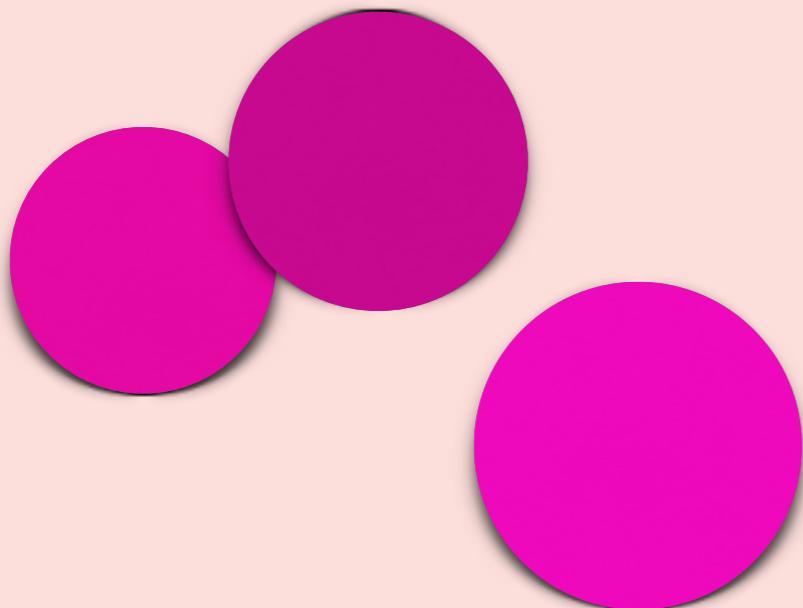


3

Qualities

Lent 2018



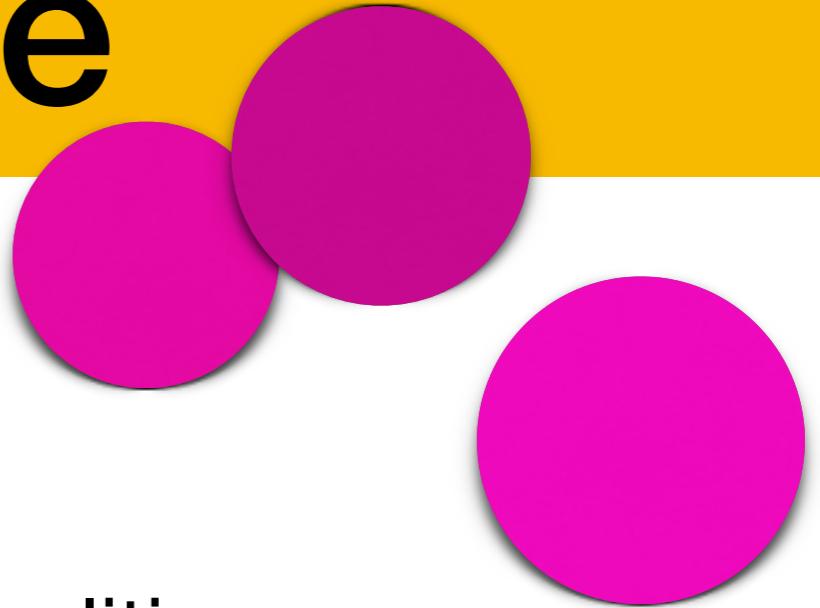
Dr Maarten Steenhagen
<http://msteenhangen.github.io/teaching/2018qua/>

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

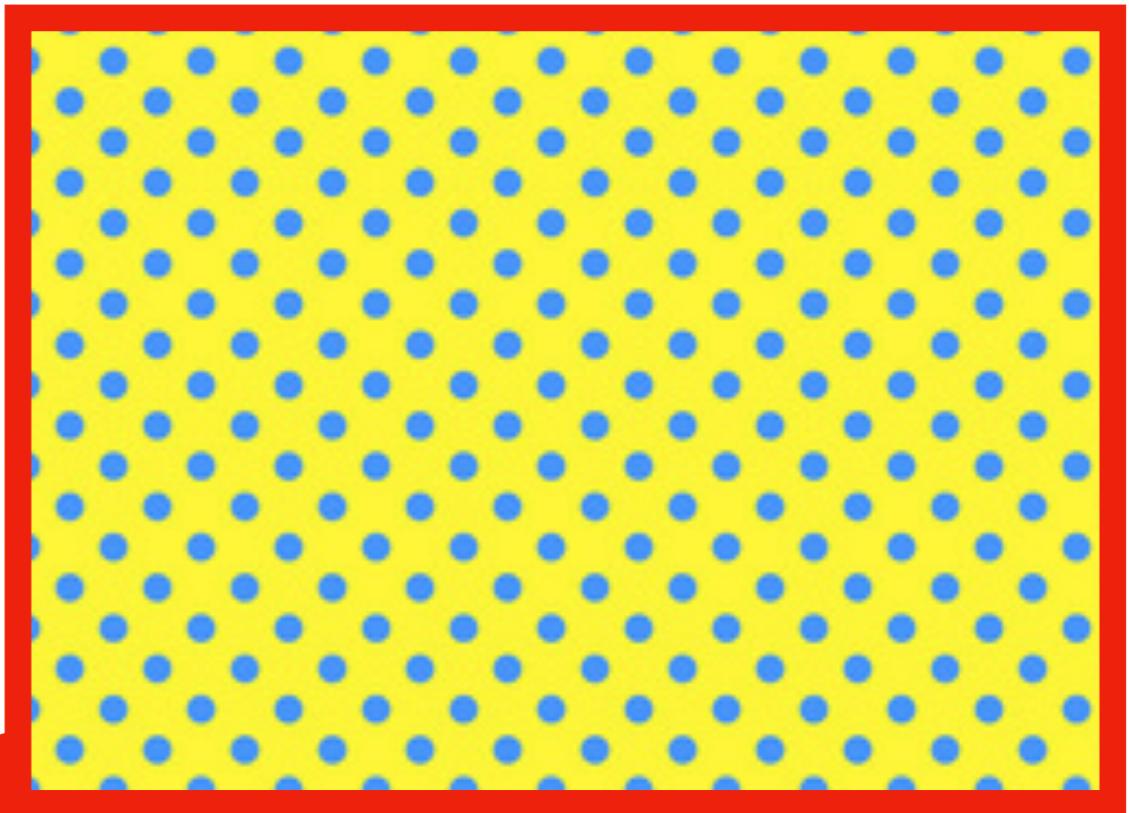


Last time



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

Empirical distinctions



Conceptual distinctions

- Wright: there is a contrast between available bi-conditionals for observational predicates like ‘red’ on the one hand and observational predicates like ‘square’ on the other
 - 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
- The difference is in what counts as the relevant normal conditions (C-conditions): only in the former case are (non-trivial) *a priori* C-conditions logically independent of facts about the subject matter in question (i.e. substantial): this difference between predicates can be used to mark a difference between properties

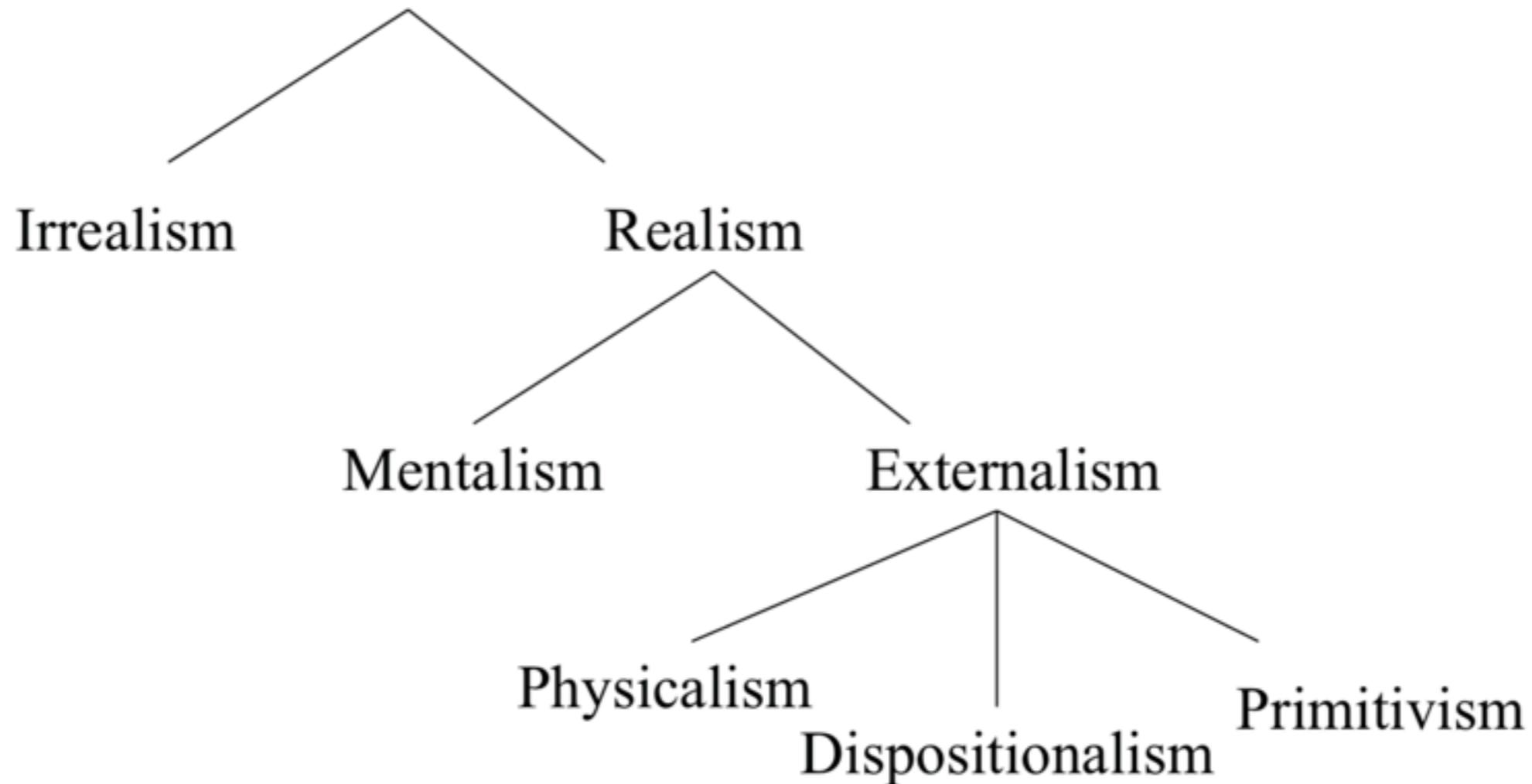
Drawing up the list

- **Argument from microscopes:**
the secondary qualities are, at least epistemically, tied to our sense experience in a way primary qualities are not
- **Argument from substantial a priori biconditionals:**
the secondary qualities are, at least conceptually, tied to our sense experience in a way primary qualities are not
- These arguments allow us to distinguish primary and secondary qualities. But they do not obviously tell us about the nature of secondary qualities

Metaphysics of colour



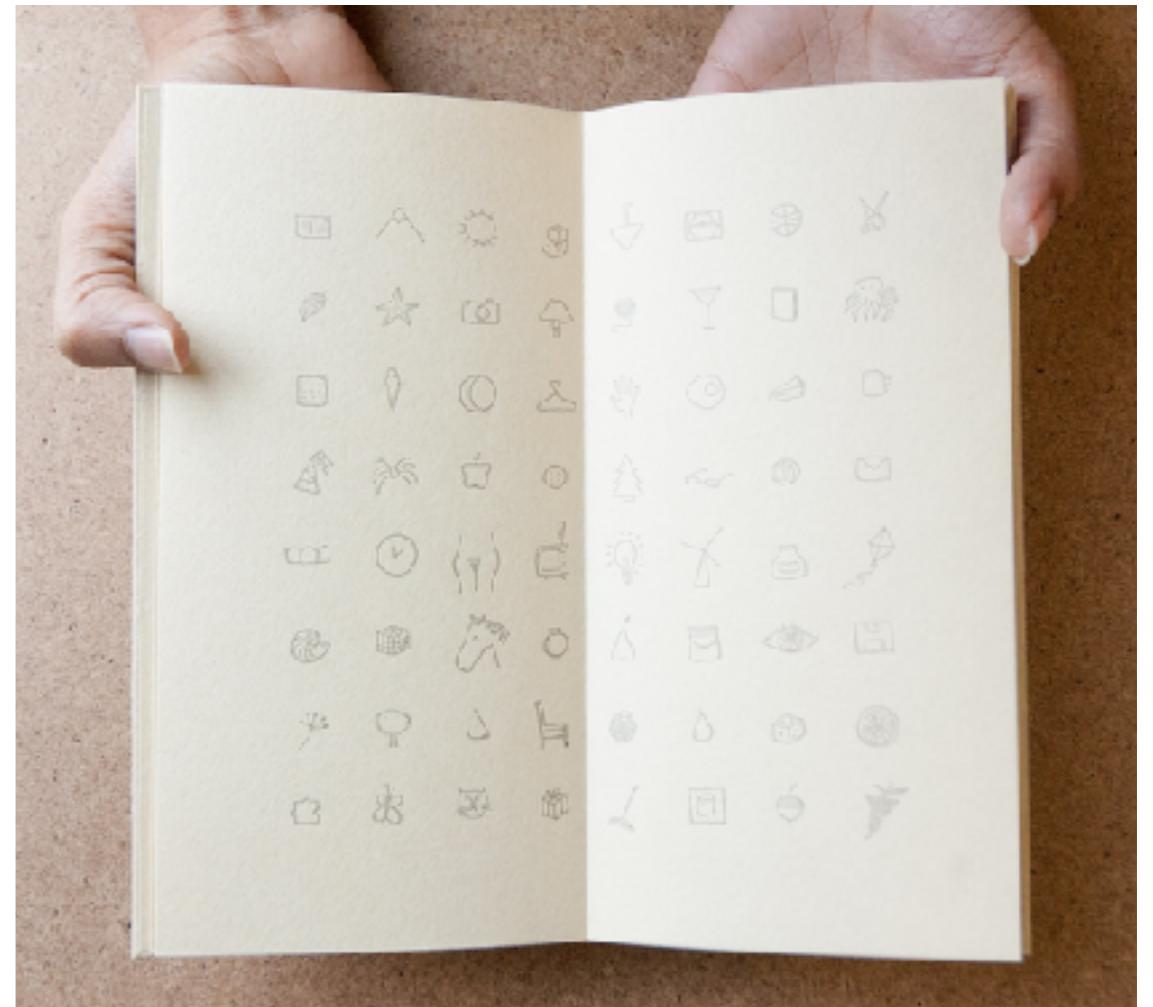
Standard taxonomy



(cf. Cohen 2009, Ch. 1; Cohen also suggests an alternative taxonomy)

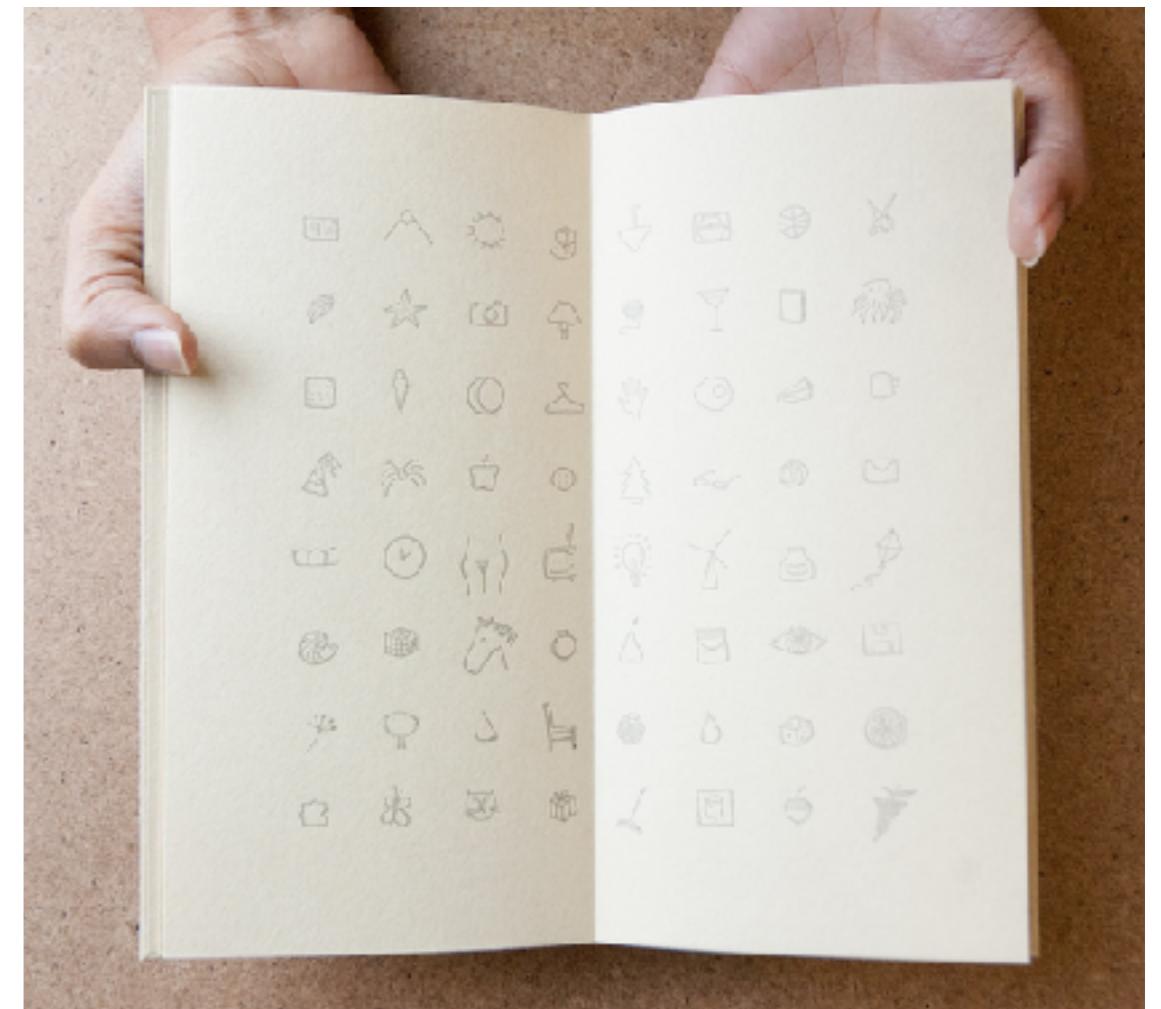
Standard taxonomy

- **Eliminativism** ('irrealism'): there are no colours, so we can't perceive them
 - **Subjectivism** ('mentalism'): there are colours, but they are not in the world, so we can't perceive them
 - **Physicalism**: there are colours, and they are in the world, and we can perceive them, and their nature can be fully explicated in experience-independent, physical terms
 - **Dispositionalism**: there are colours, and they are in the world, and we can perceive them, and their nature can be fully explicated in terms of their typical mental effects
 - **Primitivism**: there are colours, and they are in the world, and we can perceive them, and their nature is not fully explicable



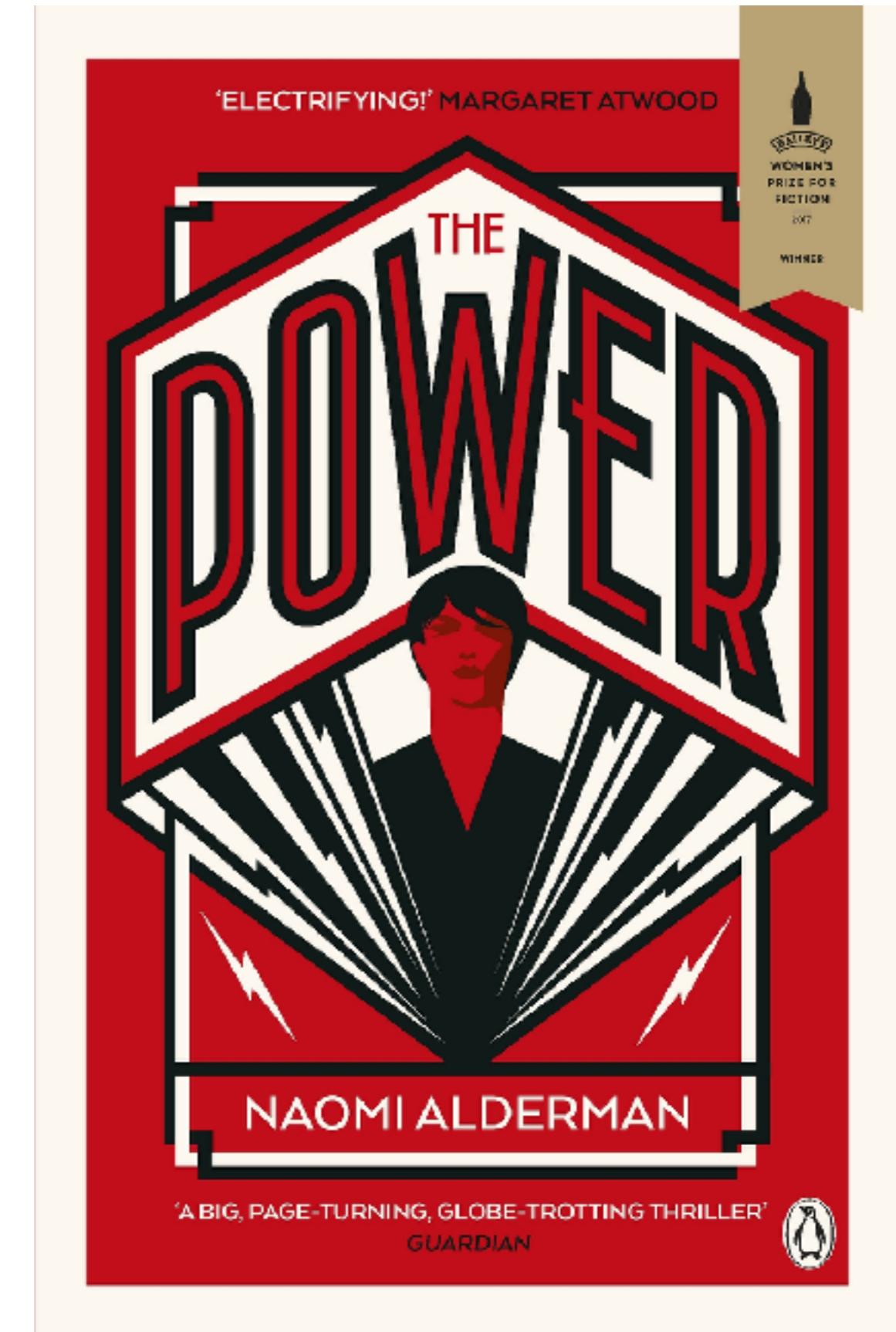
Standard taxonomy

- There are different ways of drawing up the taxonomy (see Cohen 2009, Ch. 1 for an alternative)
- This taxonomy doesn't only work for debates about colour but for debates about qualities more generally (e.g. ethical values, aesthetic properties, funniness)
- If we assume (a) that we can perceive colours and (b) that what it is like to perceive colour is somehow part of its nature, then we have to choose: dispositionalism or primitivism?



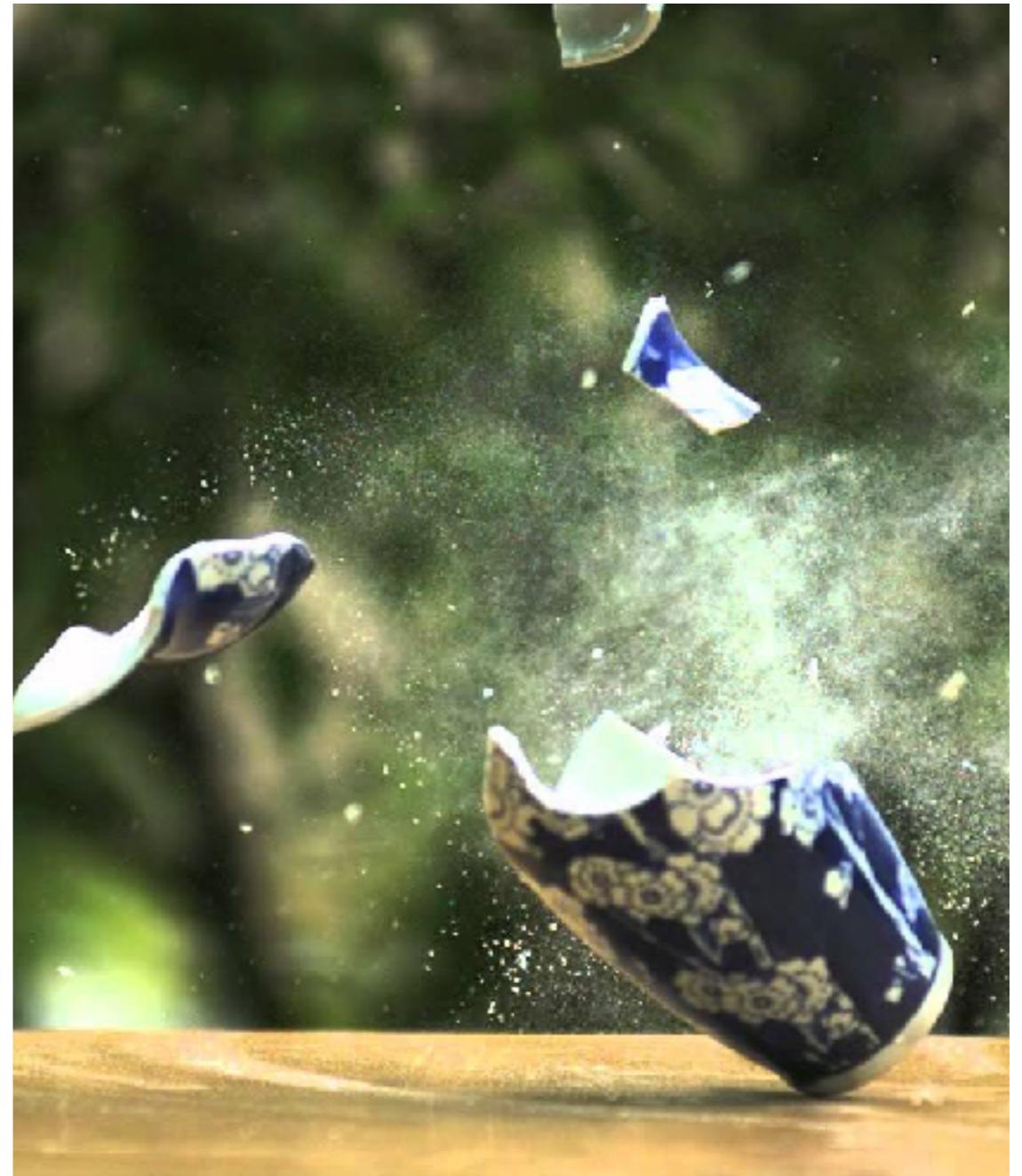
Colours as dispositions

“I think it is safe to say that dispositionalism, in a suitably broad sense, is the received view about color ontology in philosophy” (Cohen 2009:4)



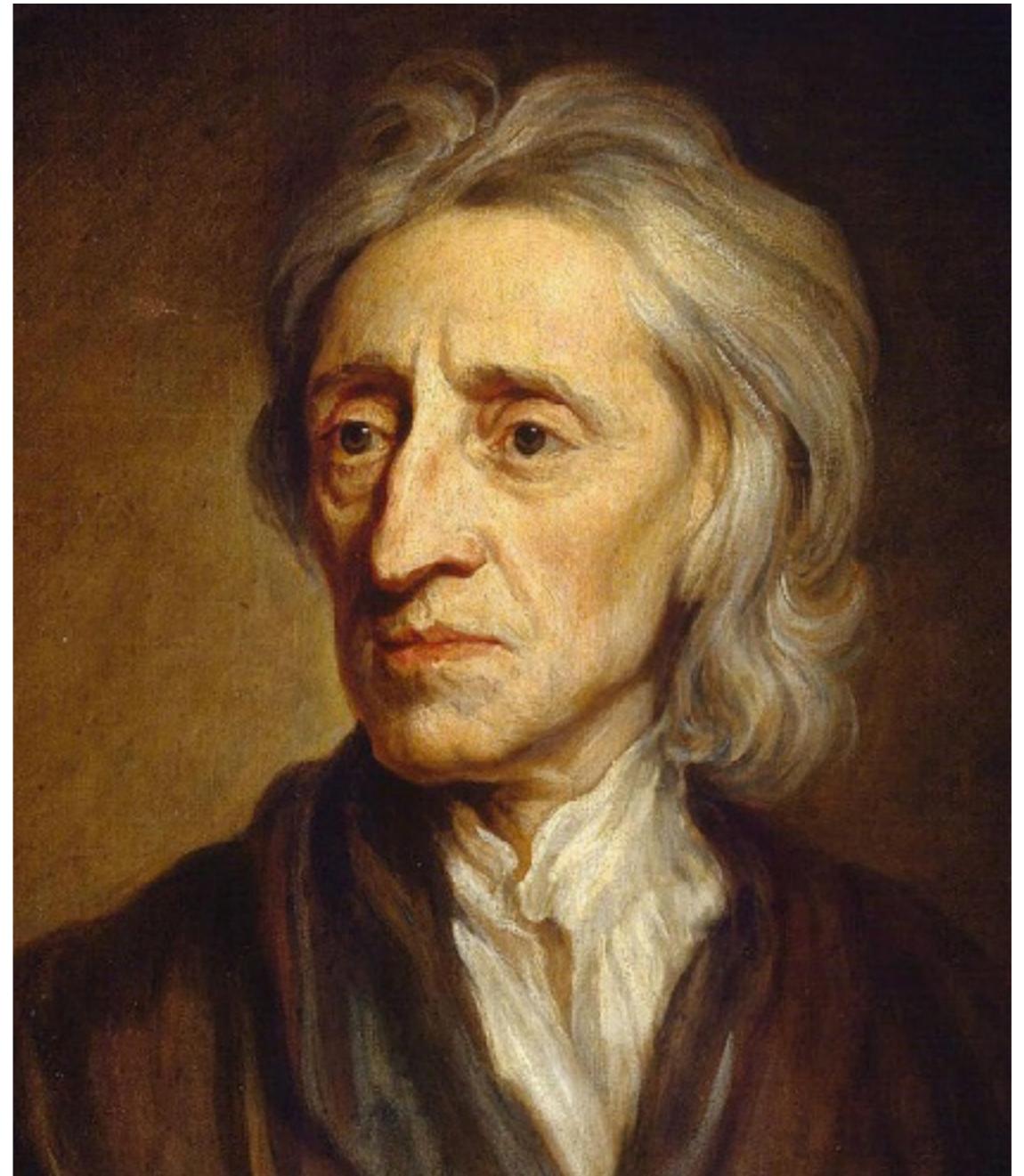
Colour dispositionalism

- Dispositionalism about colour tries to harmonise subjectivist intuitions with a realist outlook
 - Colours are essentially visual qualities (tied to the mind)
 - Colours are at the surfaces of objects (tied to the world)
- Standard conception of dispositions:
An object is disposed to M when C iff it would M if it were the case that C (see Lewis 1997 for complications)
- (Recall, *dispositional* properties contrast with *categorical* properties)



Colour dispositionalism

- Dispositionalism about colour:
x is red iff x is disposed to look red to normal observers in normal conditions
- Locke: “Whatsoever the mind perceives in itself, or is the immediate object of perception, thought, or understanding, that I call idea; and the power to produce any ideas in our mind, I call quality of the [body] wherein that power is.”



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)



Circularity?

- If ‘red’ is a response dependent concept, then we can have a grasp of something’s looking red to us (i.e. a specific sensory response, experience, or judgment) prior to understanding what it is to be red
- Such concepts are fine. For example, we can understand ‘being nauseating’ in terms of ‘finding something nauseating’ without circularity



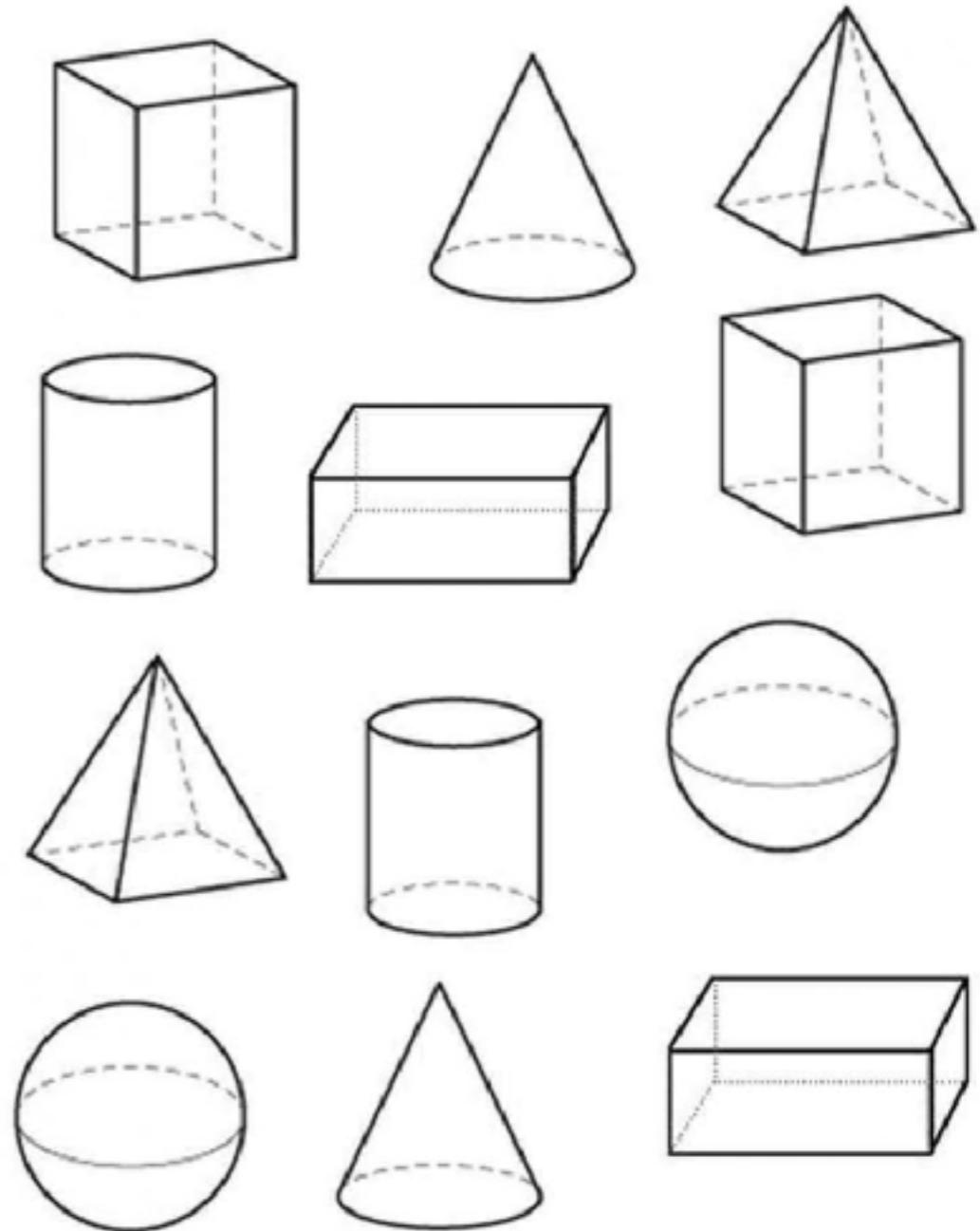
Colour dispositionalism

- So to avoid circularity, we must assume that ‘red’ is a response-dependent concept. Our concept of being red is that of a disposition to look red. We can express this more precisely:

R: 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
- This is just the kind of biconditional Wright exploited to distinguish secondary qualities from the primary ones; but now we use it to elucidate the precise nature of colour as dispositional property
 - being red is a purely dispositional property iff biconditional R is a priori and substantial

Shape dispositionalism?

- Recall, the parallel for ‘square’ is not both *a priori* and *substantial*. We can now see why: because ‘square’ is not a response-dependent concept
 - x is square iff x is disposed to look square to normal observers in normal conditions
- Hence, being square is not purely dispositional in nature; it is at least in part a categorical property



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?

