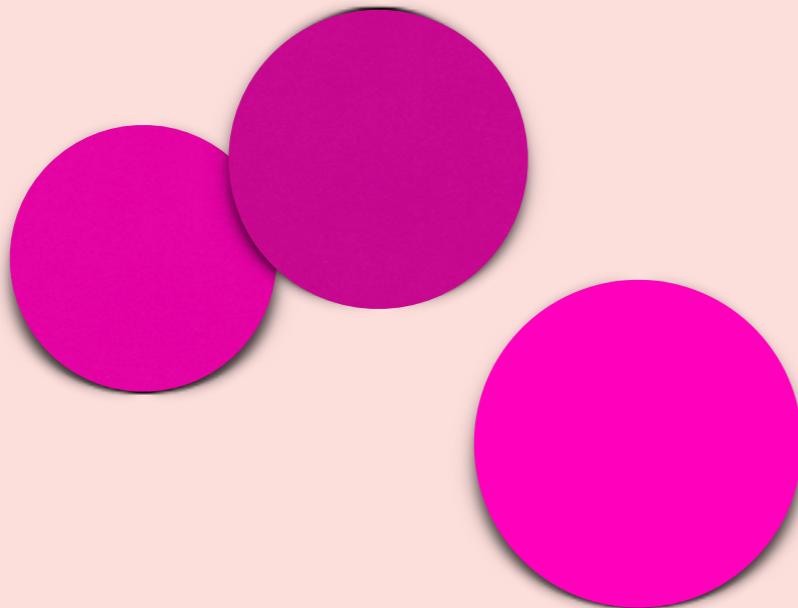


3

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
4. A simple view of qualities

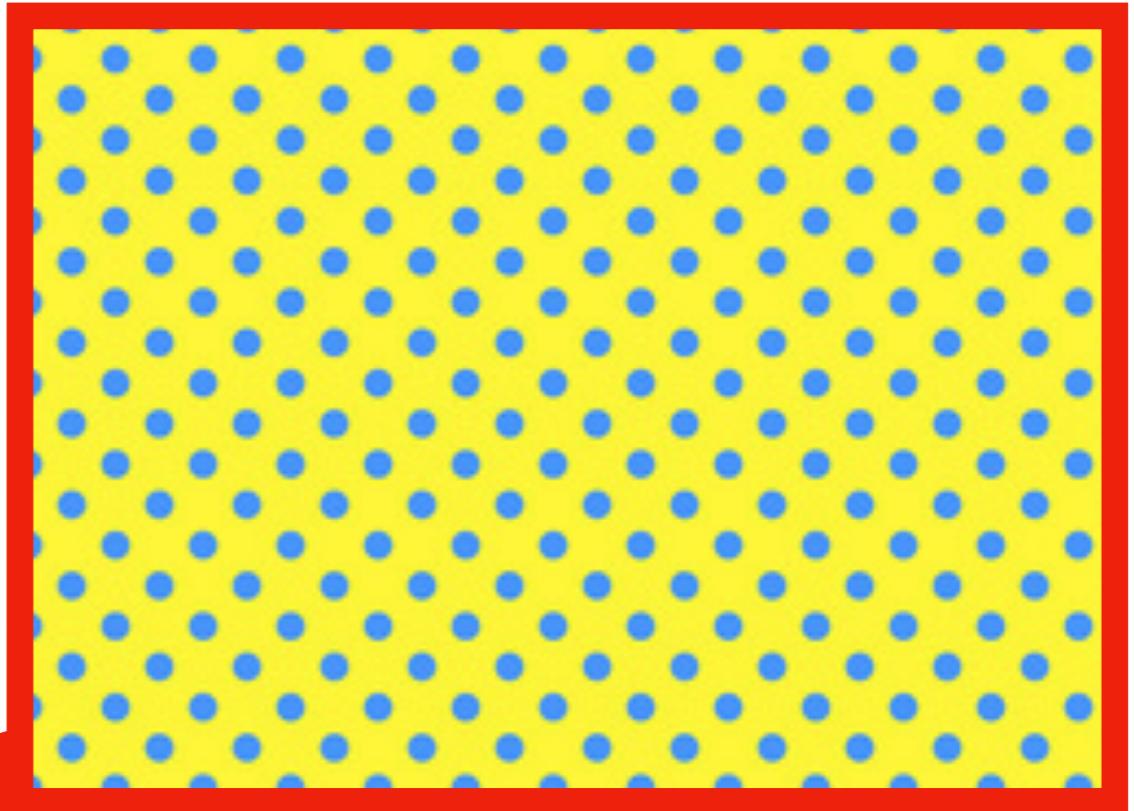


Last time



- 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

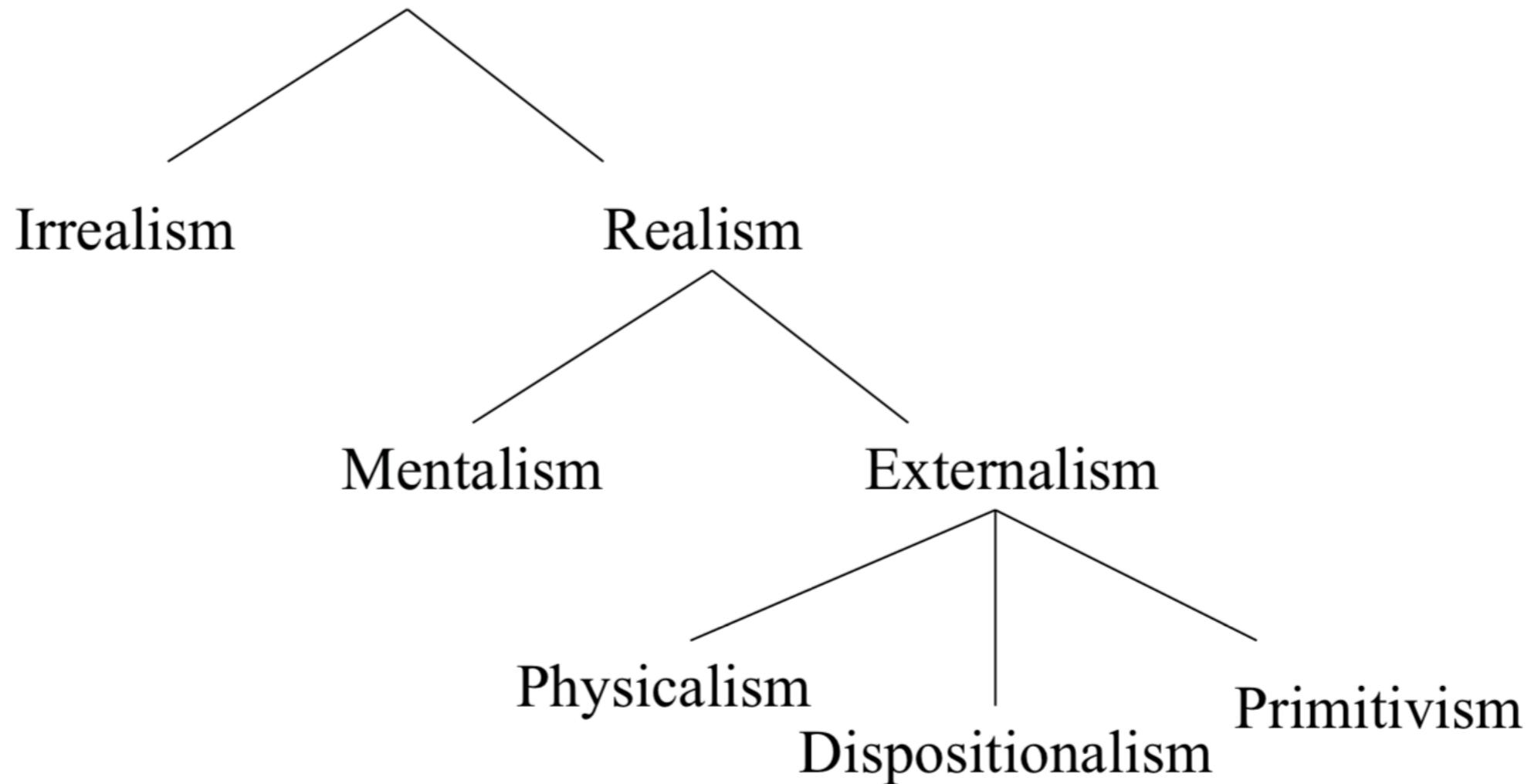
Drawing up the list

- **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



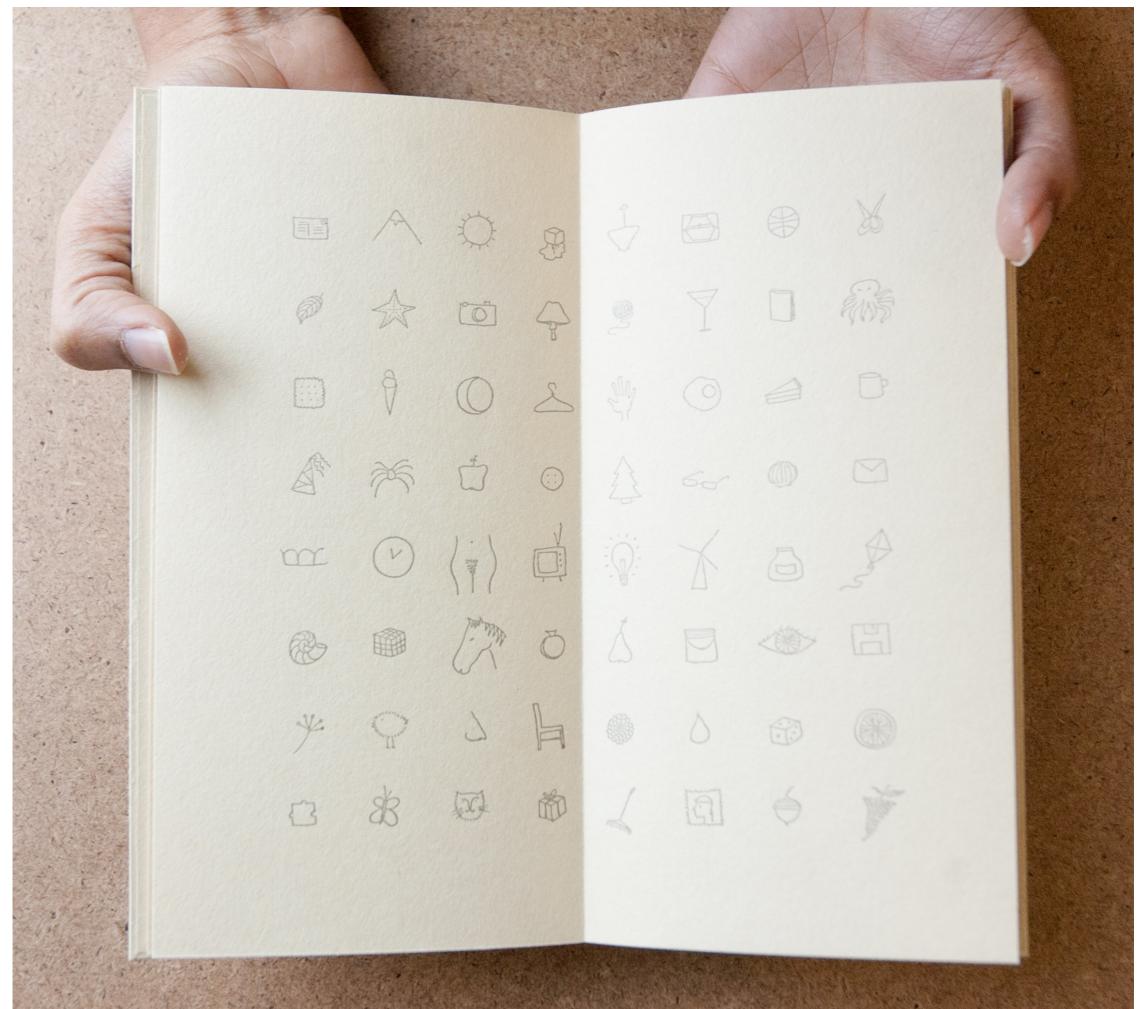
Standard taxonomy



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

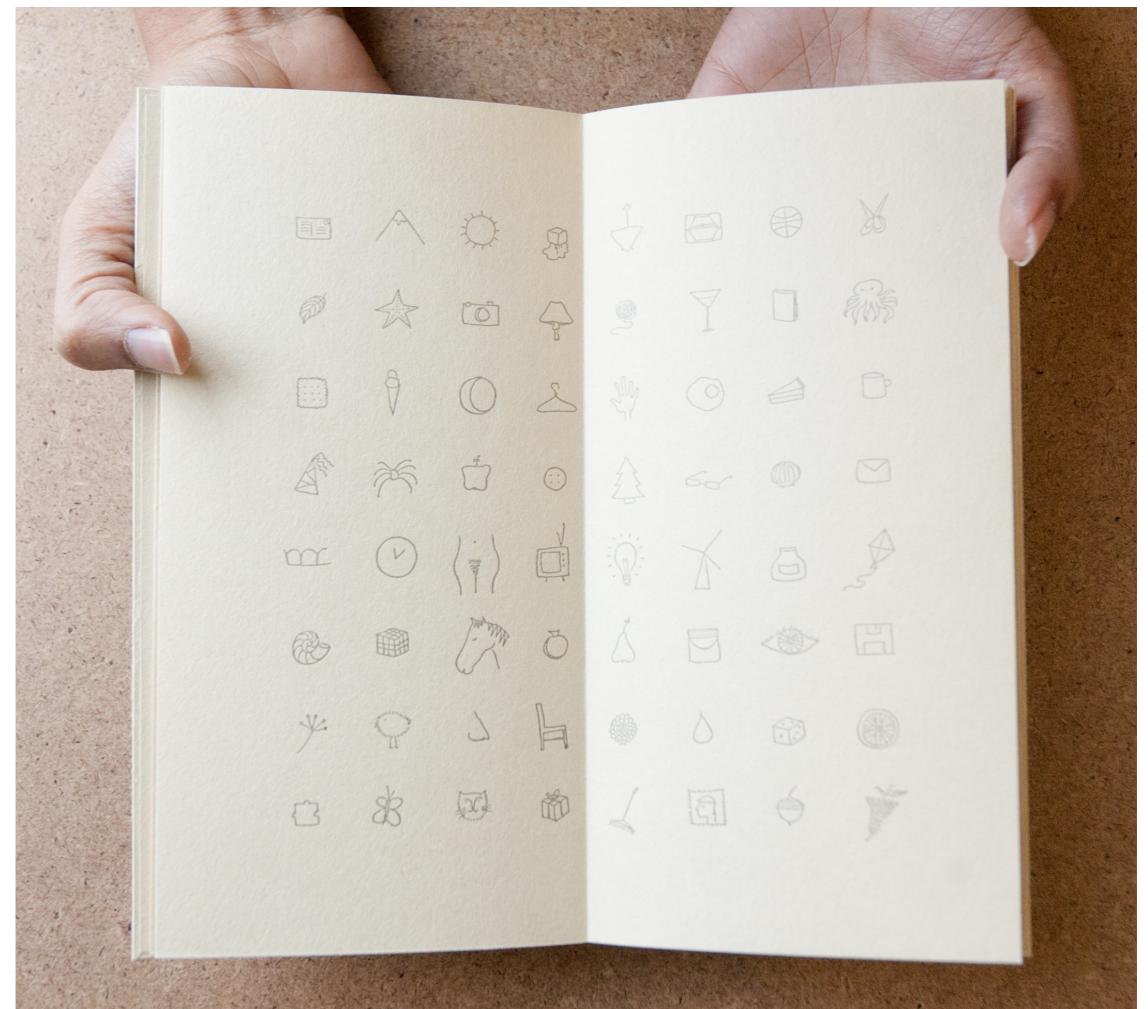
Standard taxonomy

- **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



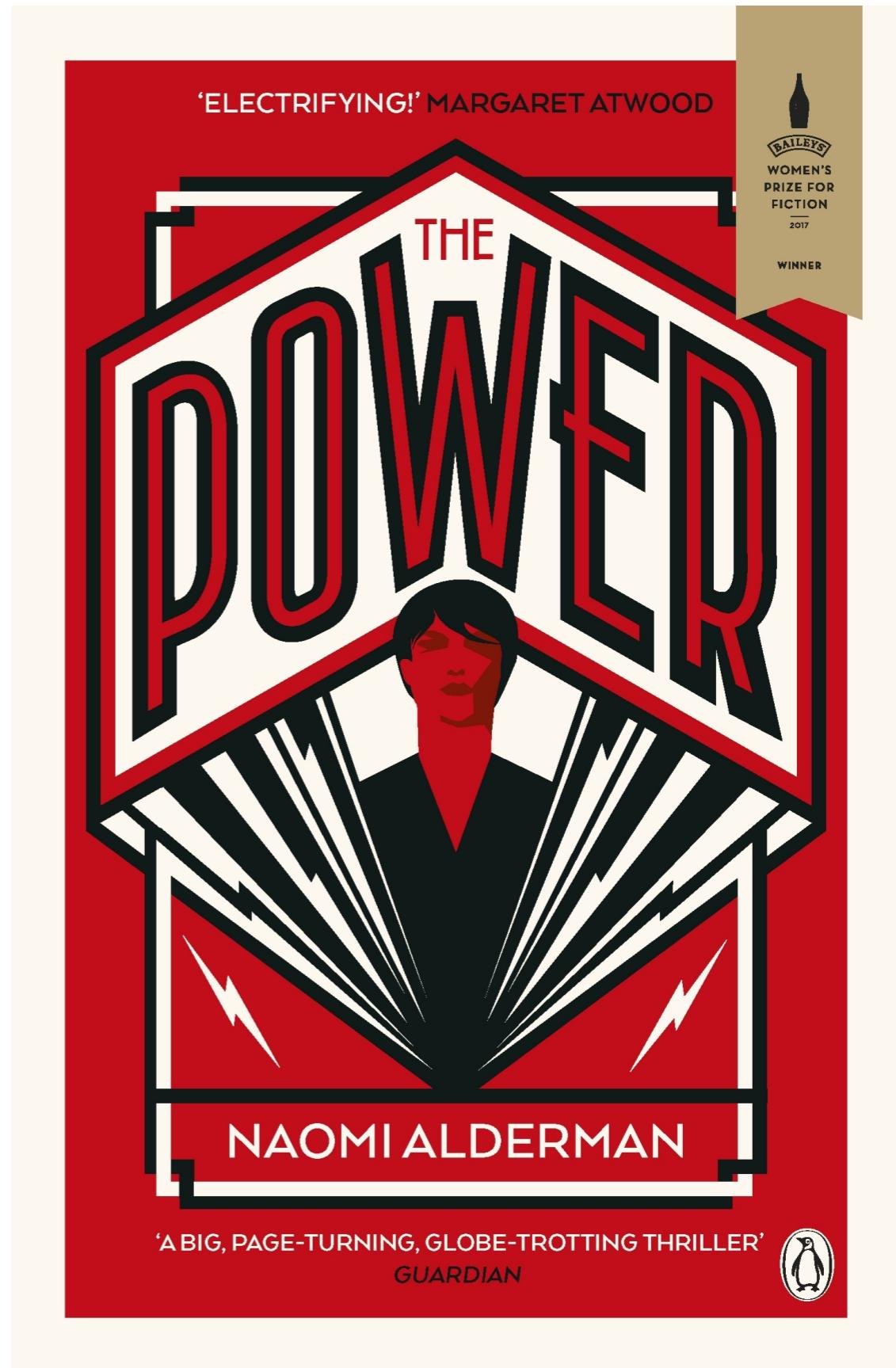
Standard taxonomy

- 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?



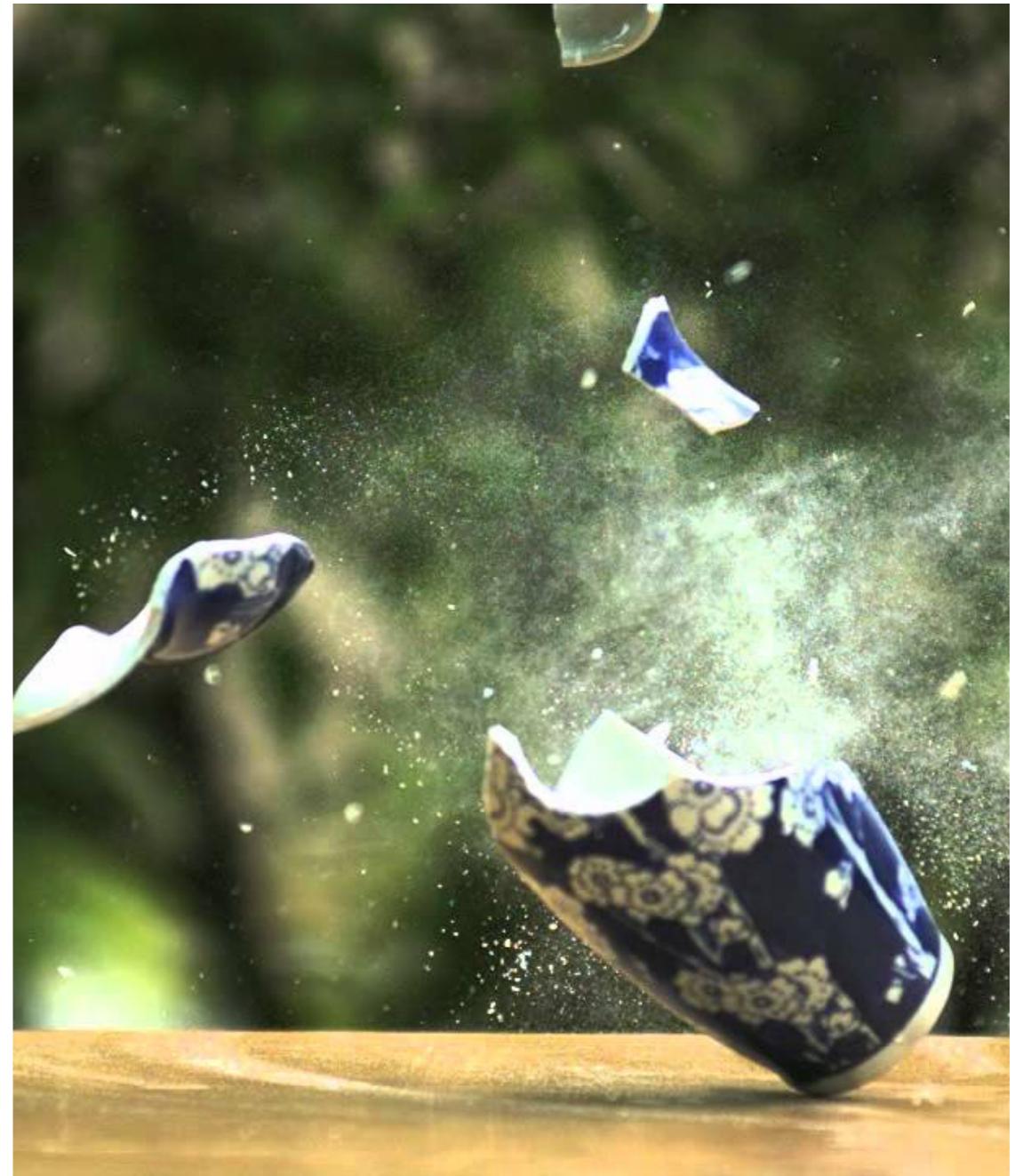
Colours as dispositions

“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)



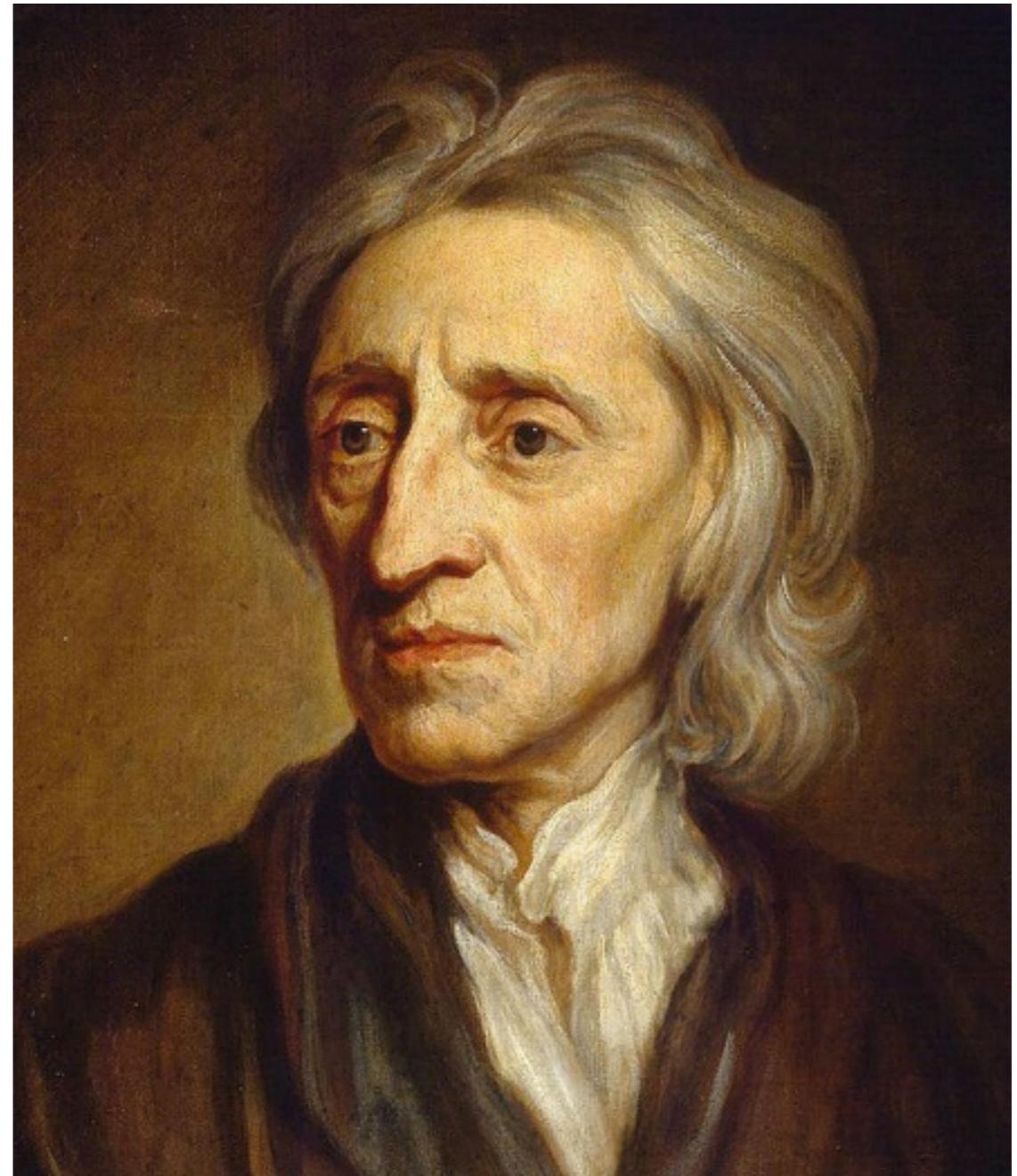
Colour dispositionalism

- 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



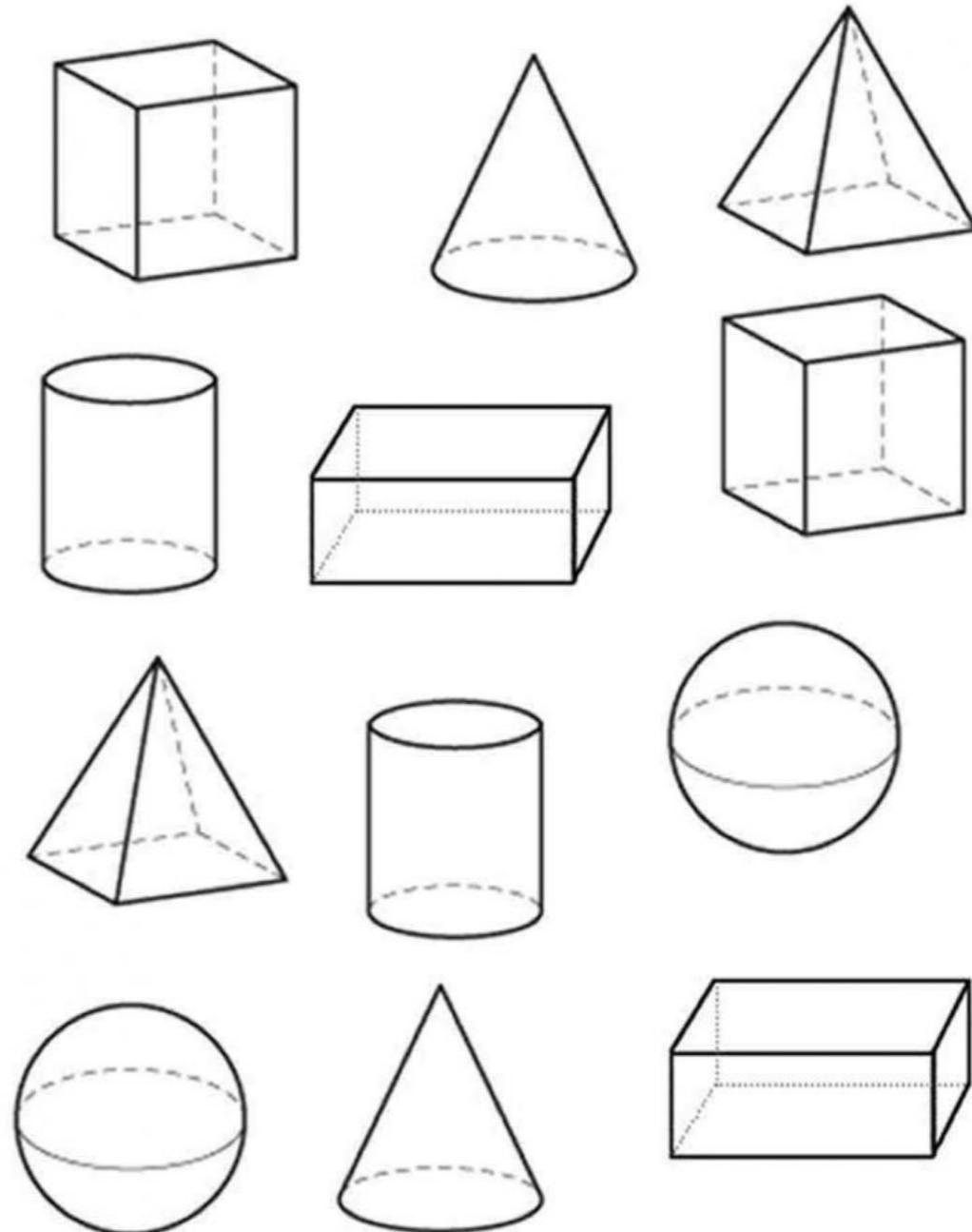
Colour dispositionalism

- 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

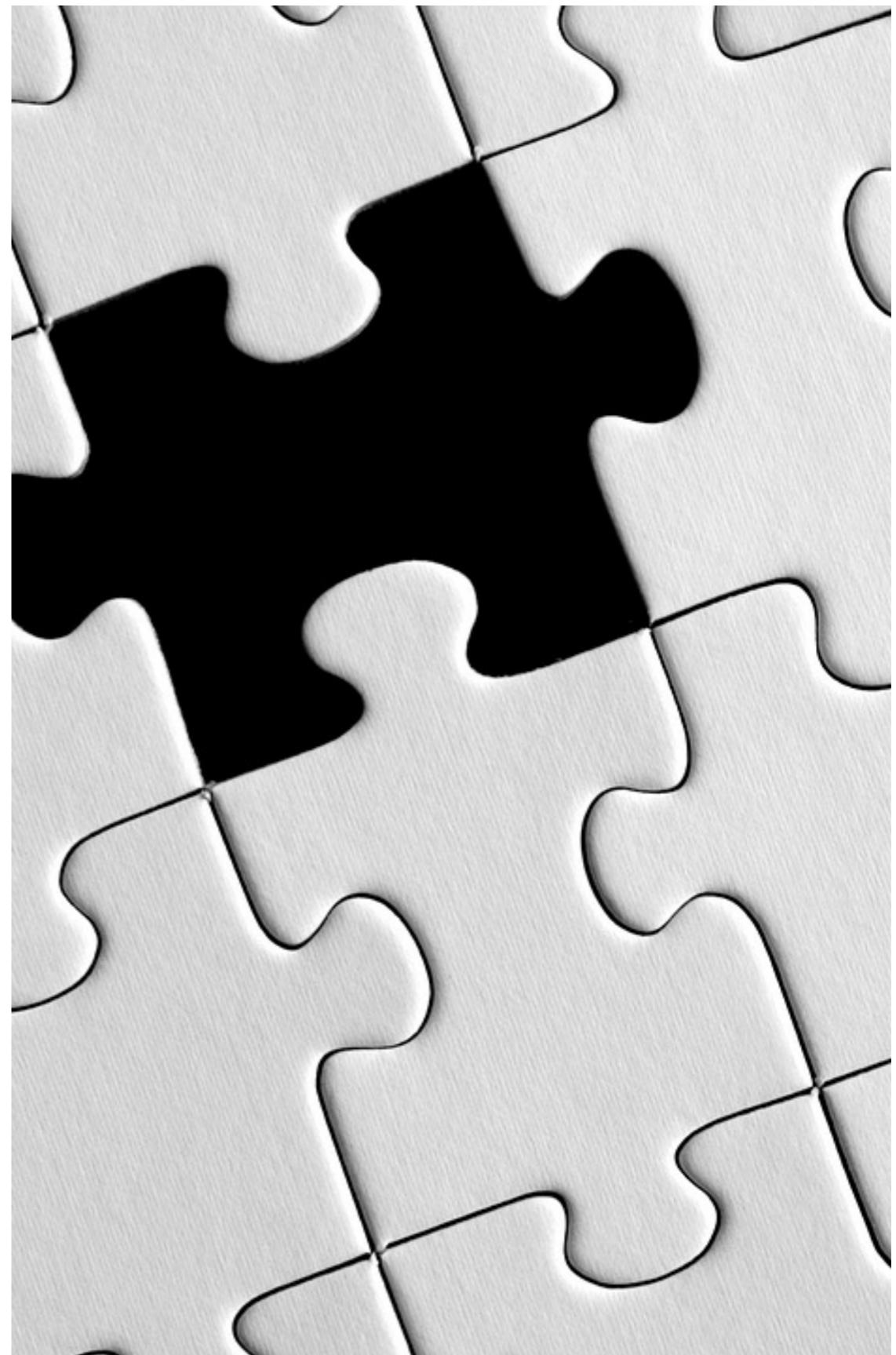
Shape dispositionalism?

- 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



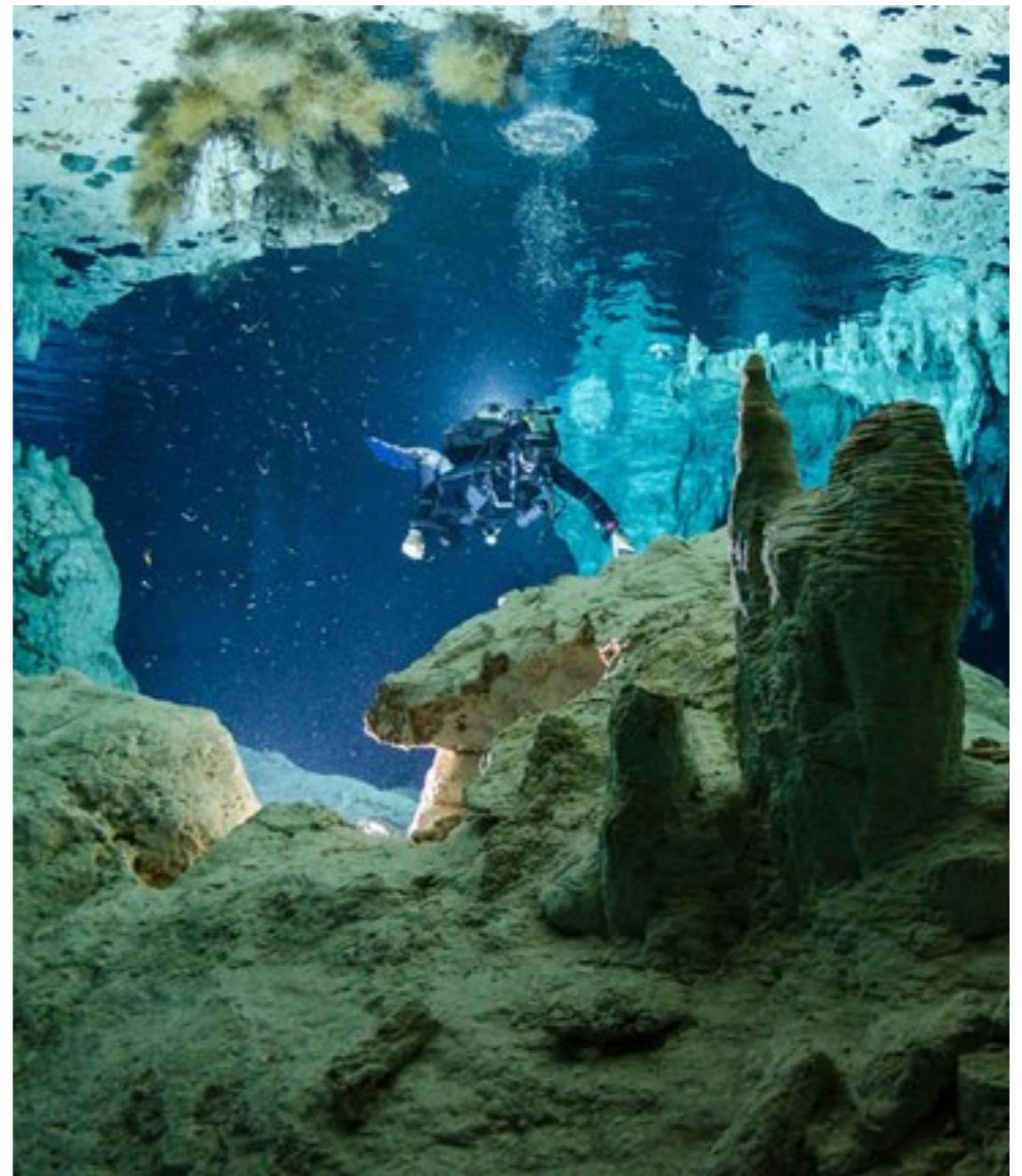
Missing explanation

- 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 perceive its colour (perception reliably tracks objects and properties in your environment)



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 (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:
 1. We can sense or perceive colours
 2. Our colour concepts are response-dependent concepts
- This is a dilemma for colour dispositionalism: If we reject (1) we are pushed towards an eliminativism or subjectivism about colour; If we reject (2) 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)

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 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

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?

