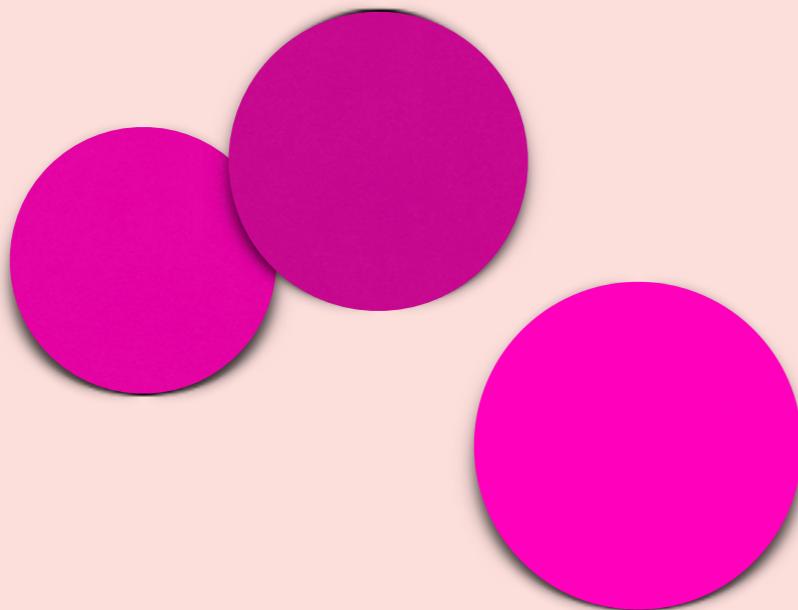


1

Qualities

Lent 2018



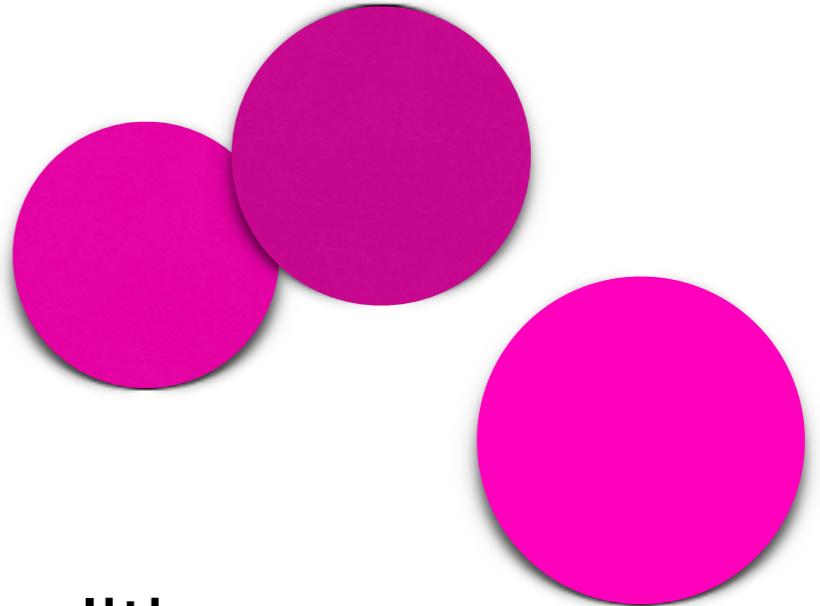
Dr Maarten Steenhagen
<http://msteenhangen.github.io/teaching/2018qua/>

Overview of lectures

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



Today



- Step 1: From attributes to sensible qualities
- Step 2: Primary and secondary qualities
 - Empirical-cum-phenomenological arguments
 - Conceptual arguments

From
attributes to
sensible
qualities

Step 1



What are qualities?

- Nowadays ‘quality’ is often used interchangeably with ‘property’: we use them simply to talk about a way of being
- Some urge we should distinguish them: properties are *conditions* or *states* of objects whereas qualities are ‘*abstract stuffs*’ that objects have. The latter come in degree while the former don’t
- Example: *being wise* and *wisdom*. The first does not come in degree: you cannot have more or less of being wise; but you can be more or less wise (e.g. Plato is wiser than Thales)
- Jerrold Levinson (‘Why there are no tropes’, 2006) proposes to use the term ‘attribute’ to cover both properties and qualities

Sensible qualities

- Some qualities, such as redness or roundness, are obviously sensible
- Some qualities, such as wisdom or virtuousness, are not obviously sensible
- A first challenge:
how do we distinguish the sensible from the non-sensible qualities?



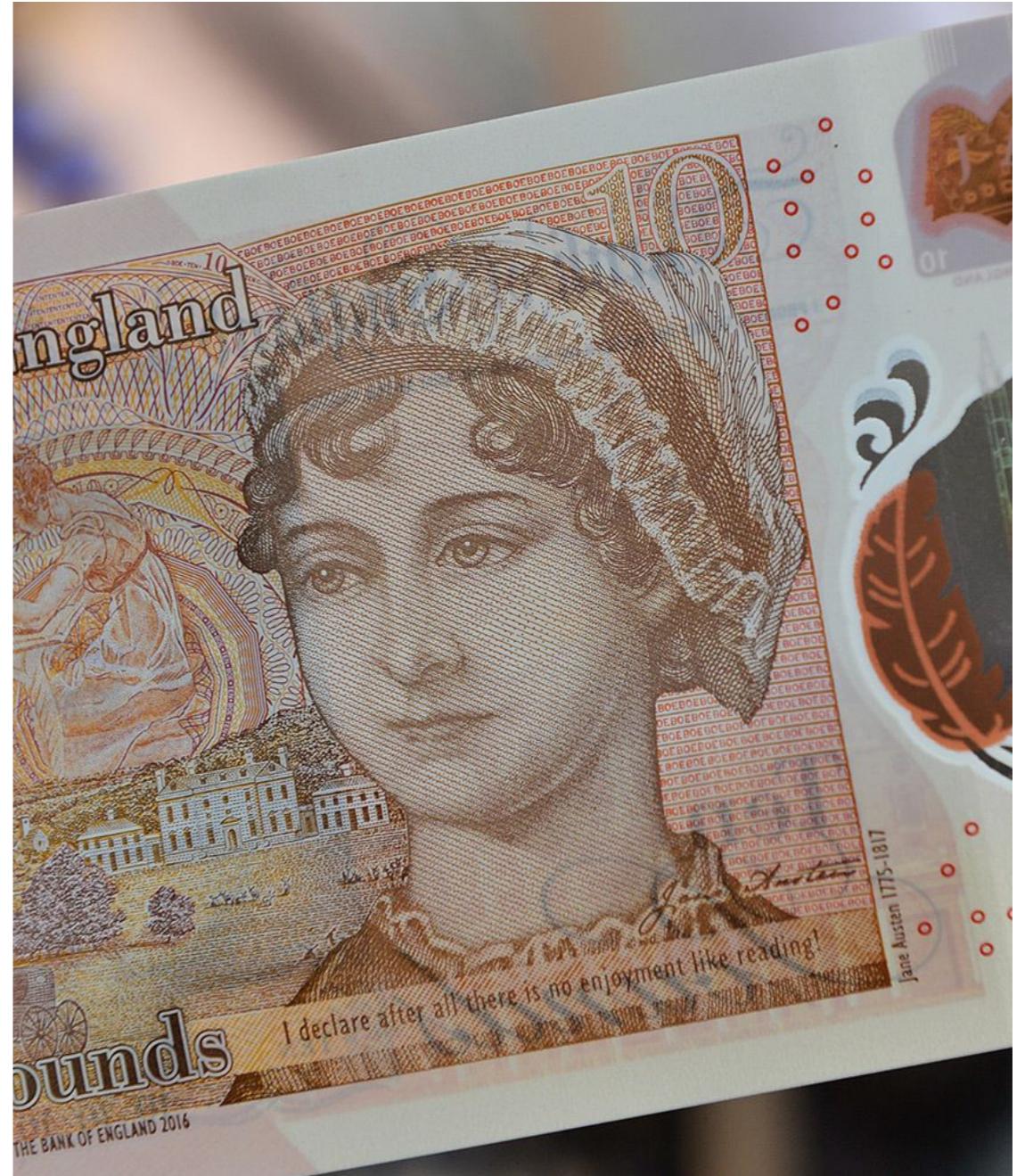
Sensible qualities

- Start with the idea of a qualitative duplicate: x is a qualitative duplicate of y iff there is no quality x has that y has not, and there is no quality y has that x has not
- In other words: x is a qualitative duplicate of y iff x and y are absolutely qualitatively indiscernible
- Qualitative duplicates can still differ in respect of their non-qualitative attributes (e.g. they may have different location, or one may have been born earlier)



Sensible qualities

- We can define the notion of a sensory duplicate by singling out those duplicates that we cannot tell apart just by sense perception
- Example: a reddish fake bank note lacks value, but cannot be distinguished perceptually from a valuable reddish £10 note
- Because we only require indiscernibility by our sensory modalities, sensory duplicates are *relatively* qualitatively indiscernible (i.e. not absolutely)

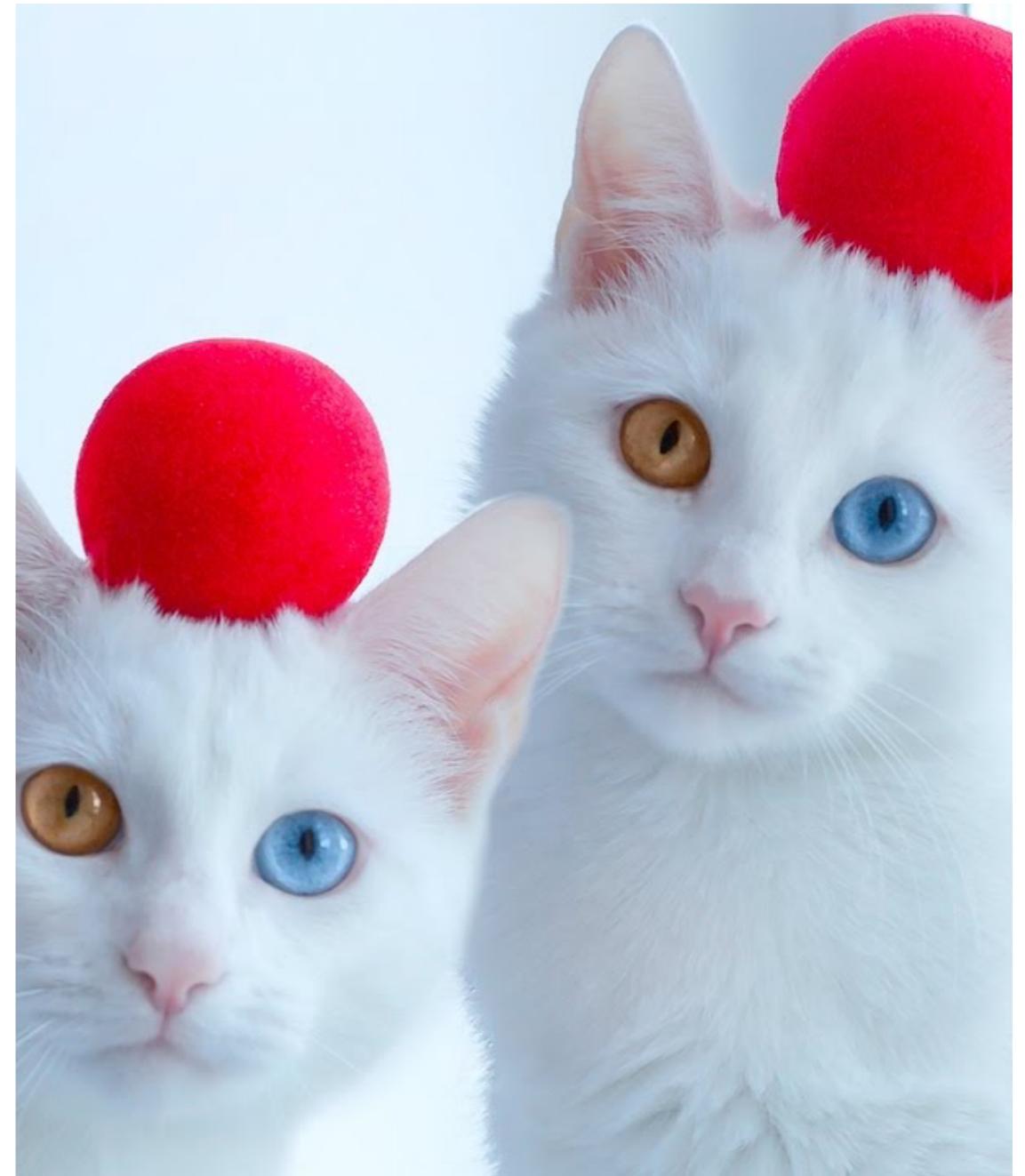


Sensible qualities



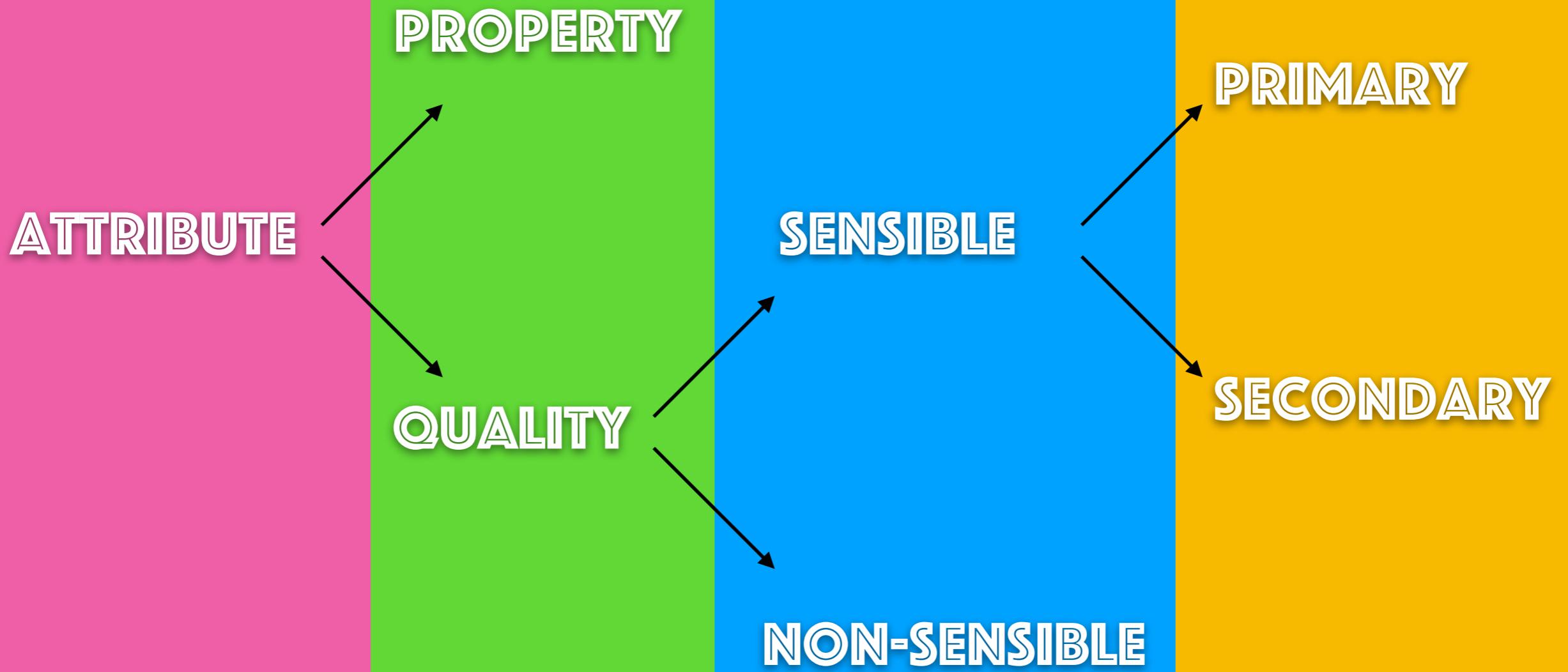
Sensible qualities

- This allows us to define what a **sensible quality** is: x is a sensible quality iff it is a quality that is necessarily shared by all of x 's sensory duplicates
- In the same way we can define 'observational concepts' or 'observational predicates'
- If we like, we can even introduce further restrictions by limiting the sensory modalities we're allowed to use, so that we arrive at visual duplicates (visual qualities), tactile duplicates (tactile qualities), etc.



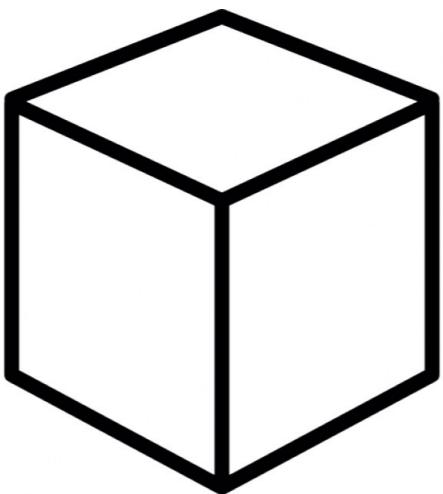
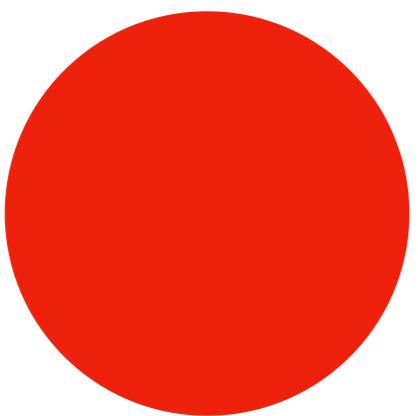
ROADMAP





Primary and secondary qualities

Step 2



Intuitive?

- Johnston: “the very distinction between primary and secondary qualities has itself the dubious distinction of being better understood in extension rather than intension. Most of us can generate two lists under the two headings, but the principles by which the lists are generated are controversial, even obscure.” (‘How to speak of the colors?’, 1992)

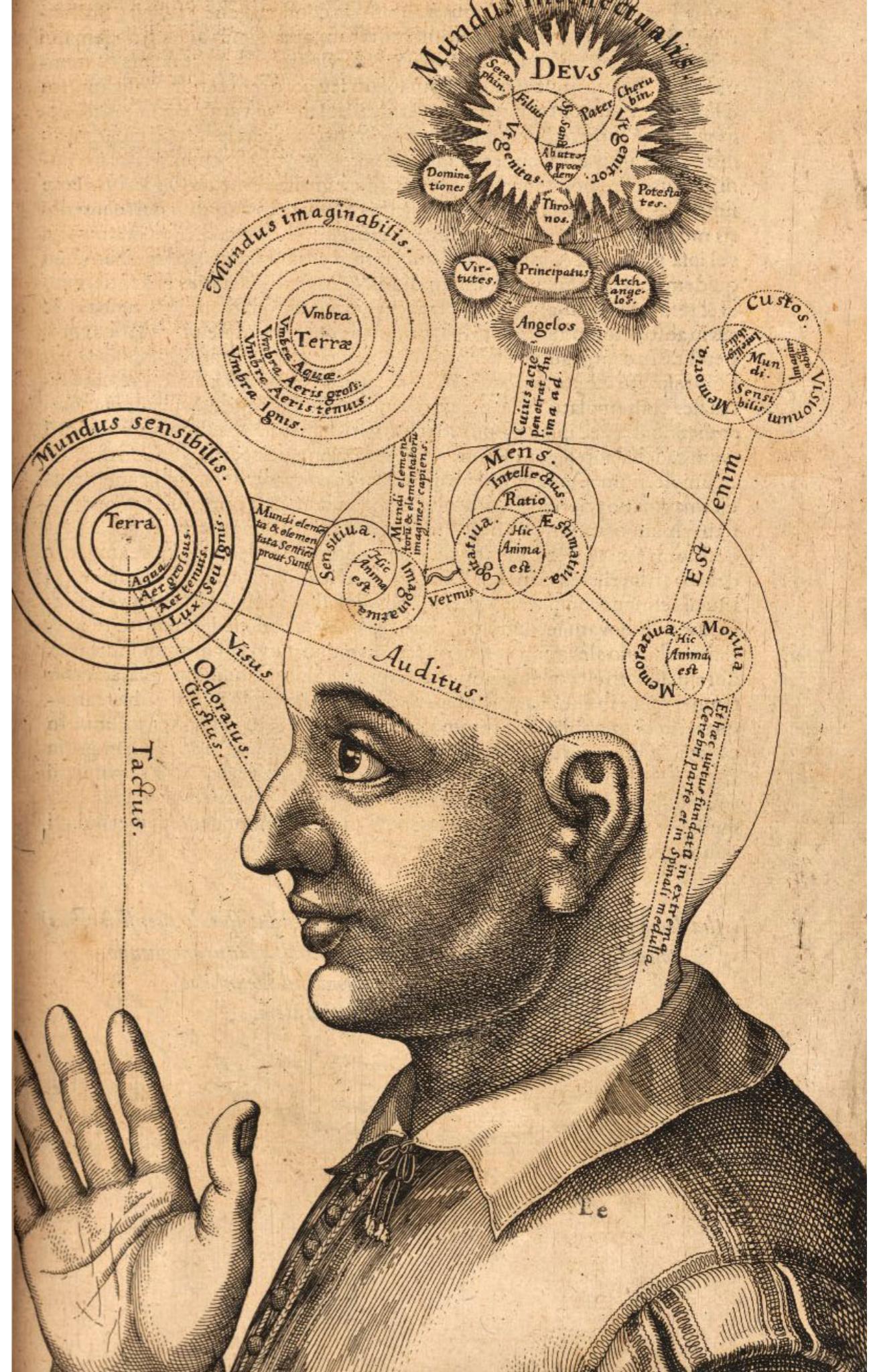


Metaphysics?

- One suggestion: draw the distinction at the level of metaphysics
- The primary qualities are the **categorical, objective** ones, whereas the secondary qualities are **dispositional** or **subjective**
- Problem: this is not informative. The metaphysical criterion presupposes that we have an obvious way of telling whether redness, say, is dispositional and not categorical. But we don't have such a way of telling

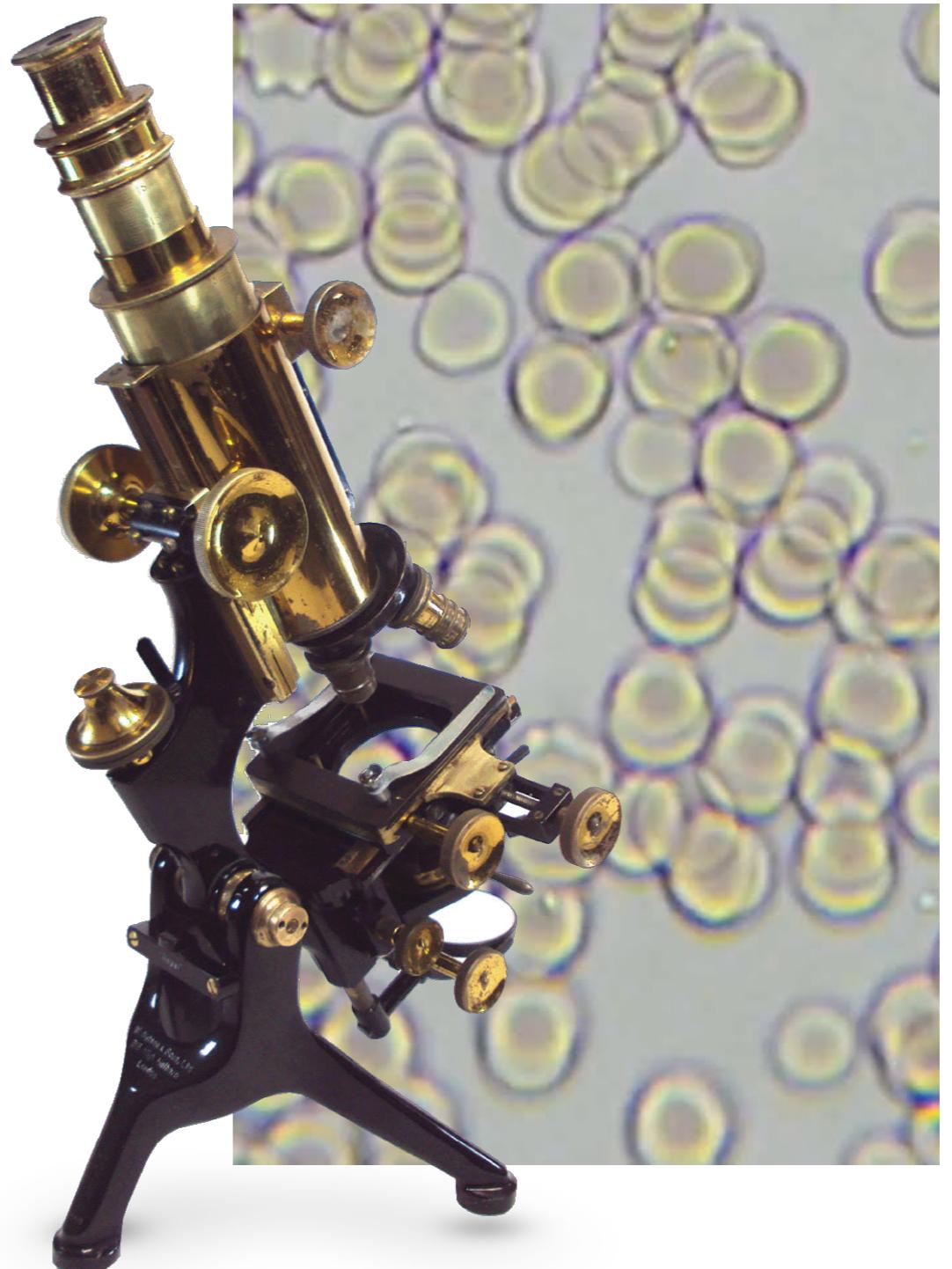
Arguments from observation

- We can set metaphysics aside and try to draw a distinction based on phenomenology or observation
 - What we should be looking for is a broadly empirical way in which a distinction within the group of sensible qualities manifests itself
 - Can we really observe the difference?



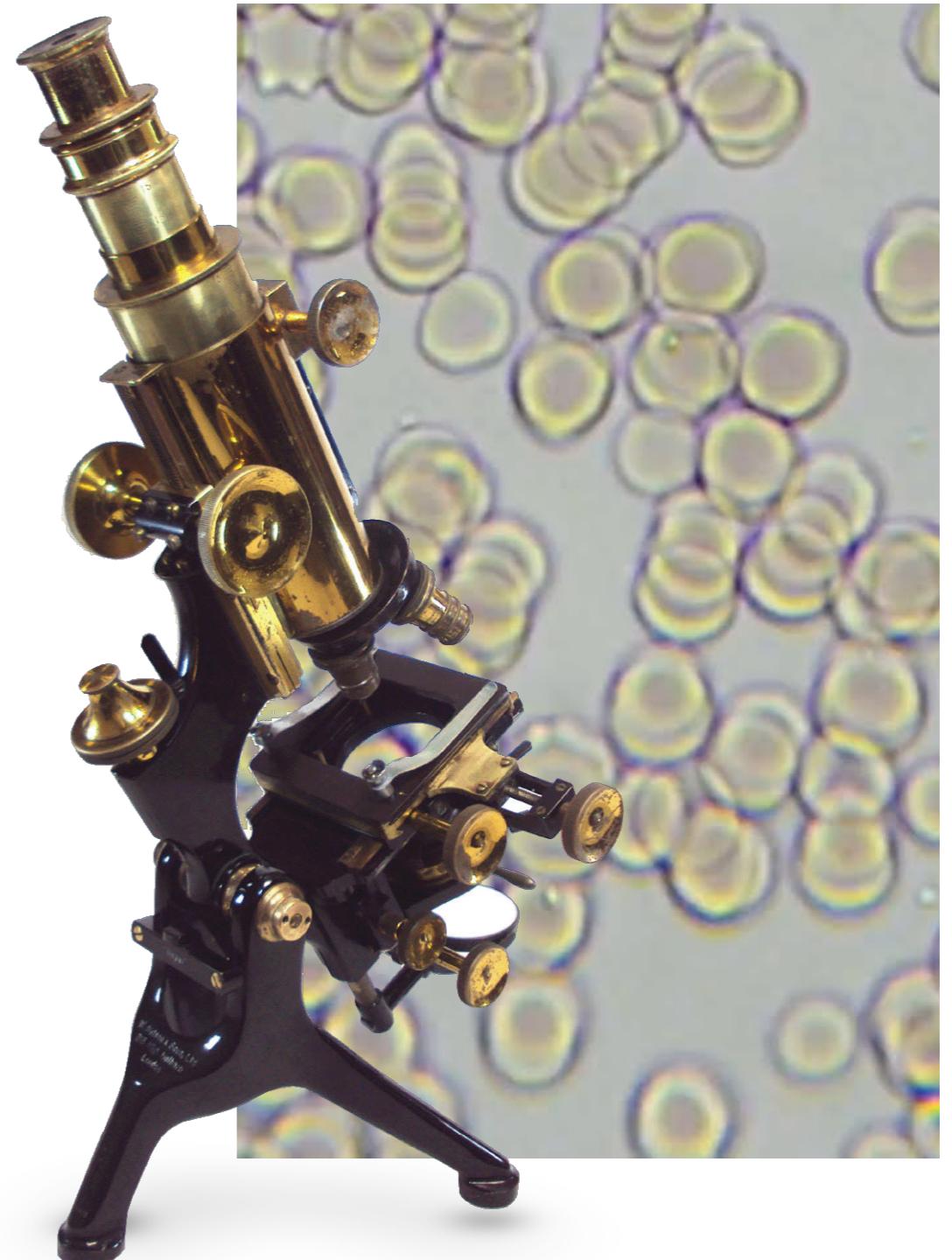
Argument from microscopes

- Locke reports looking at a droplet of blood: “Blood to the naked eye appears all red; but by a good microscope, wherein its lesser parts appear, shows only some few globules of red, swimming in a pellucid liquor.” (*Essay II*: 23.11).



Argument from microscopes

- “Had we senses acute enough to discern the minute particles of bodies, and the real constitution on which their sensible qualities depend, I doubt not but they would produce quite different ideas in us: and that which is now the yellow colour of gold, would then disappear, and instead of it we should see an admirable texture of parts, of a certain size and figure.” (Locke)

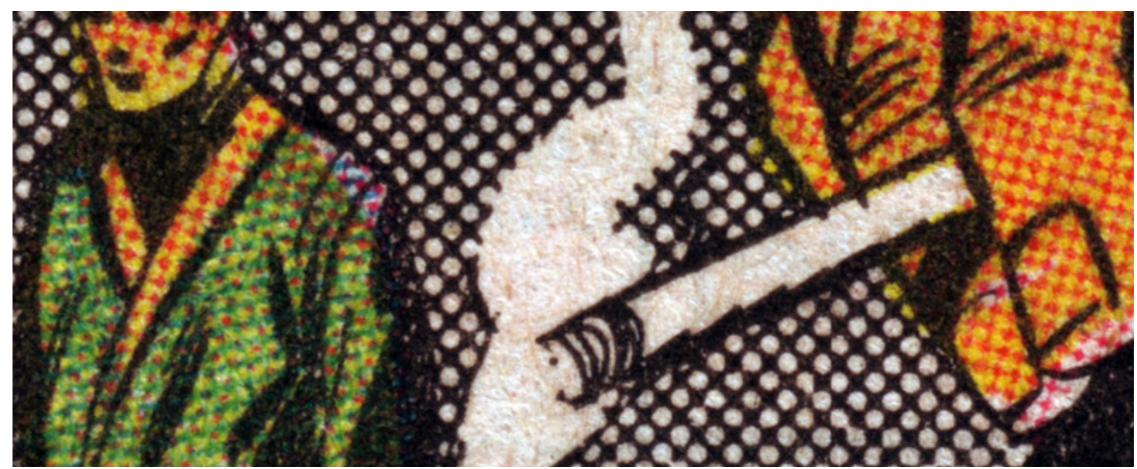
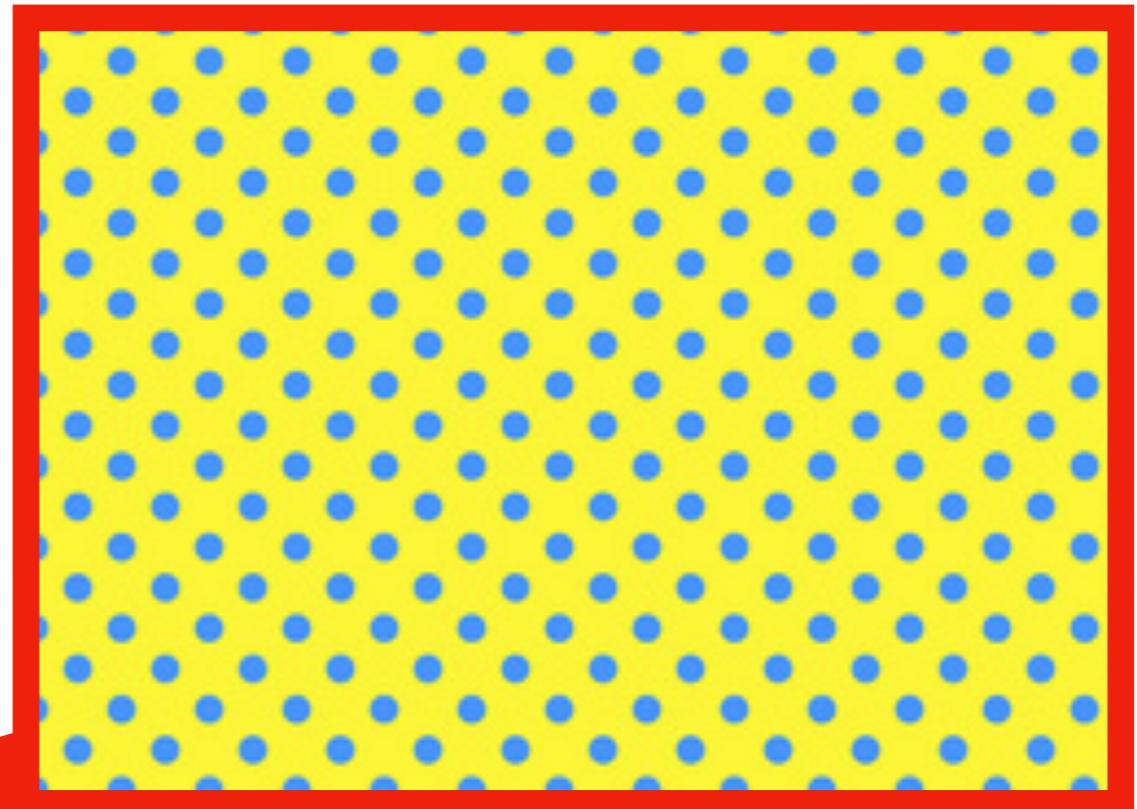


Argument from microscopes

- Colour is a ‘secondary’ quality
- Locke: The microscope reveals the true features of the physical world, and the redness of the blood is not really part of it
- Berkeley: If the colour really belonged to the blood, this means that the blood itself must have undergone some change. But the blood itself has not changed. And so the redness does not really belong to the blood



Argument from comics



Conflicting appearances

- In its most basic form, all such ‘paradoxes of conflicting appearances’ consist of three jointly inconsistent claims
 1. **Variation:** x appears F and x appears G
 2. **Veridicality:** The F appearance and the G appearance are veridical
 3. **Incompatibility:** Nothing is both F and G
- If we reject 2, then it may be *ad hoc* to say of the F-ness that it is real while taking the G-ness to be unreal. So we should admit that bot the F appearance and the G appearance are in some way unreal, given 3

Conceptual arguments

Observational concepts and normal conditions



Observational concepts and normal conditions

- Crispin Wright ('Moral Values, Projection and Secondary Qualities', 1988) suggests that for both primary and secondary qualities, we can construct true bi-conditionals of the form:

x is Q iff for any S : if S were perceptually normal and were to encounter x in perceptually normal conditions, S would experience x as Q
- These bi-conditionals are not only true, but also seem knowable a priori to someone who has a grasp of the observational concept Q , given certain specifications of the normal conditions
 - Example: if I have the concept of red, I can know a priori that if this apple were red and if conditions were normal, I would experience this apple as red

A priori links and normal conditions

- However, there is a contrast between the bi-conditionals for observational predicates like ‘red’ on the one hand and observational predicates like ‘square’ on the other
- Wright suggests that the difference is in what counts as the relevant normal conditions (C-conditions)
 - A. $\forall x$ C-conditions obtain \rightarrow (Suitable subject S judges that x is red \leftrightarrow x is red)
 - B. $\forall x$ C-conditions obtain \rightarrow (Suitable subject S judges that x is square \leftrightarrow x is square)

Independence of C- conditions

- Someone who understands “red” already has a grasp of what conditions need to be met for her judgment ‘x is red’ to be authoritative and true
- Those conditions have to do with overall circumstances and her perceptual apparatus and attentiveness and can be specified without mentioning what colour the object in fact has



Independence of C-conditions

- The situation for ‘square’ is very different
- What are the C-conditions that make perceptual judgments of squareness authoritative and true?
- What needs to be the case for the appearance of something as square to be conclusion reason to believe that it is square?



Shape shifters?

- Consider the possibility of shape-shifters: these are objects (mythical creatures, perhaps) that are not square but present the characteristic aspect of square things
- An ignorant subject encountering a shape-shifter is inevitably led to judge that she sees a square, because the shifter will present a square appearance
- To rule out cases like the shape-shifters, we must stipulate that C-conditions have to include that x is in fact is square



Independence of C-conditions

- If this is right, then concepts like ‘red’ differ in C-conditions from concepts like ‘square’
- Only in the former case are (non-trivial) a priori C-conditions logically independent of facts about the subject matter in question
 - A. $\forall x C_{\text{red-ind}}\text{-conditions obtain} \rightarrow (\text{Suitable subject } S \text{ judges that } x \text{ is red} \leftrightarrow x \text{ is red})$
 - B. $\forall x C_{\text{square-dep}}\text{-conditions obtain} \rightarrow (\text{Suitable subject } S \text{ judges that } x \text{ is square} \leftrightarrow x \text{ is square})$

A conceptual primary/ secondary distinction

- A quality Q is secondary iff it is associated with an observational concept for which the C-conditions are logically independent of facts about Q
- Why is this? Wright suggests that judgments about secondary qualities, when formed in the right circumstances, determine the extension of the concept, whereas judgements about primary qualities can at best track the concept's extension



A conceptual primary/ secondary distinction

[T]he beliefs, if any, which we (would) have formed, or will or would form, under the relevant C-conditions, serve to determine the extension of the concept red. And this claim is to be understood by contrast with the thought that beliefs keep track of an extension which is independently determined.”
(Wright 1988, 18)

- Perhaps there are other ways the distinction shows up (e.g. as in the empirical arguments), but this conceptual distinction helps us see that the secondary qualities are, at least conceptually, tied to our senses in a way primary qualities are not. (cf. Pasnau ‘A Theory of Secondary Qualities’, 2006)

Next week

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

