

Perception

LECTURE FOUR | MICHAELMAS 2017

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Last week

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



Disjunctivism

Overview

- Discuss different philosophical views of the nature of perceptual experience
- Start with 'common sense' (Naive Realism). Then discuss objections by those who are impressed by various 'strange' experiences, such as illusions and hallucinations
- These objections have motivated:
 - Alternative theories of perception: Sense-Datum Theory, Representationalism/Intentionalism
 - **Theories that defend naive realism: Disjunctivism**

An inconsistent triad



- I. Common Kind Assumption
- II. Experiential Naturalism
- III. Naive Realism

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On Being Alienated

M. G. F. Martin

Disjunctivism about perceptual appearances, as I conceive of it, is a theory which seeks to preserve a naive realist conception of veridical perception in the light of the challenge from the argument from hallucination. The naive realist claims that some sensory experiences are relations to mind-independent objects. That is to say, taking experiences to be episodes or events, the naive realist supposes that some such episodes have as constituents mind-independent objects. In turn, the disjunctivist claims that in a case of veridical perception like this very kind of experience that you now have, the experiential episode you enjoy is of a kind which could not be occurring were you having an hallucination. The common strategy of arguments from hallucination set out to show that certain things are true of hallucinations, and hence must be true of perceptions. For example, it is argued that hallucinations must have non-physical objects of awareness, or that they are not relations to anything at all, but are at best seeming relations to something. The relation of veridical perception is of a distinct kind from

M.G.F. Martin's 'Master Argument'

1. Perception is a presentation of mind-independent objects in our environment (Naive Realism)
2. Perception and hallucination are part of the natural causal order (Experiential Naturalism)

Therefore,

3. Perception and (causally matching) hallucination do not belong to the same fundamental kind of experience (Rejection of Common Kind Assumption)



Common Kind Assumption

What happens when we reject it?



‘Same phenomenology’

- Perceptions and (causally matching) HALLUCINATIONS are experiences of the same fundamental kind (Common Kind Assumption)
- By experiential naturalism, the kind of experience you have in a causally matching hallucination occurs also when you perceive a tomato
- And so, either ordinary perceptions are presentations of *mind-dependent* objects, or they are *representations* of mind-independent objects



Assumptions motivating the common kind claim

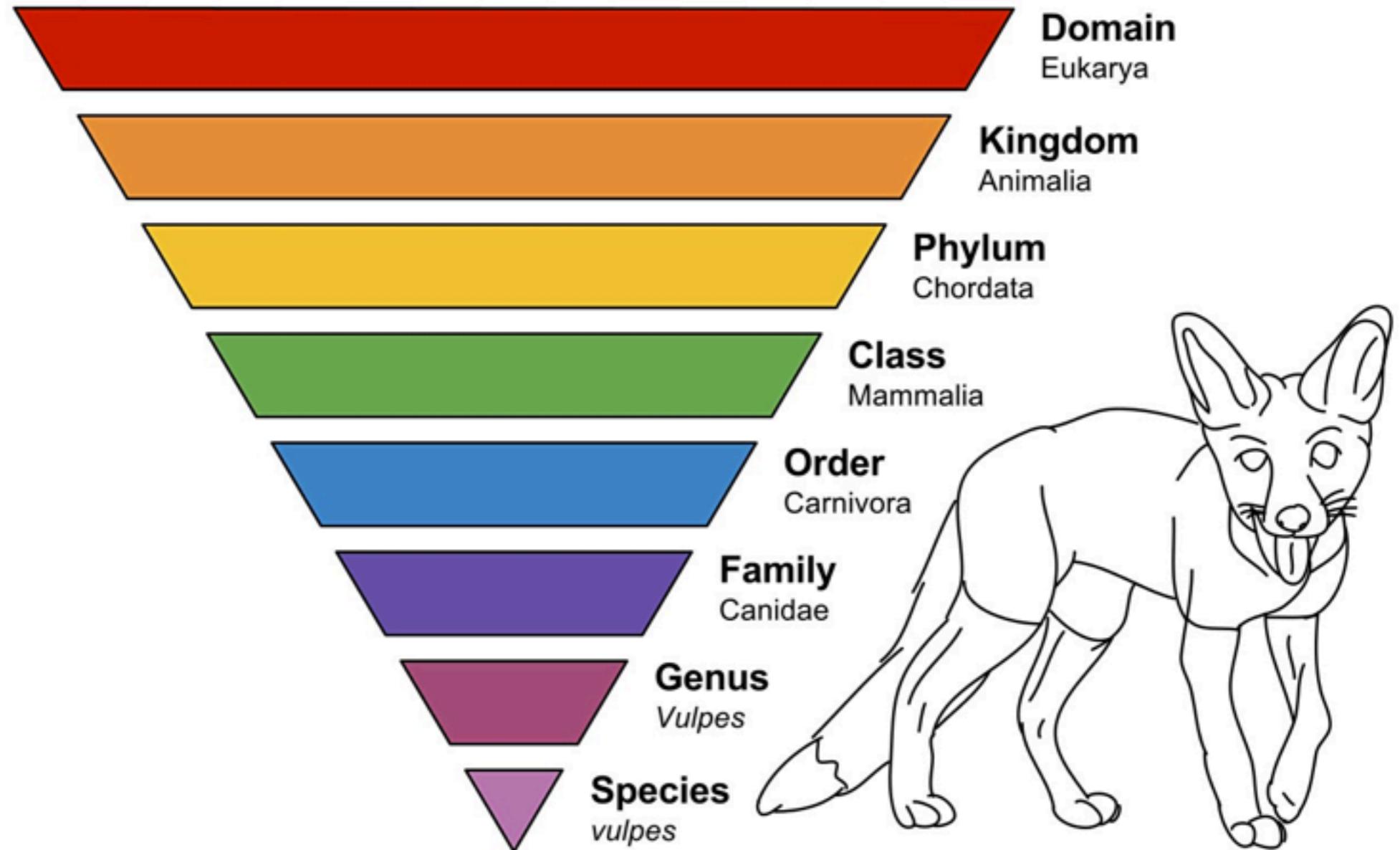
- A. A perception and corresponding hallucination are subjectively indistinguishable experiences
- B. **If two experiences are subjectively indistinguishable, then they are experiences of the same fundamental kind**
- C. Perceptions and (causally matching) HALLUCINATIONS are experiences of the same fundamental kind (Common Kind Assumption)

‘fundamental kinds’

- "There are ways of construing the Common Kind Assumption on which it is trivially false. If we relax our conception of a kind of event sufficiently then any description of an event mirrors a kind of event. On that conception, it is easy to find kinds which some individual events fall under and otherwise matching individuals fail to." (Martin 2006:360)
- Causally matching hallucinations are (say) artificially induced, while perceptions are not. Hence, in a loose sense, they are different *kinds* of experiences. In what sense are they the same?



Fundamental kinds as most specific kinds



Good case, bad cases

- **Good Case**

X = the most specific kind of experience you have when you (veridically) see a fox

- **Bad Case**

Y = the most specific kind of experience you have when you have a visual HALLUCINATION of a fox

- Common kind assumption:

X = Y

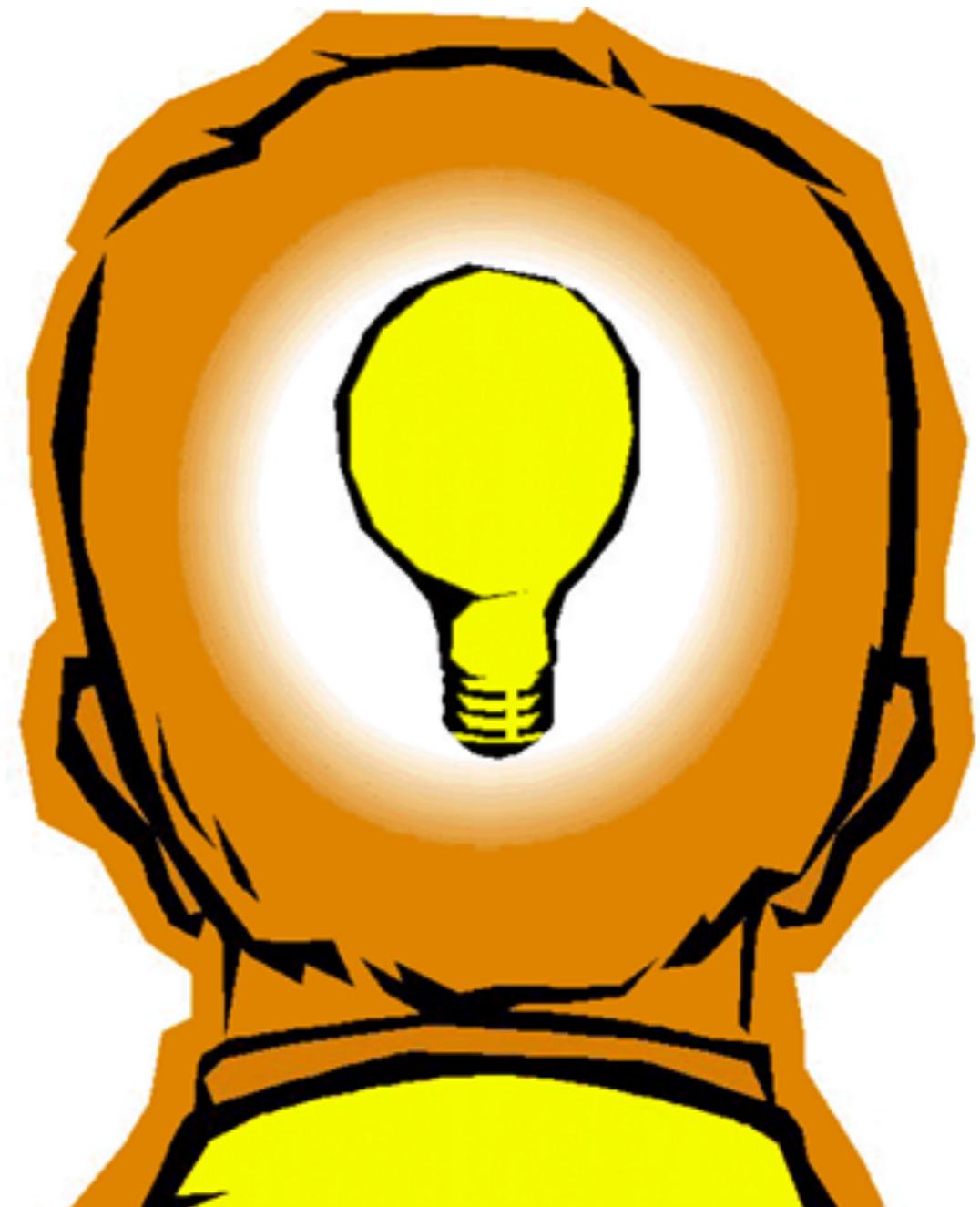
- What fundamental kind of experience could X be?



Having an experience

- “On one view, the good case and the bad cases have a common mental core—in all such cases, the subject is having an experience of a certain kind, or is in a certain (experiential) mental state (at the time of the case).”
- “Although the nature of the common core is disputable, that there is one can seem nothing short of obvious.”

(Byrne and Logue 2008: 59)



Why think there are good/bad-neutral ‘experiences’ of this kind?

1. **Introspective evidence:**

A subjectively indistinguishable hallucination (by hypothesis) cannot be introspectively distinguished from an ordinary perception

2. This implies that there is no introspectively discernible difference between both experiences

3. This in turn implies that both experiences are qualitatively alike, i.e have the same phenomenal character

4. Fundamental differences between experiences entail differences in phenomenal character

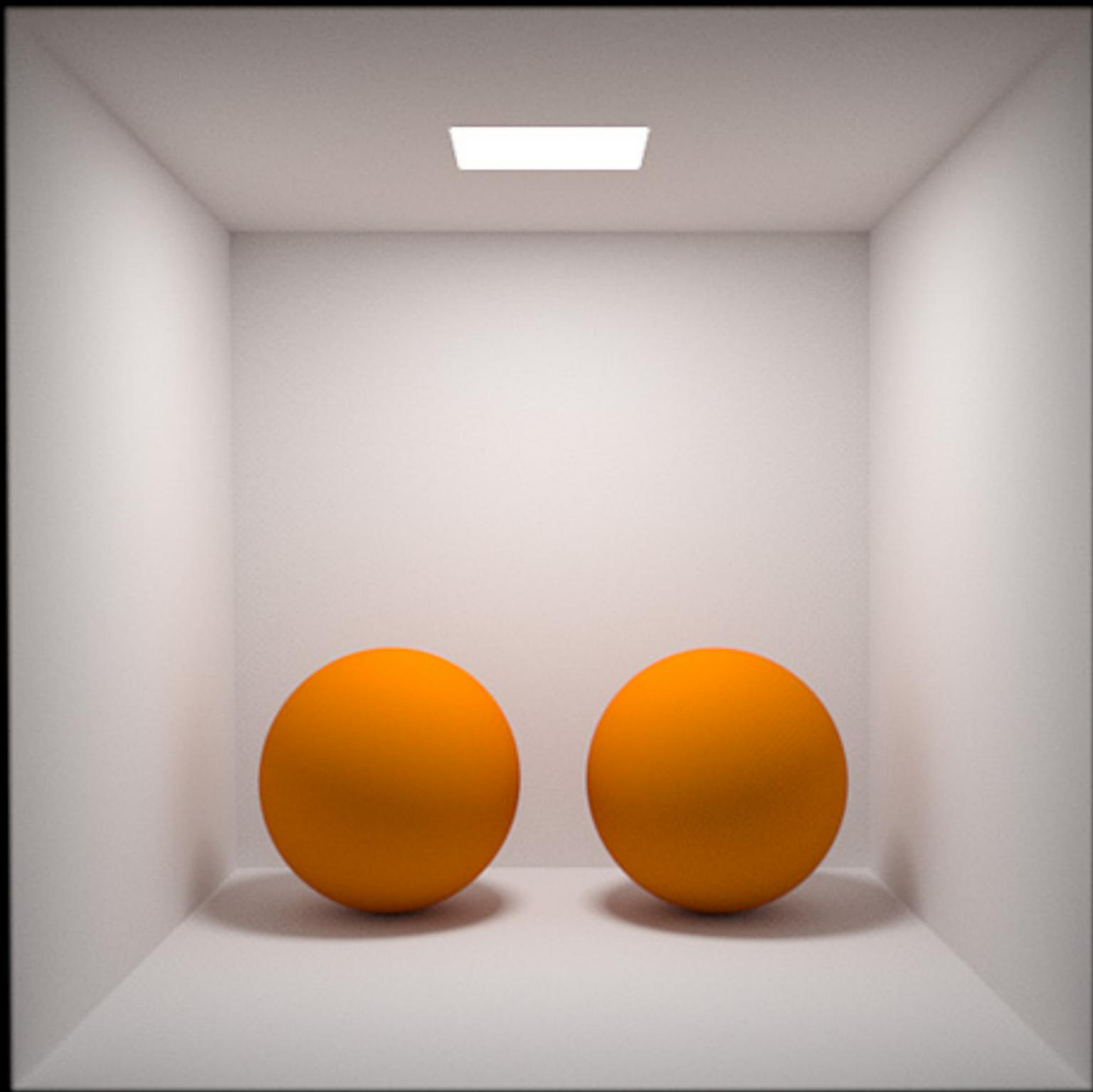
5. A subjectively indistinguishable hallucination cannot be fundamentally different from an ordinary perception

Austin's soap revisited

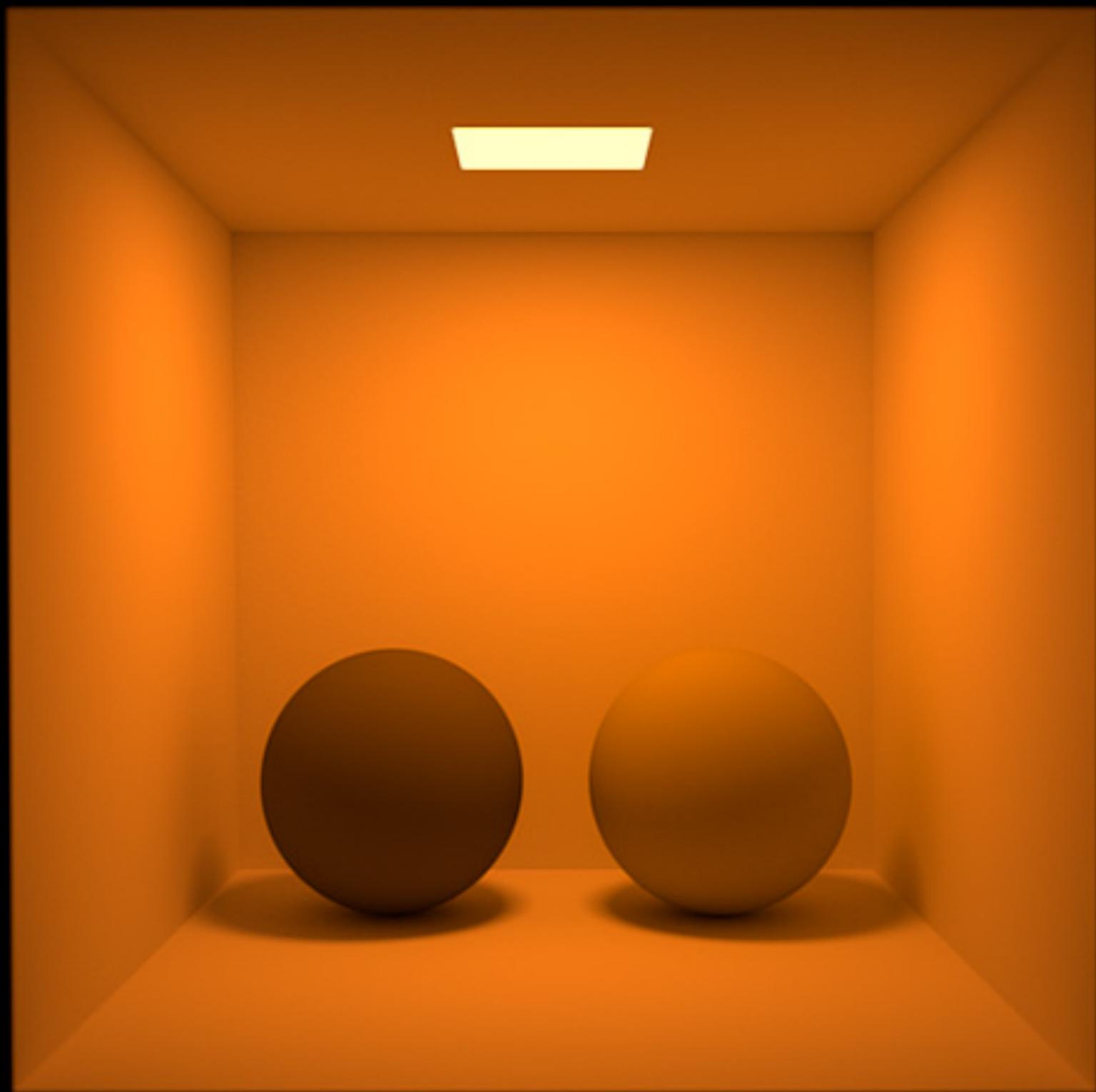
- “...even if we were to make the prior admission [...] that in the ‘abnormal’ cases [e.g. hallucinations] we perceive sense-data, we should not be obliged to extend this admission to the ‘normal’ cases too. For why on earth should it not be the case that, in some few instances, perceiving one sort of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



Metamers

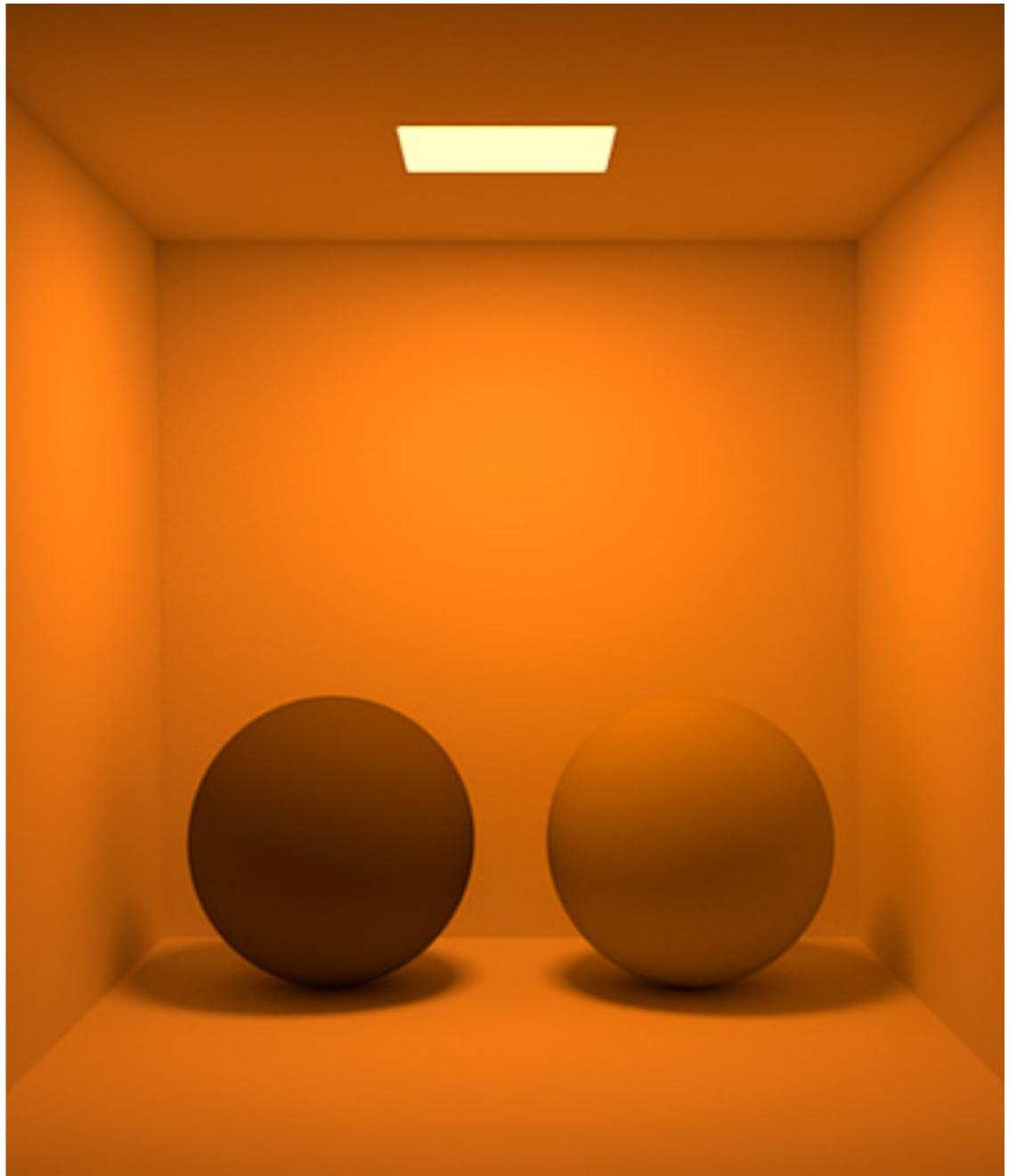


Metamers



What does a failure to distinguish tell us about reality?

- It seems strange to assume, as a general rule, that a failure of an ability to distinguish must reveal something about *any kind* of sameness in reality
- So why think that the absence of an introspectively discernible difference between experiences implies that both experiences are qualitatively alike?



Merely apparent phenomenology

- Two objects can seem to have properties in common without having properties in common: they *merely* seem to have properties in common
- An hallucination seems to have the same phenomenal character as an ordinary perception
- Why not just think that's all there is to it? So: Hallucinations *merely* seem to have the kind of phenomenal character that ordinary perceptions have



Example: encountering a pig in a forest



‘Disjunctive evidence’

- Once again the discussion turns on a puzzle about how exactly things appear or seem to us. What conclusions about the world can we draw on the basis of these appearances?
- Everyone agrees that in ordinary perception of a pig it at least seems to you as if you are presented with a pig
- But if HALLUCINATIONS are possible, it is possible to have an experience in which it seems to you as if you are presented with a pig, while the experience is in fact not a presentation of a pig
- So all the introspective evidence allows us to conclude is that: either we are presented with a pig (good case), or it merely seems to us as if we’re presented with a pig (bad case)

VI.—VISUAL EXPERIENCES

By J. M. HINTON

I

ONE of the things we can say and think is :

(A) I see a flash of light : actual light, a photic flash.

Another is:

(B) I have an illusion of a flash of light: I do not see a photic flash,
but something is happening that to me is like seeing one.

This is true, for instance, when I am given such an illusion by
passing an electric current through my brain.

A third thing we can say and think is :

(A \vee B) Either I see a flash of light, or I have an illusion of a
flash of light.

Nothing stops us from introducing some sentence as a more
compact way of saying this. It might be

(A \vee B)' I see a flash, or

It is to me as if I saw a flash of light, or
I seem to see a flash of light,

though no doubt these sentences can also be used in other ways.

Disjunctivism about perception

- “Hinton’s strategy is to argue that there is no good reason to think that these disjunctive statements could not do all the work that our normal talk of appearances and experience do. That is, that there is no good reason from our ordinary ways of talking to suppose that we are committed to the existence of some special kind of experiential event which may be present equally in cases of perception and hallucination.” (Martin 2006: 362)
- In other words, we have introspective evidence only for the possibility of presentations of mind-independent things and the possibility of episodes that are merely subjectively indistinguishable from presentations of mind-independent things
- We have no reason to suppose that there are in addition ‘visual experiences’ ('a common mental core') which occur in both cases

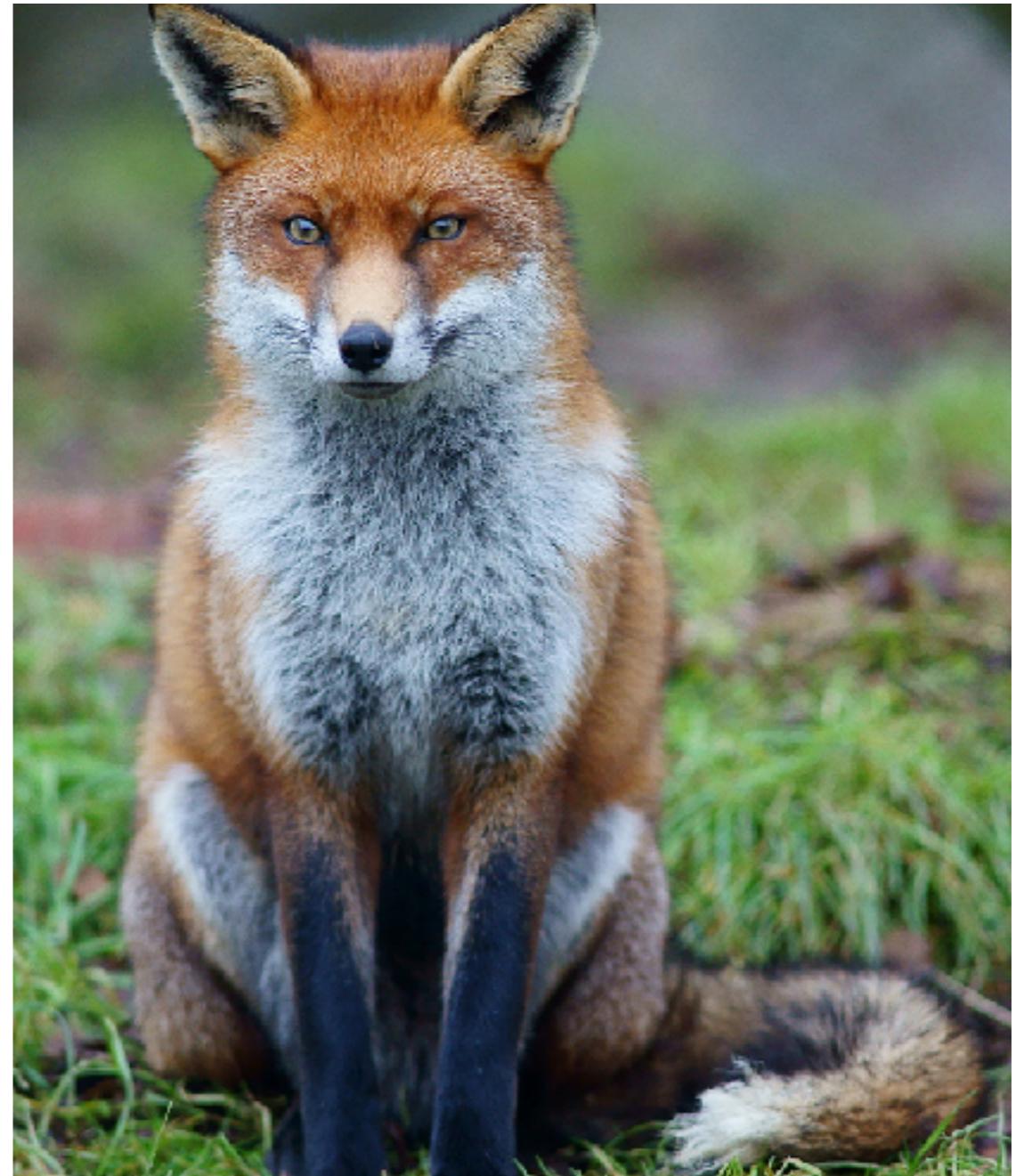
Common Kinds?

- Perception and hallucination do belong to a common kind: seeing a pig and hallucinating a pig are both experiences that are indistinguishable the presentation of a pig
- But the naive realist can now maintain that this kind is not the most specific kind of experience one enjoys when one perceives a pig
- When one perceives a pig one is presented with a pig; that is the experience's fundamental nature
- For all we know, the fundamental nature of a hallucination is just that it is an experience subjectively indistinguishable from the presentation of a pig

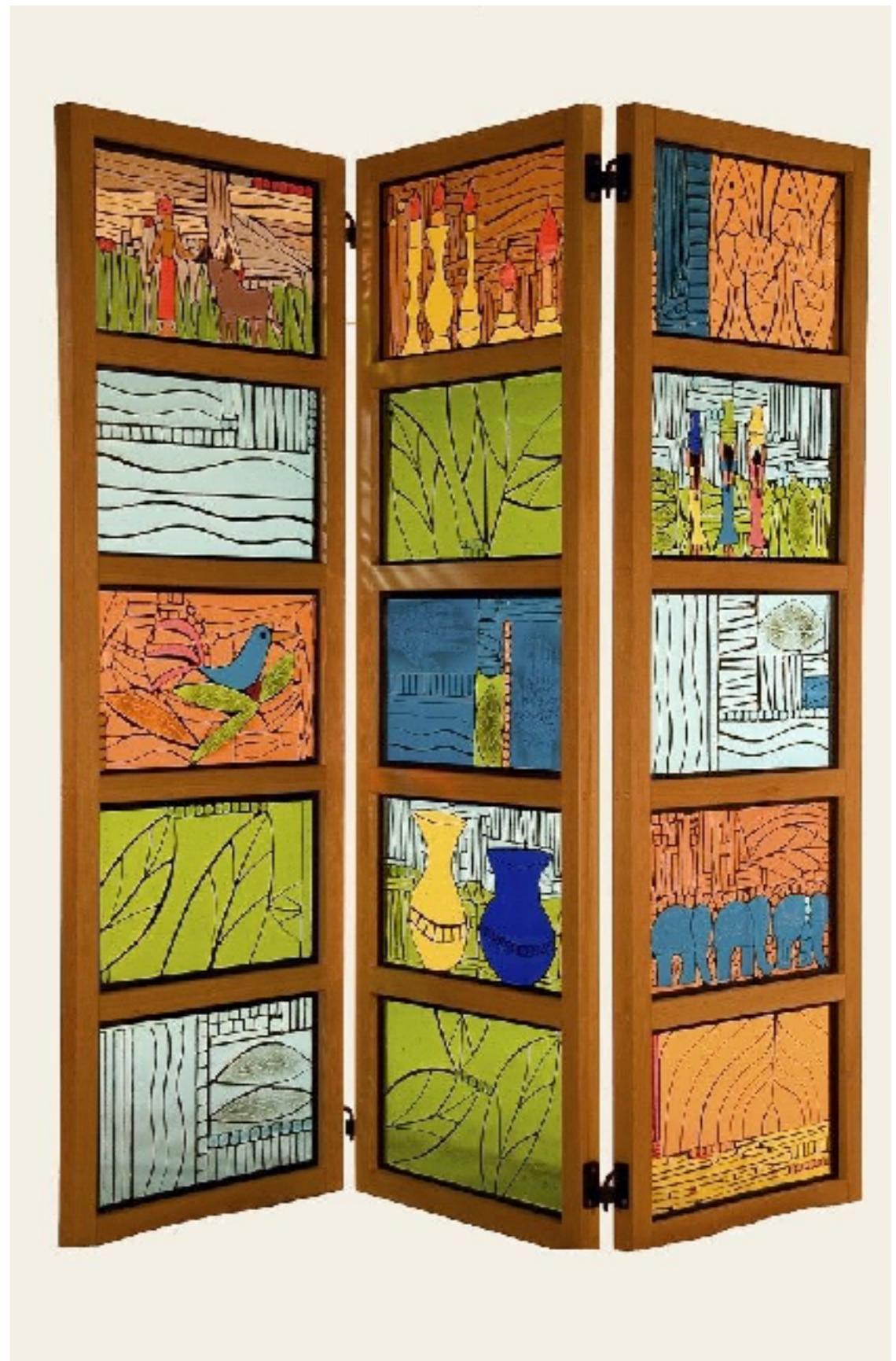


Analogy: schmoxes

- A **schmox** is an entity that is visually indistinguishable from a red fox
- It follows that a red fox is a schmox
- But a red fox is not fundamentally a schmox; fundamentally, we know, a red fox is a *Vulpes vulpes*
- What about other schmoxes? Take an arbitrary schmox s . What can we now say about the (fundamental) kind to which it belongs?

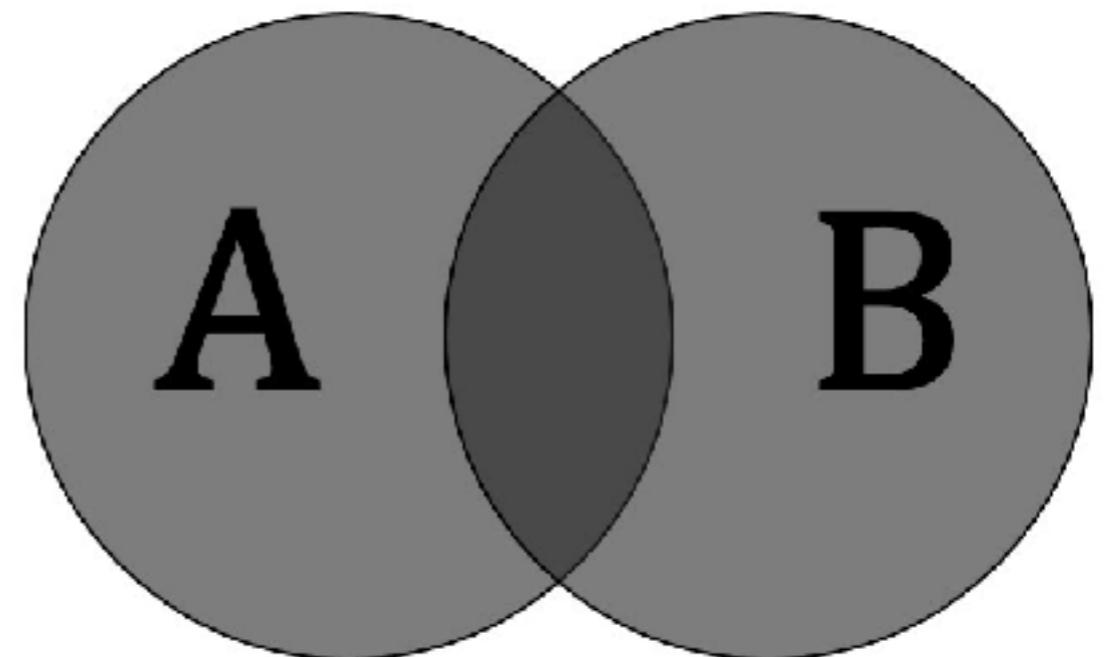


Does this
really avoid
the screening
off problem?



Remaining commonality

- On the disjunctivist picture, perceptions and hallucinations continue to have something in common
- The screening off problem for Naive Realism arises because this common element ‘gets in the way’: it can account for the phenomenology of perception on its own
- So does the disjunctivist move really solve the problem?

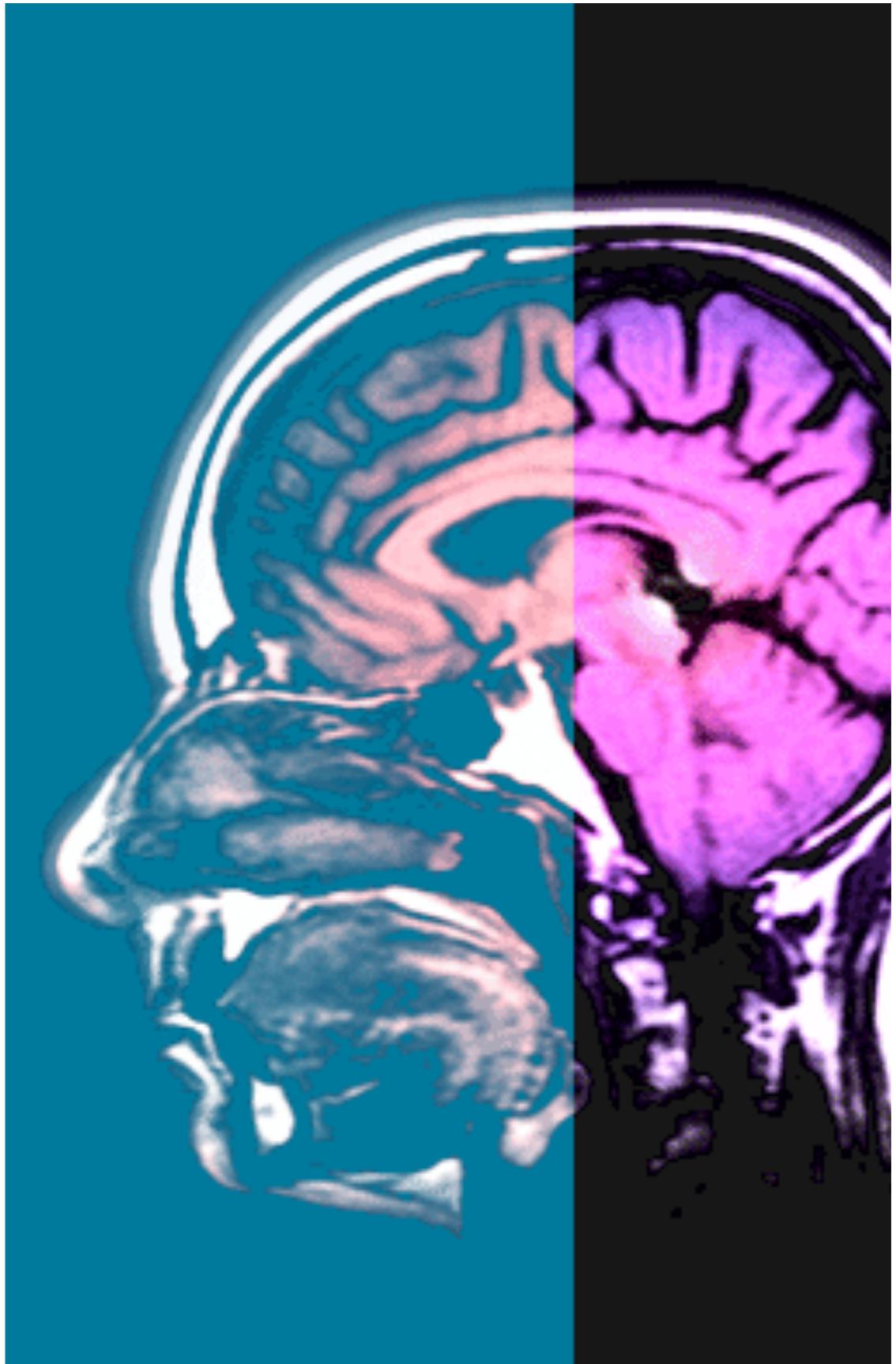


Purely negative characterisation of HALLUCINATIONS

- By experiential naturalism, the kind of experience you have in a causally matching HALLUCINATION occurs also when you perceive a tomato
- But this at most implies, according to the disjunctivist, that in ordinary perception we are in a state that is a presentation of a tomato and also subjectively indistinguishable from a presentation of a tomato
- That's fine. There is no longer any additional, positive phenomenology to 'screen off' the presentation



Does Disjunctivism violate vision science?



Burge on Disjunctivism

- Tyler Burge: “On any given occasion, given the total antecedent psychological state of the individual and system, the total proximal input into the system suffices to produce a given type of perceptual state, assuming no malfunction or interference” (2005: 22)
- Burge holds that episodes of perception and causally matching hallucinations belong to the same kind of psychological effect studied by vision science, and that any theory denying this is in conflict with well-established empirical psychology

Burge on Disjunctivism

- However, all this shows is that besides belonging to the superficial kind ‘indistinguishable from a perception’, perceptions and hallucinations also belong to another kind: ‘brain process X’.
- Burge (or the vision scientist) is not entitled to assume that conscious perception *fundamentally* is brain process X
- Our ordinary perception of a tomato may be enabled by brain process X just as our hallucination may be enabled by the same kind of process. But this does not show that brain process X is all there is to perceiving or hallucinating.

And that's it

- Discuss different philosophical views of the nature of perceptual experience
- Start with 'common sense' (Naive Realism). Then discuss objections by those who are impressed by various 'strange' experiences, such as illusions and hallucinations
- These objections have motivated:
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Good luck!

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