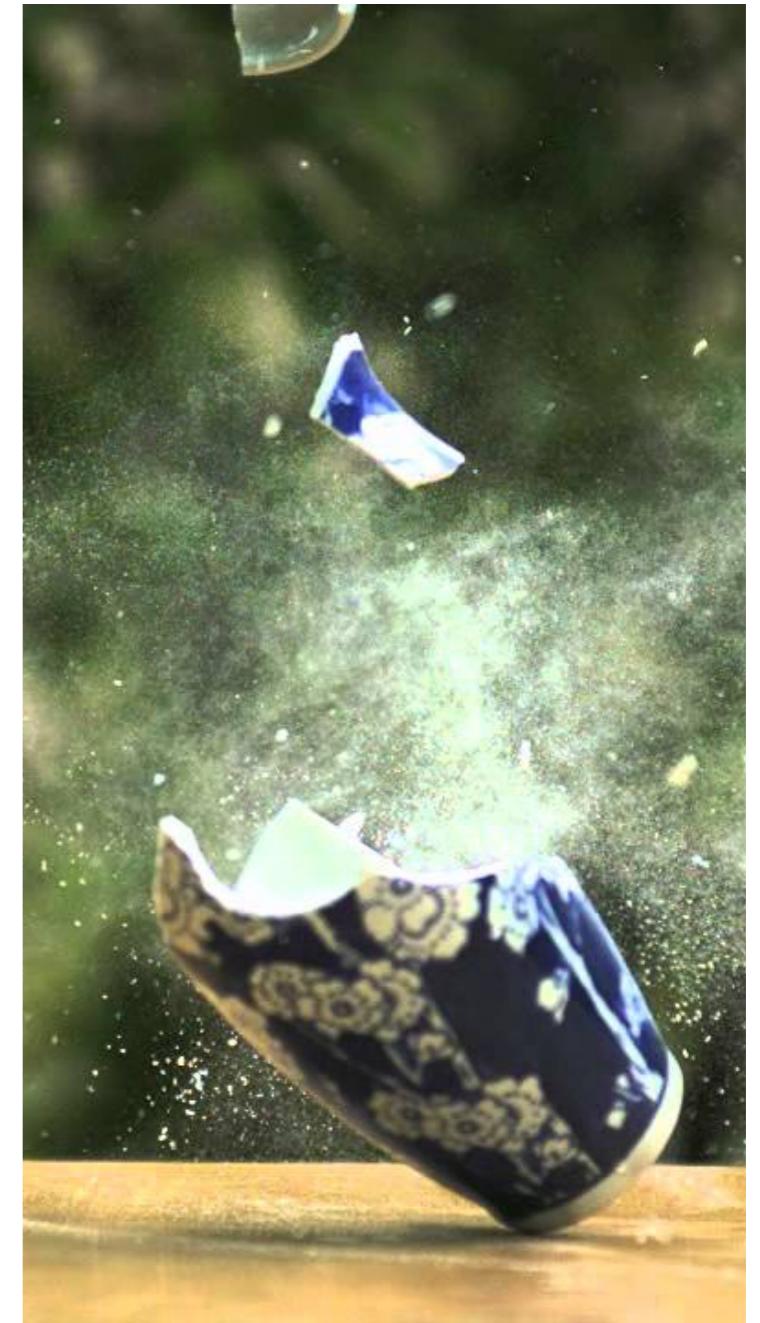
Circularity?

- Isn't this a circular definition of the being red?
'x is red iff x is disposed to look red to normal observers in normal conditions'
- Not if 'red' is a response-dependent concept, i.e. if it exhibits "a conceptual dependence on or interdependence with concepts of our responses in certain specific conditions" (Johnston 1989:145)



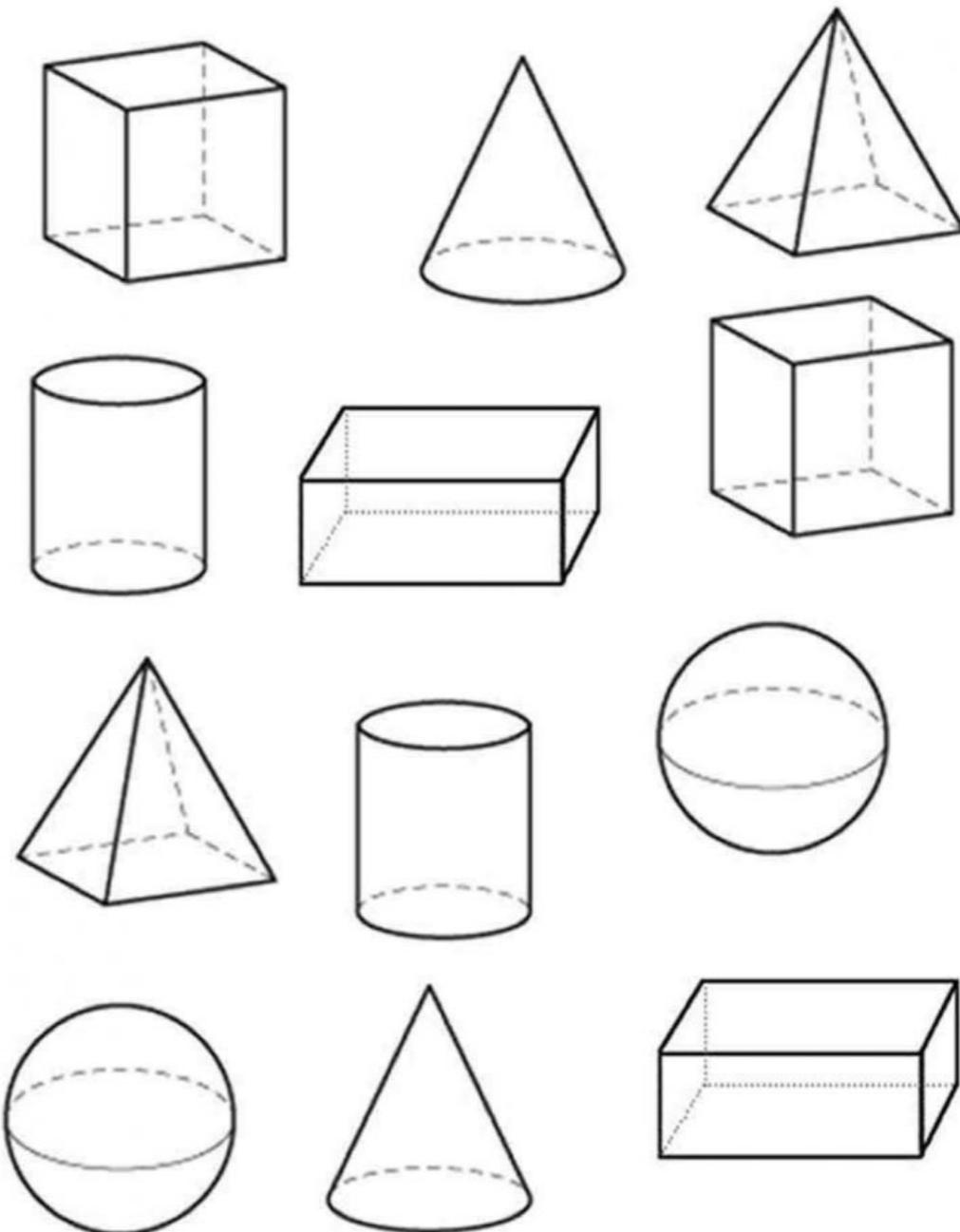
Colour dispositionalism

- Our concept of being red is that of a disposition to look red:
 x is red iff x is disposed to look red to normal observers in normal conditions
- This is just the kind of biconditional Wright exploited to distinguish secondary qualities from the primary ones:
 x is red iff for any S , if S were perceptually normal and were to encounter x in perceptually normal conditions, x would look red to S
- To avoid circularity the colour dispositionalist must assume that ‘red’ is a response-dependent concept: looking red to normal perceivers in normal conditions *determines* the extension of the concept ‘red’.



Shape dispositionalism?

- We cannot avoid circularity in this way for shape concepts like ‘square’, because shape concepts are not response-dependent concepts
 - x is square iff x is disposed to look square to normal observers in normal conditions
- Being square is not purely dispositional in nature: looking square to normal perceivers in normal conditions merely *reflects* the extension of the concept ‘square’

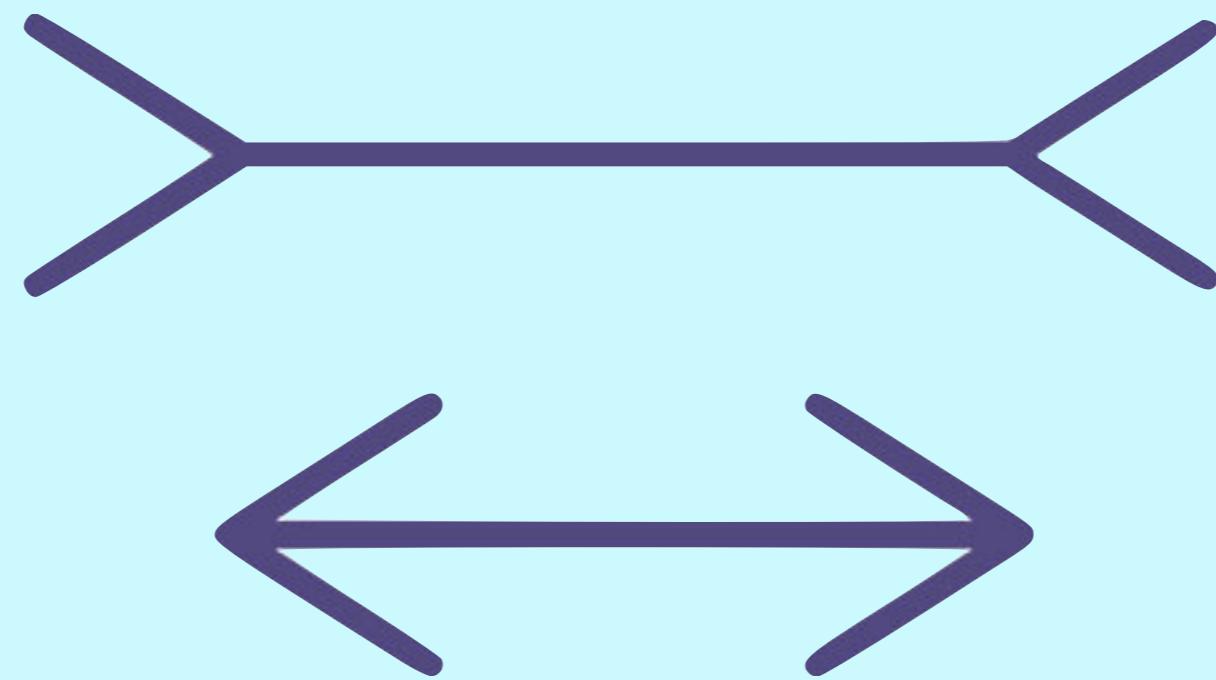


Room for error

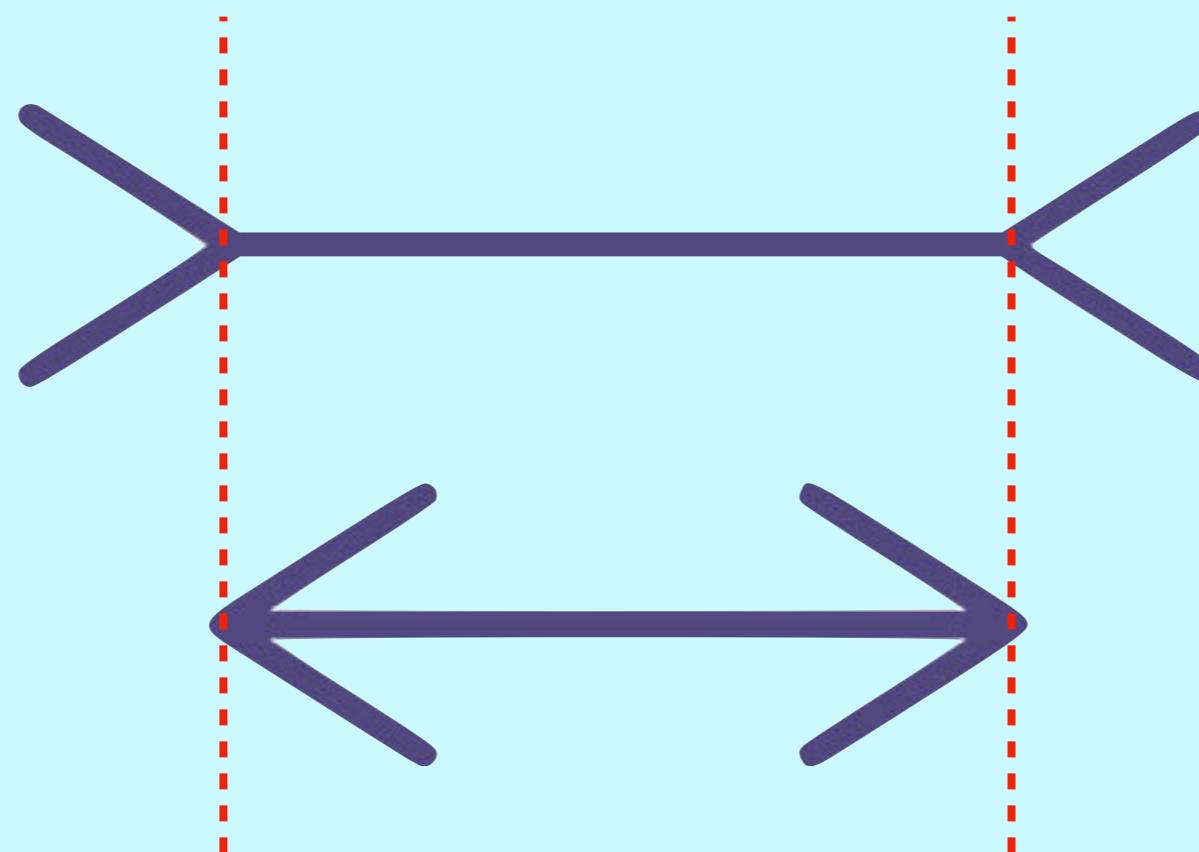


ERROR.

Error and response-dependence



Error and response-dependence

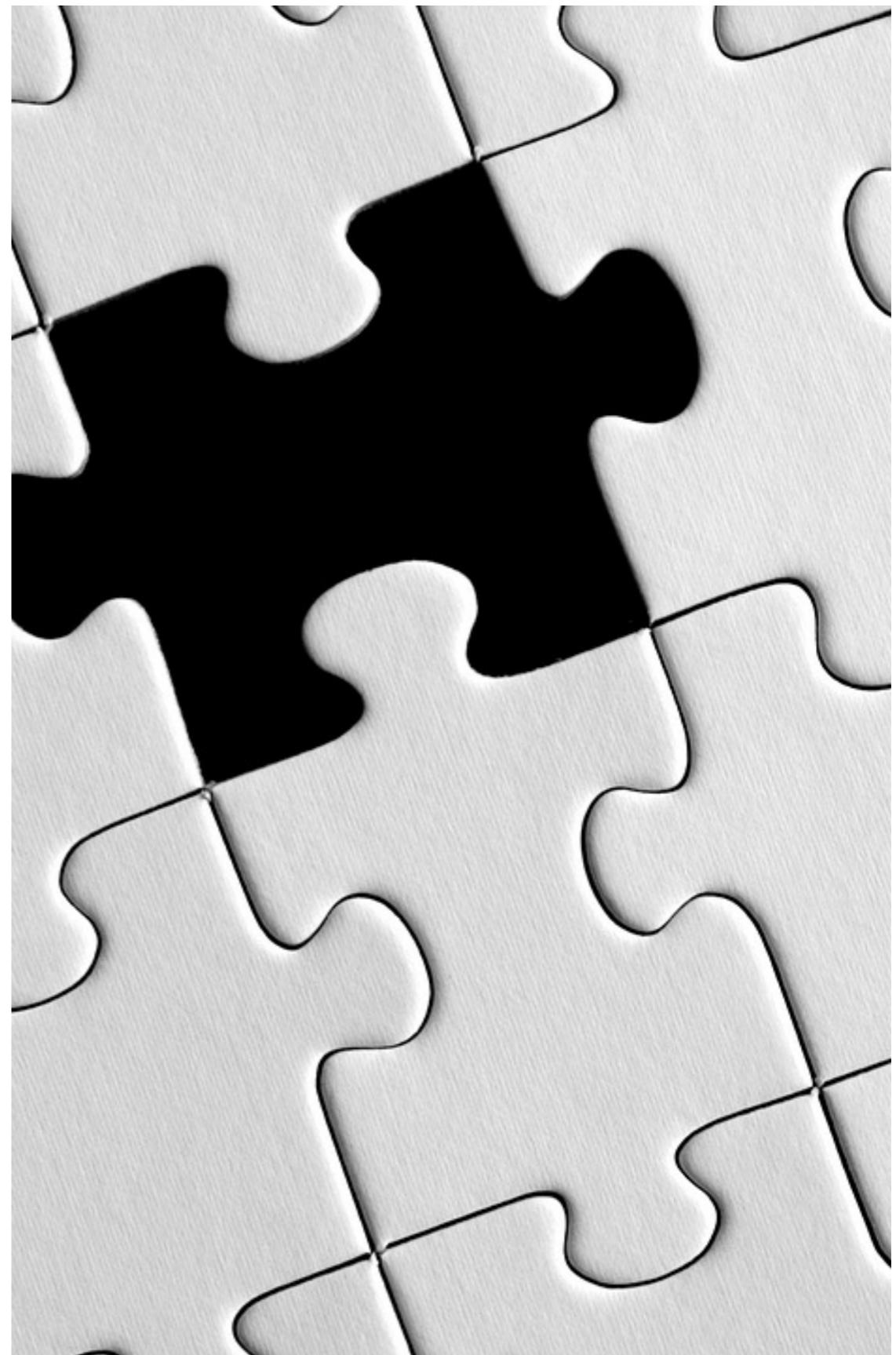


Error and response-dependence

It would be a strange confusion to suppose that the lamp-posts on the street get bigger as we move towards them and shrink in size as we move away. Yet it is not confused to suppose that a piece of rotten meat is all the more nauseating (or as some say “nauseous”) the closer we get to it. In the case of attributing the property of being nauseating to things, the only room for error is the supposition that there is an external object with the disposition to nauseate us, whereas in the case of size there is room for the thought that, as with the Muller-Lyer illusion, a thing might be stably disposed to appear to have a different size from its actual size. There could be no such stable illusions of the nauseating.

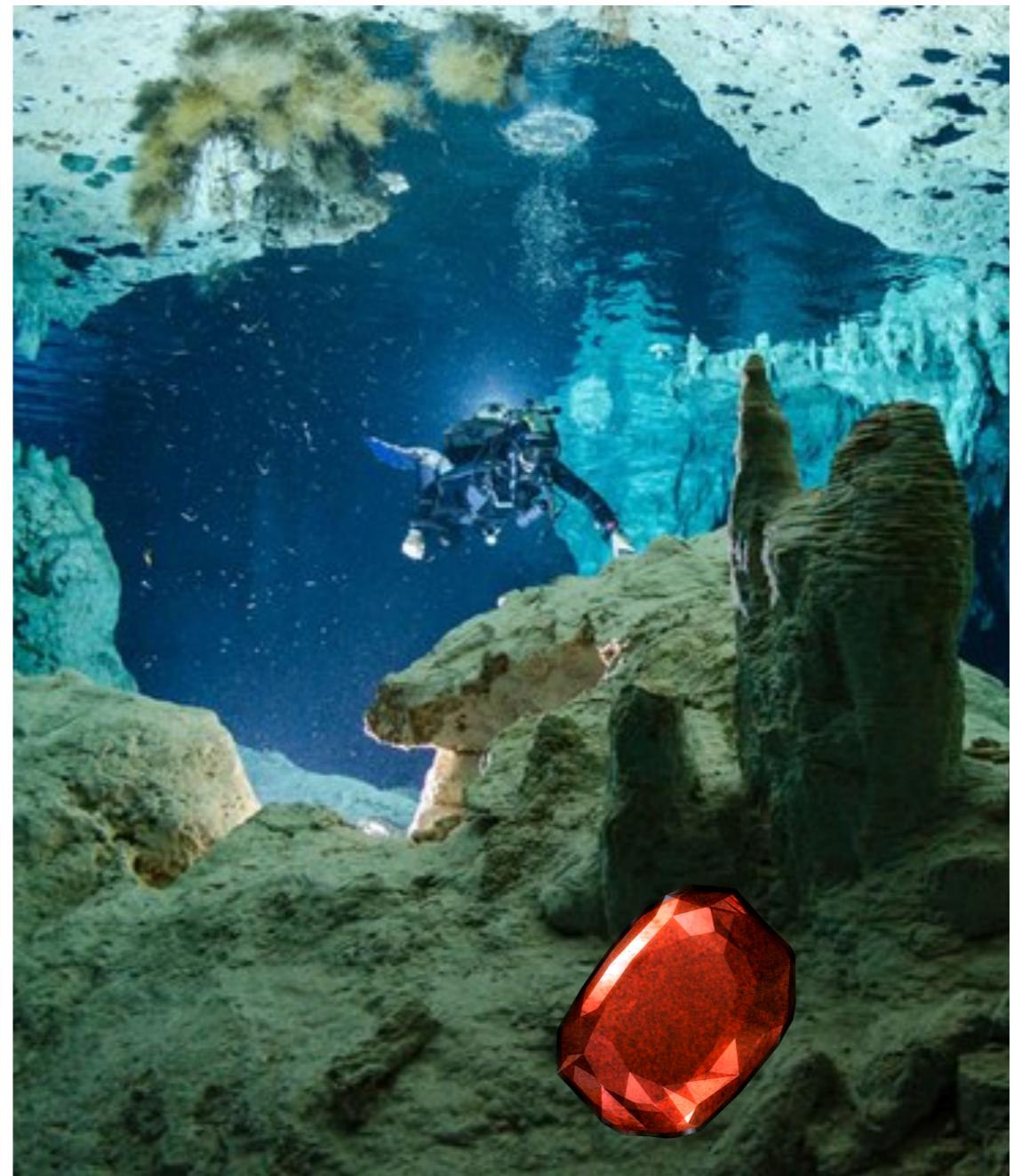
Missing explanation

- Johnston (1991), 'Explanation, Response-Dependence and Judgment-Dependence'
- Johnston (1998), 'Are Manifest Qualities Response-Dependent?'



Johnston's underwater cave

- There's a precious gem fixed to the wall of an underwater cave, and every normal perceiving subject who swims down and illuminates the gem so as to produce normal illumination conditions is disposed to see the stone as deep red (Johnston 1998)
- If these swimmers have genuinely perceived the colour of the gem, then they had the experience they had *because* the stone is deep red
- The availability of such an empirical explanation is entailed by the assumption that we sense or perceive its colour



Sensing and perceiving

- “ x is red iff x is disposed to look red to normal observers in normal conditions”
What is this response, ‘looking red to S’?
- **Answer A:** It is a state of *sensing* a quality. To sense a quality is to detect its presence using one’s senses
- **Answer B:** It is a state of *perceiving* a quality. To perceive a quality is to represent its presence in a perceptual belief about what is the case



Sensing and perceiving

Subjects are able to sense a family of qualities had by a range of objects only if this empirical generalization holds of them: each of the subjects has a disposition which in standard conditions issues in the appearing of an object having some of the qualities (i) just when the object in fact has these qualities and (ii) partly because the object has these qualities.

Subjects are able to perceive a family of qualities had by a range of objects only if this empirical generalization holds of them: each of the subjects has a disposition which in standard conditions issues in the immediate perceptual belief that an object has some of the qualities (i) just when the object in fact has these qualities and (ii) partly because the object has these qualities.

Missing Explanation Argument

1. For some x , x is disposed to look red to perceptually normal observers in perceptually normal conditions *because* x is red (Assumption, underwater cave)
2. It is a priori that x is red iff x is disposed to look red to normal observers in normal conditions (Assumption, response-dependence)
3. Hence, ‘ x is red’ and ‘ x is disposed to look red to normal observers in normal conditions’ are a priori equivalent, and may be freely substituted for one another (from 2)
4. For some x , x is disposed to look red to normal observers in normal conditions because x is disposed to look red to normal observers in normal conditions (from 1 and 3)
5. It is not the case that, for some x , x is disposed to look red to normal observers in normal conditions because x is disposed to look red to normal observers in normal conditions (Assumption, nature of explanation)
6. Contradiction

A dilemma for dispositionalism

- The upshot is that a perfectly ordinary explanation for why we have colour experiences goes missing.
- The aim of this Missing Explanation Argument is to show that the the following two claims are incompatible:
 - A. We can sense or perceive colours
 - B. Our colour concepts are response-dependent concepts

A dilemma for dispositionalism

- This is a dilemma for colour dispositionalism:
 - if we reject A we are pushed towards an eliminativism or subjectivism about colour
 - if we reject B We are pushed to a physicalism or primitivism about colour



An argument against colour dispositionalism?

1. We can sense or perceive colours (Assumption)
2. If we can sense or perceive some colours, then there must be an empirical explanation of why it is that every standard subject under standard conditions is disposed to see things of a certain colour things as having that colour (Assumption)
3. There must be an empirical explanation of why it is that every standard subject under standard conditions is disposed to see things of a certain colour things as having that colour (From 1,2 MP)
4. If colours are just dispositions to cause colour experience, then colour concepts are response-dependent concepts (Avoiding circularity objection to dispositionalism)
5. If colour concepts are response-dependent concepts, then there is no empirical explanation of why it is that every standard subject under standard conditions is disposed to see things of a certain colour things as having that colour (Missing Explanation Argument)
6. Colour concepts are not response-dependent concepts (From 3,5 MT)
7. Colours are not just dispositions to cause colour experience (From 4,6 MT)

Generality



Generality

- The Missing Explanation Argument is topic-neutral
- It can be used to show that the following two claims are incompatible:
 - A. We can sense or perceive (or track in some other way) the F-ness of things
 - B. Our concept of F-ness is a response-dependent concept

Plato's *Euthyphro*

Euth: Piety, then, is that which is dear to the gods, and impiety is that which is not dear to them.

Soc. It is loved because it is [pious], not [pious] because it is loved?

Euth. Yes.

- Why do the gods love the pious?
 - The gods love the pious because it is pious (empirical hypothesis)
 - The gods love the pious because it is what the gods love (vacuous)



Saving response- dependence



Saving response dependence

- Does this show there is something wrong with the idea of response-dependence?
- No: some properties might rightly be characterised in response-dependent terms
- It seems a priori that x is nauseating iff normal subjects in normal circumstances feel nausea when exposed to x



Saving response dependence

- But we don't want to say that we feel nausea *because* the object is nauseating

Suitable subjects are disposed to feel nausea when exposed to rotten meat because rotten meat has perceptible qualities (such as a purplish blush, evident maggot-riddenness, a noisome smell, etc.) which cause the feeling of nausea in the subjects in question.

- We have the feeling of nausea because the object is maggot-ridden, smelly, and visibly past its 'best before' date
- We do not conceive of 'being nauseating' itself as a sensible quality, but conceive of 'being nauseating' merely as associated with certain sensible qualities

Summary

1. Drawing distinctions: Primary and Secondary Qualities
2. Dispositionalist theories of qualities and response-dependent concepts
3. The Missing Explanation argument

