

Perception

LECTURE TWO | MICHAELMAS 2018

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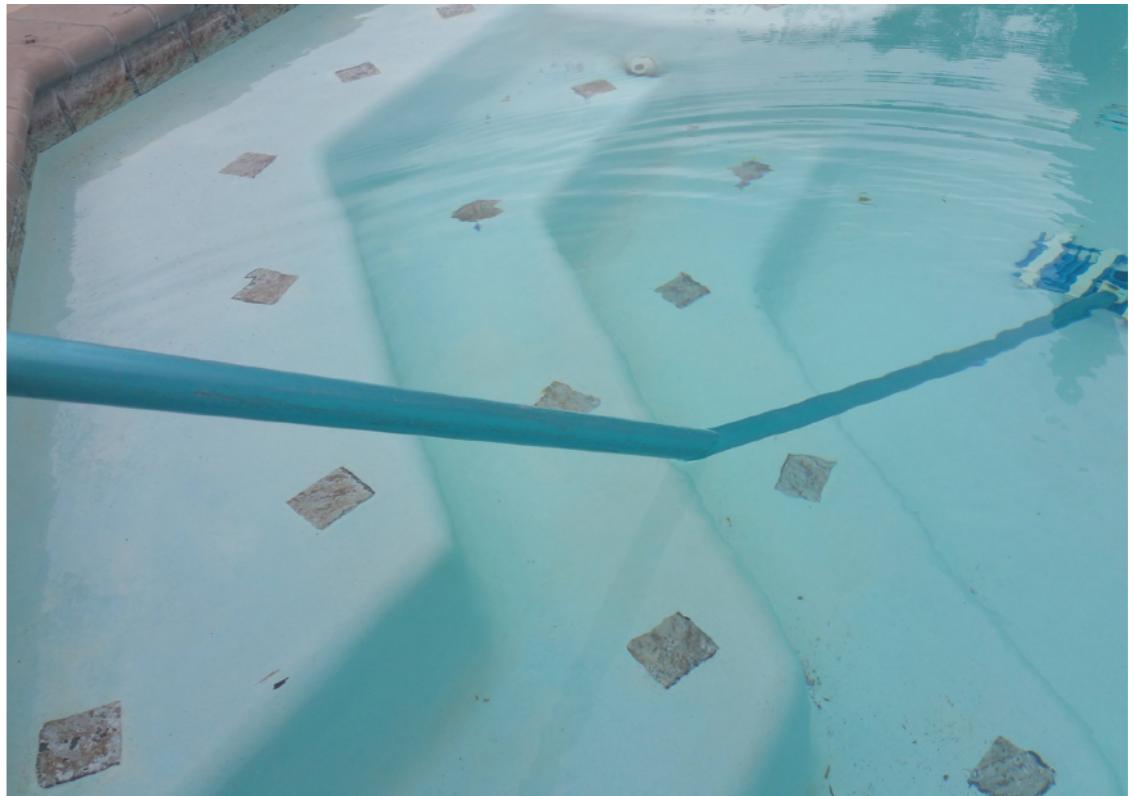
Last Week

- Phenomenological approach
- Naive Realism
- Sense Datum Theory



Argument from Illusion







Argument from Illusion

- “In some/many/most/all cases of perception, we are aware of something that possesses different sensible properties from those possessed by the physical object we take ourself to be perceiving. That of which we are aware is, therefore, something other than the object purportedly perceived.” (Robinson. *Perception* 1994:31)

What's the argument?

Robinson's version of the Argument from Illusion:

1. When viewing a straight stick half-submerged in water, one is directly aware of something bent.
2. None of the familiar objects in your environment is bent in this situation.
3. Therefore, in this situation, one is directly aware of something other than the familiar objects in your environment.

What's the argument?

More accurate (but invalid) version:

1. When viewing a straight stick half-submerged in water, one is directly aware of **something that looks bent**.
2. None of the familiar objects in your environment is bent in this situation.
3. Therefore, in this situation, one is directly aware of something other than the familiar objects in your environment.

What's the argument?

Revised and valid version:

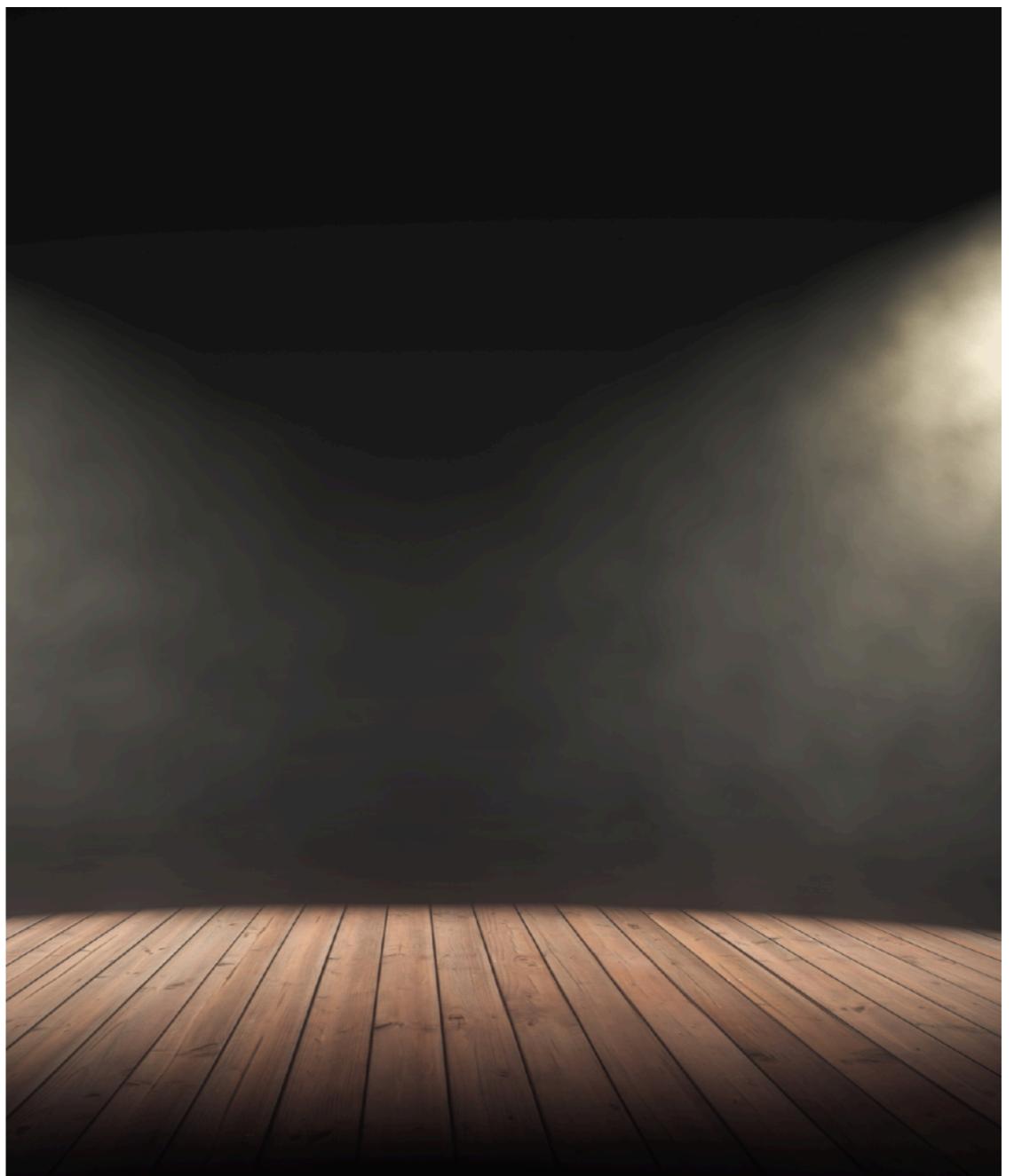
1. When viewing a straight stick half-submerged in water, one is directly aware of **something that looks bent**.
2. If one is aware of something that *looks bent*, then the thing one is aware of *is bent*. ('Phenomenal Principle')
3. None of the familiar objects in your environment is bent in this situation.
4. Therefore, in this situation, one is directly aware of something other than the familiar objects in your environment.

Phenomenal Principle

- “What is wrong, what is even faintly surprising, in the idea of a stick's being straight but looking bent sometimes ? Does anyone suppose that if something is straight, then it jolly well has to *look* straight at all times and in all circumstances? Obviously no one seriously supposes this.” (Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* 1964:29)
- Problem for the revised argument: P2, ‘If one is aware of something that *looks* bent, then the thing one is aware of *is* bent’, seems highly implausible if we know that straight things can look bent sometimes.

Candidate physical objects

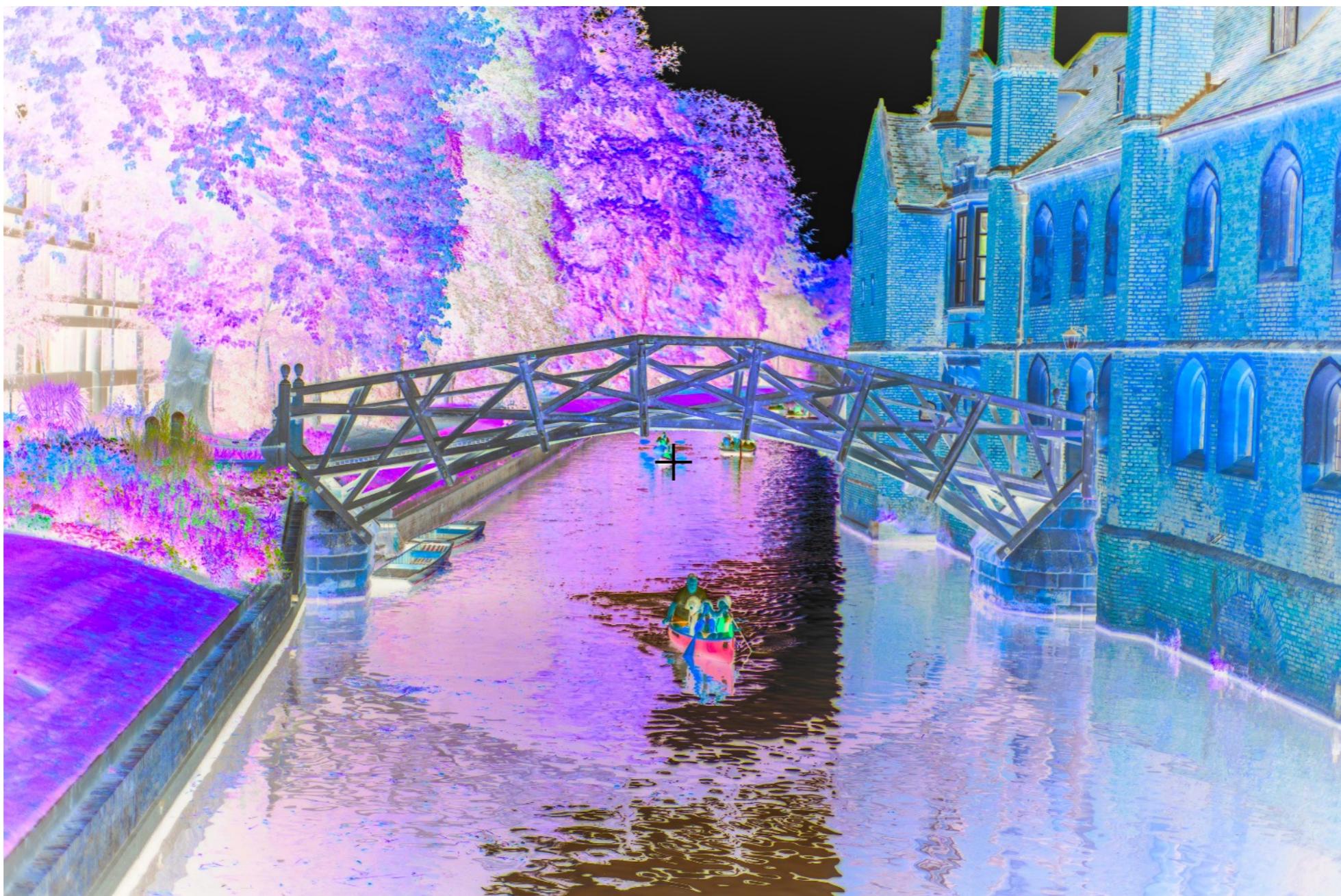
- The problem with the argument from illusion is its dependence on the Phenomenal Principle
- Without that principle, a bent-stick perception could be understood as a misleading presentation of a straight stick; there still is a mind-mind-independent candidate object
- Can we find cases where there is no plausible candidate mind-independent object?





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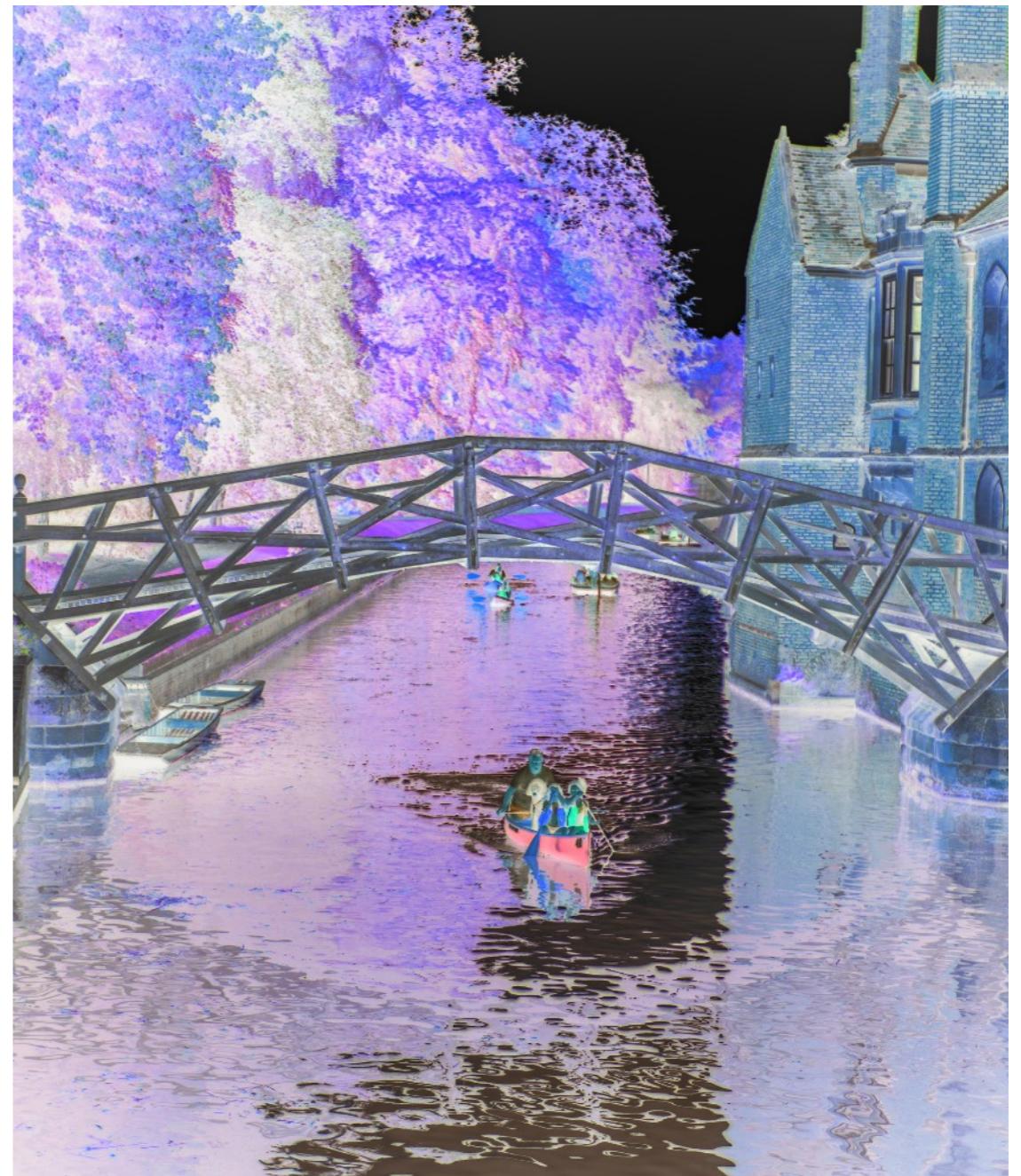


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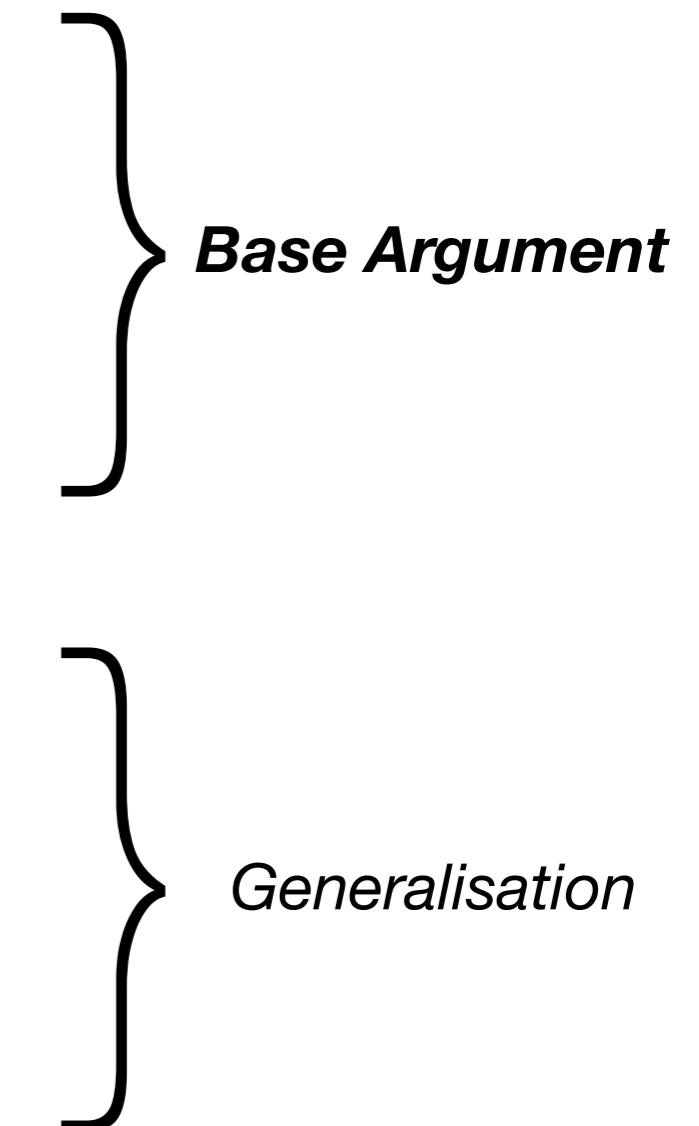
Perception, illusion, hallucination

- Veridical perception: you are undergoing a conscious experience, and are presented with a mind-dependent object that appears to be the way it is
- Illusion: you are undergoing a conscious experience, and are presented with a mind-independent object that does not appear to be the way it is
- Hallucination: you are undergoing a conscious experience, but are not presented with a mind-independent object



An argument from Hallucination

1. When you hallucinate you are presented with some object of awareness (Assumption)
2. The object you are presented with when you hallucinate does not exist mind-independently (Assumption)
3. Therefore, when you hallucinate you are presented with some mind-dependent object of awareness (From 1,2)
4. The objects of hallucination are of the same kind as the objects of perception (Assumption)
5. Therefore, when you perceive you are presented with some mind-dependent object of awareness (From 3,4)



Which hallucinations?

1. When you hallucinate you are presented with some object of awareness

Does it really seem that way?

Strategy for a defence of P1:

- I. Find a kind of experience where the Naive Realist agrees you are presented with some object of awareness (e.g a veridical perception)
- II. Show that at least some hallucinations belong to the very same kind of experience



Subjective Indistinguishability

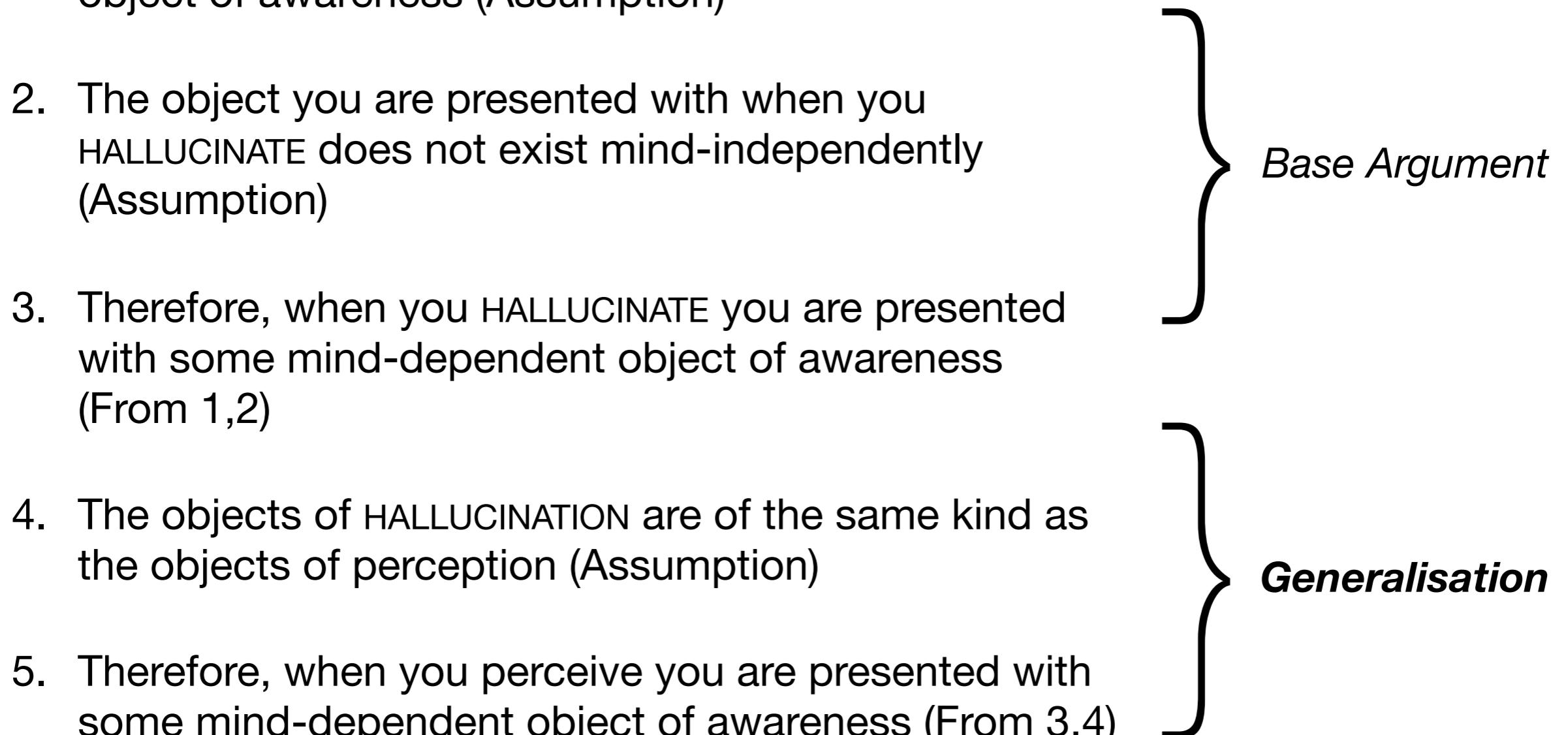
- Suggestion: We know it is possible for a hallucination to be subjectively indistinguishable from a veridical perception. Let's mark such hallucinations in small-caps: HALLUCINATIONS
 - HALLUCINATION:
“When a subject has this kind of experience there is no suitable mind-independent material object in her environment to serve as a candidate object of perceptual awareness, even though she is having an experience that is subjectively indistinguishable from a genuine perception of the world.” (Soteriou 2016:16)
- So it seems that perception and HALLUCINATION are experiences of the same fundamental kind (Common Kind Assumption)

Exploiting the Common Kind Assumption

1. When you have an ordinary perception you are presented with some object of awareness (Presentation)
2. HALLUCINATIONS are subjectively indistinguishable from some ordinary perceptions (Assumption)
3. If two experiences are subjectively indistinguishable, then they are experiences of the same fundamental kind (Assumption)
4. Perception and HALLUCINATION are experiences of the same fundamental kind (*Common Kind Assumption*; from 2,3)
5. If two states belong to the same fundamental kind of experience, then if in the one you are presented with some object of awareness, you are presented with some object of awareness in the other (Assumption)
6. When you HALLUCINATE you are presented with some object of awareness (*P1*; from 1,4, and 5)

Improved argument from Hallucination

1. When you HALLUCINATE you are presented with some object of awareness (Assumption)
2. The object you are presented with when you HALLUCINATE does not exist mind-independently (Assumption)
3. Therefore, when you HALLUCINATE you are presented with some mind-dependent object of awareness (From 1,2)
4. The objects of HALLUCINATION are of the same kind as the objects of perception (Assumption)
5. Therefore, when you perceive you are presented with some mind-dependent object of awareness (From 3,4)



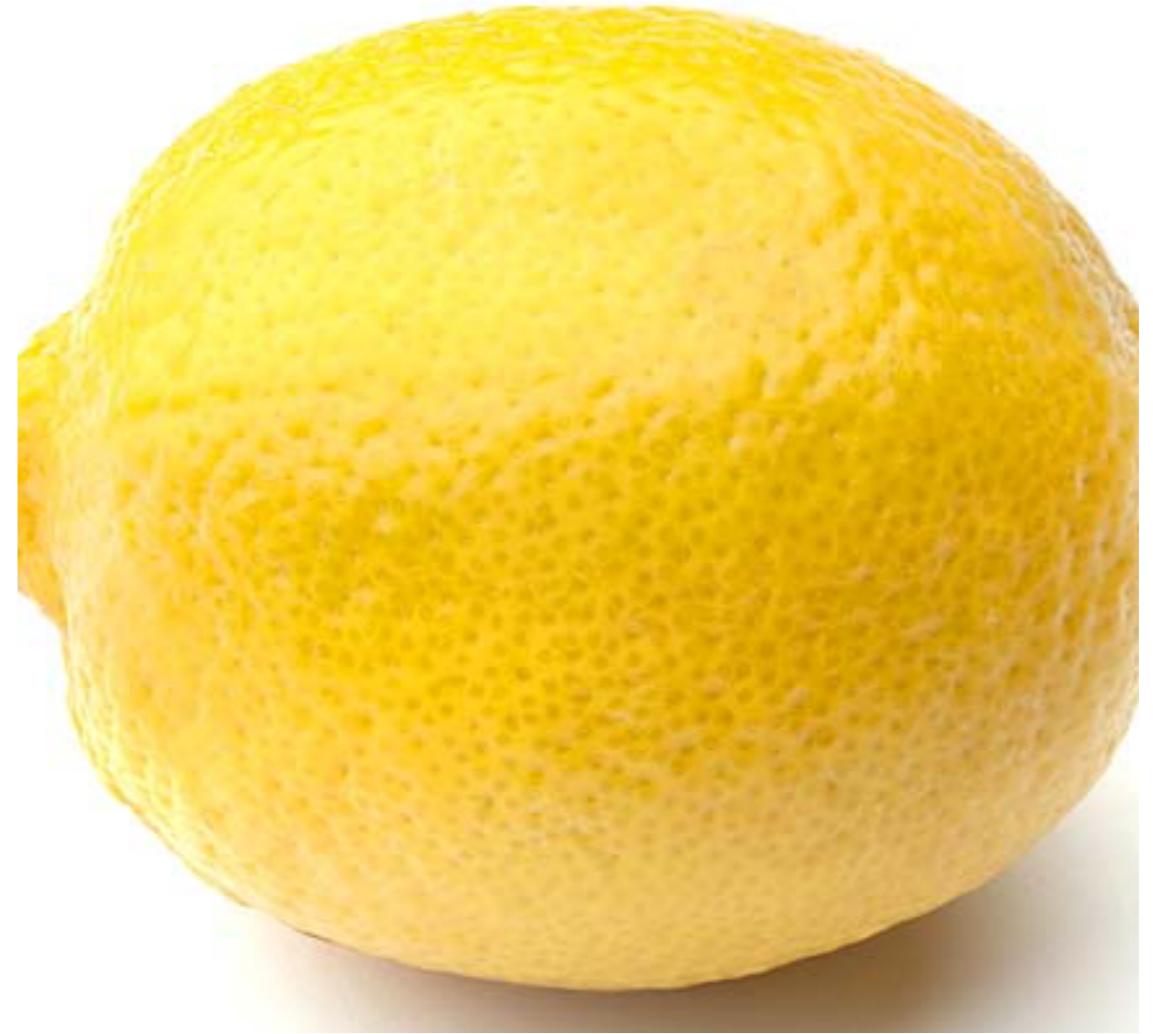
Why think the objects of hallucination and perception
are of the same kind? (P4)

“Presumably the thought here is that if such experiences really are genuinely subjectively indistinguishable, then the sense-data that the subject is consciously aware of in each case must be perceptually indistinguishable, i.e. entities that one cannot distinguish on the basis of perception alone; and the fact that the relevant sense-data are perceptually indistinguishable is best explained by the proposal that they are entities of the same kind.”

Soteriou 2016:17

Austin's soap

- “If I am told that a lemon is generically different from a piece of soap, do I 'expect' that no piece of soap could look just like a lemon? Why should I?” (Austin 1964:52)



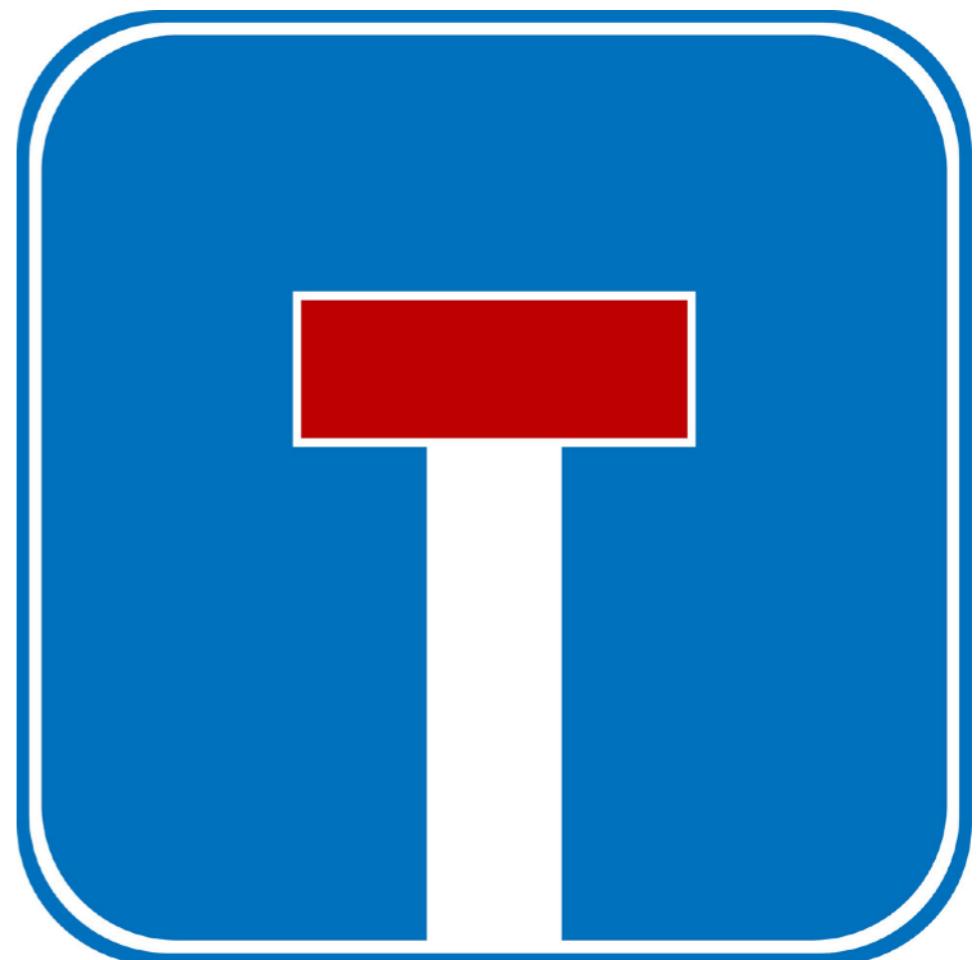
Austin's soap

- “...even if we were to make the prior admission [...] that in the ‘abnormal’ cases [e.g. hallucinations] we perceive sense-data, we should not be obliged to extend this admission to the ‘normal’ cases too. For why on earth should it not be the case that, in some few instances, perceiving one sort of thing is exactly like perceiving another?” (Austin 1964:52)



A dead end?

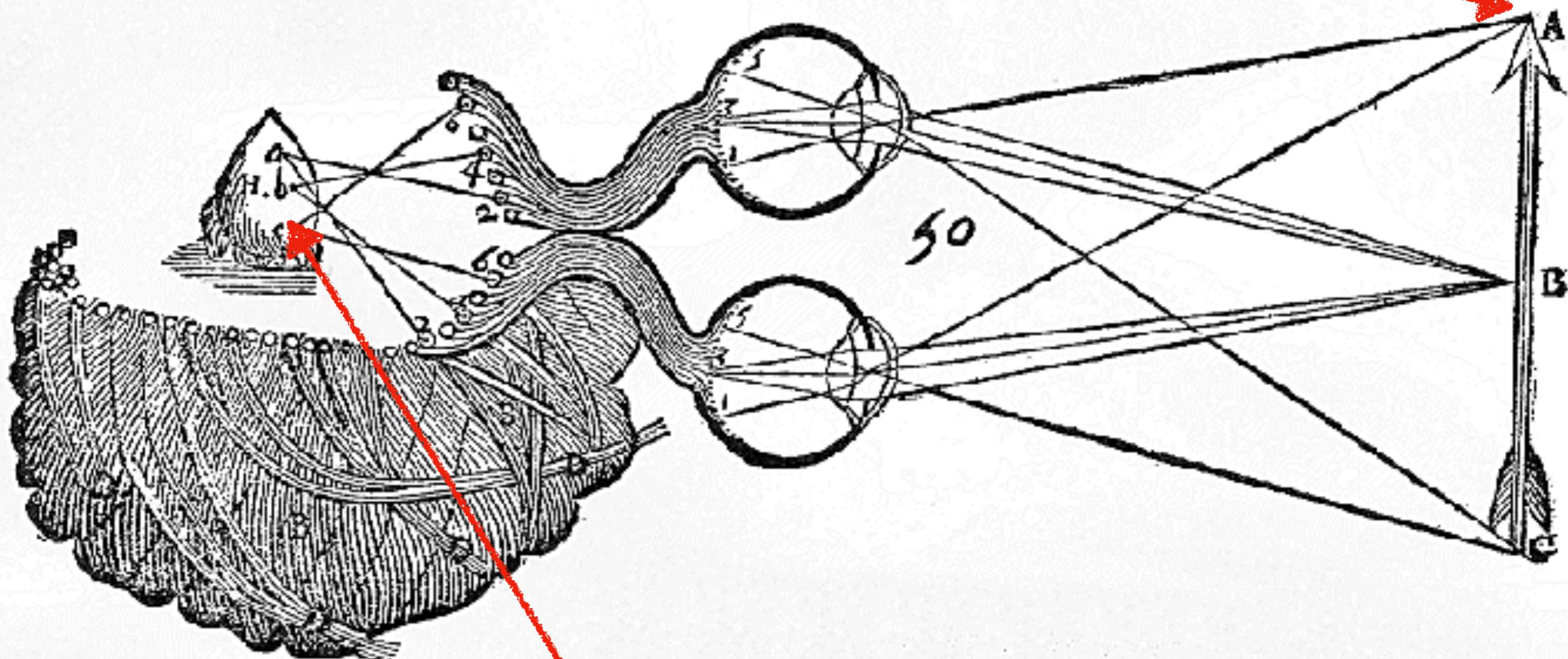
- If Austin is right, then even if what you HALLUCINATE is mind-dependent, ordinary perception could still be a presentation of physical, mind-independent objects in your environment.
- Can the opponent of Naive Realist respond to Austin's way of undermining the generalisation?



The Causal Argument

- So far we have focused only on the phenomenology of the experience. But we know perception and hallucination are to some extent natural phenomena: they have causes in the same way a fever or headache have causes. (Experiential Naturalism)
- So we may define a class of hallucinations that is not only subjectively indistinguishable from a perception (i.e. HALLUCINATIONS), but also involves the same kind of proximate cause and brain state as that involved in kind of perception it cannot be distinguished from subjectively.
- Call these ‘causally matching HALLUCINATIONS’.

Distal cause



The Causal Argument

- Assumption: for any case of genuine perception it is possible, in principle at least, for there to be a corresponding causally matching HALLUCINATION
- This implies that in any case of perception the sufficient causal condition for both that perception and its corresponding causally matching HALLUCINATION are met
- So when we perceive, even if we are presented with mind independent objects, we are also presented with the kind of mind-dependent objects we would be presented with in a corresponding causally matching HALLUCINATION
- Therefore, in ordinary perception we are either (i) presented with both the mind-independent tomato and some mind-dependent sense-datum, or (ii) just presented with some mind-dependent sense-datum

Screening off problem

- Causally matching HALLUCINATIONS are subjectively indistinguishable from ordinary perceptions, and so have the same phenomenology
- In the case of the HALLUCINATIONS, that phenomenology (what it's like to undergo the experience) is fully explained by the presentation of a mind-dependent sense datum
- In the corresponding perception, we are presented with a mind-dependent sense-datum exactly like the one we are presented with when we HALLUCINATE
- The Naive Realist claim that the presentation of familiar, mind-independent objects explains the phenomenology of perception now seems now entirely redundant

Next week

- ~~Lecture 1: Naive Realism~~
- ~~Lecture 2: The Argument from Hallucination~~
- Lecture 3: Representationalism
- Lecture 4: Disjunctivism