

Perception

LECTURE THREE | MICHAELMAS 2018

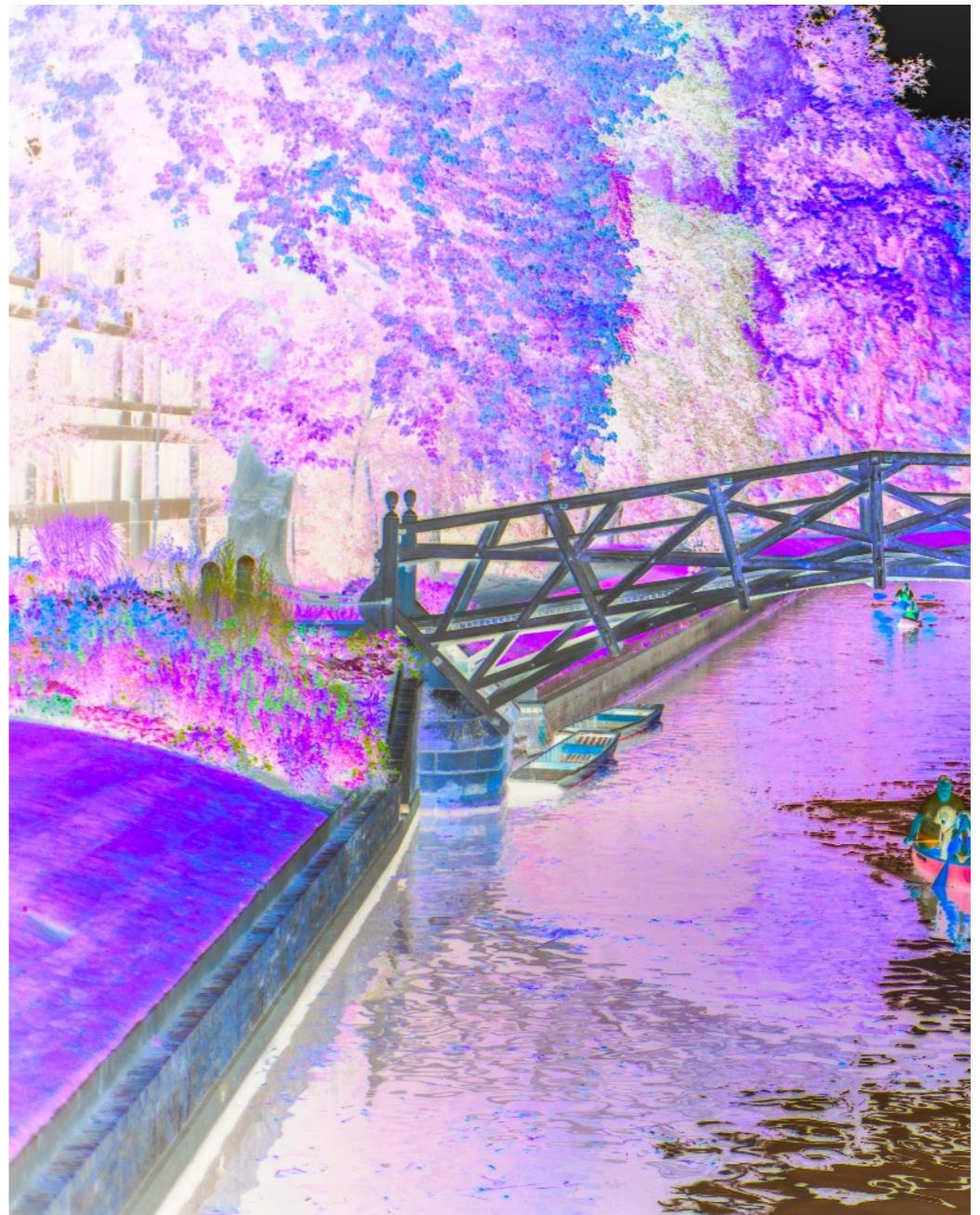
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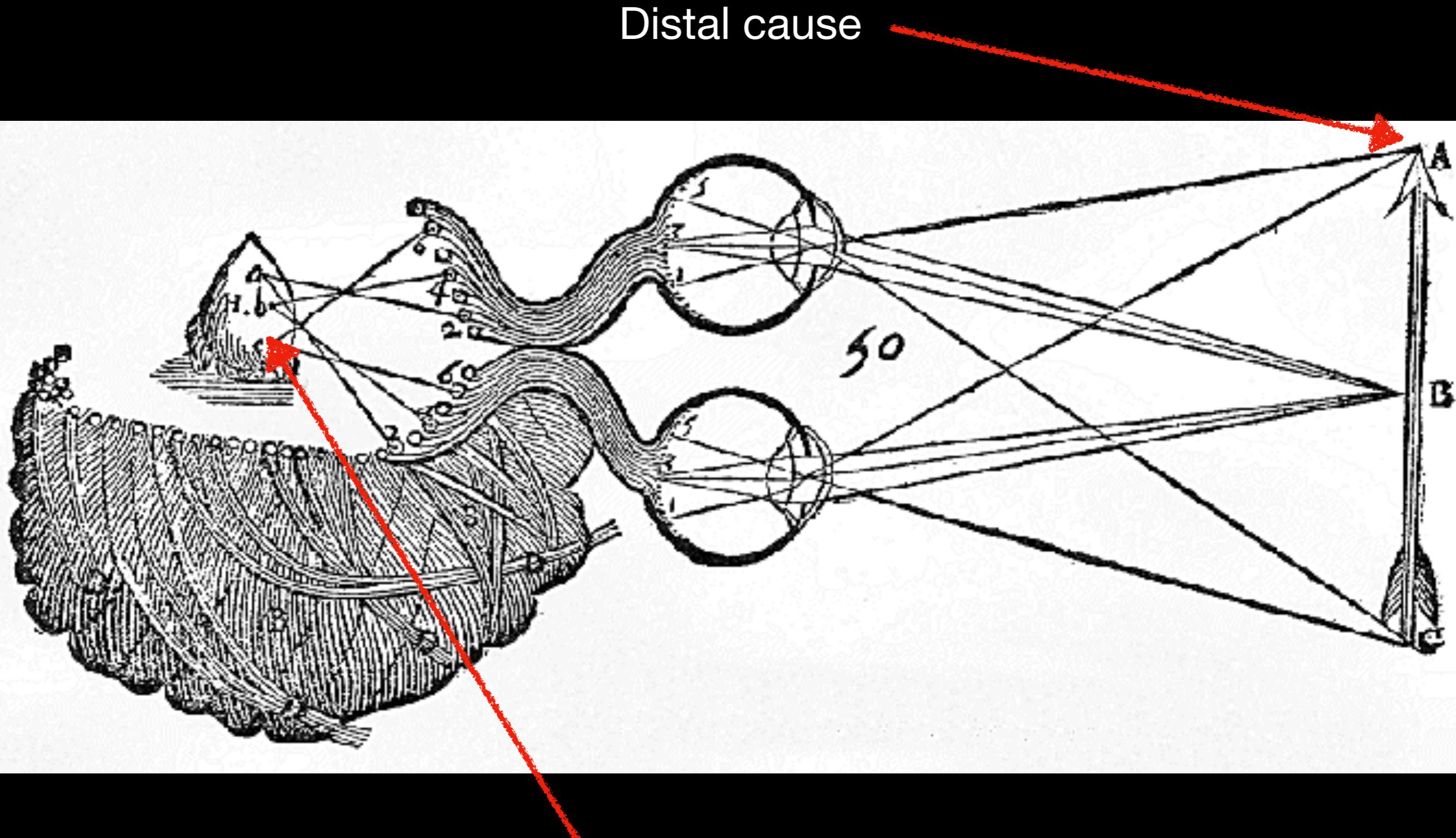
Last week

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

Last Week

- Argument from Illusion
 - Phenomenal Principle
- Argument from hallucination
 - Common Kind Assumption
 - Austin's response
- The Causal Argument
 - The Screening Off Problem





Distal cause

Proximal cause

An inconsistent triad



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

M.G.F. Martin

“...assume that we have ...an awareness of some lavender bush which exists independent of one’s current awareness of it. By the **Common Kind Assumption**, whatever kind of experience that is, just such an experience could have occurred were one merely hallucinating. By **Experiential Naturalism**, we know that there are sufficient ...causes of it. If the hallucinatory experience were relational [i.e presentational] in the manner that the **Naïve Realist** supposes... then the object in this case is not merely non-physical but dependent for its existence on the occurrence of this experience....” (Martin, ‘The Limits of Self-Awareness)

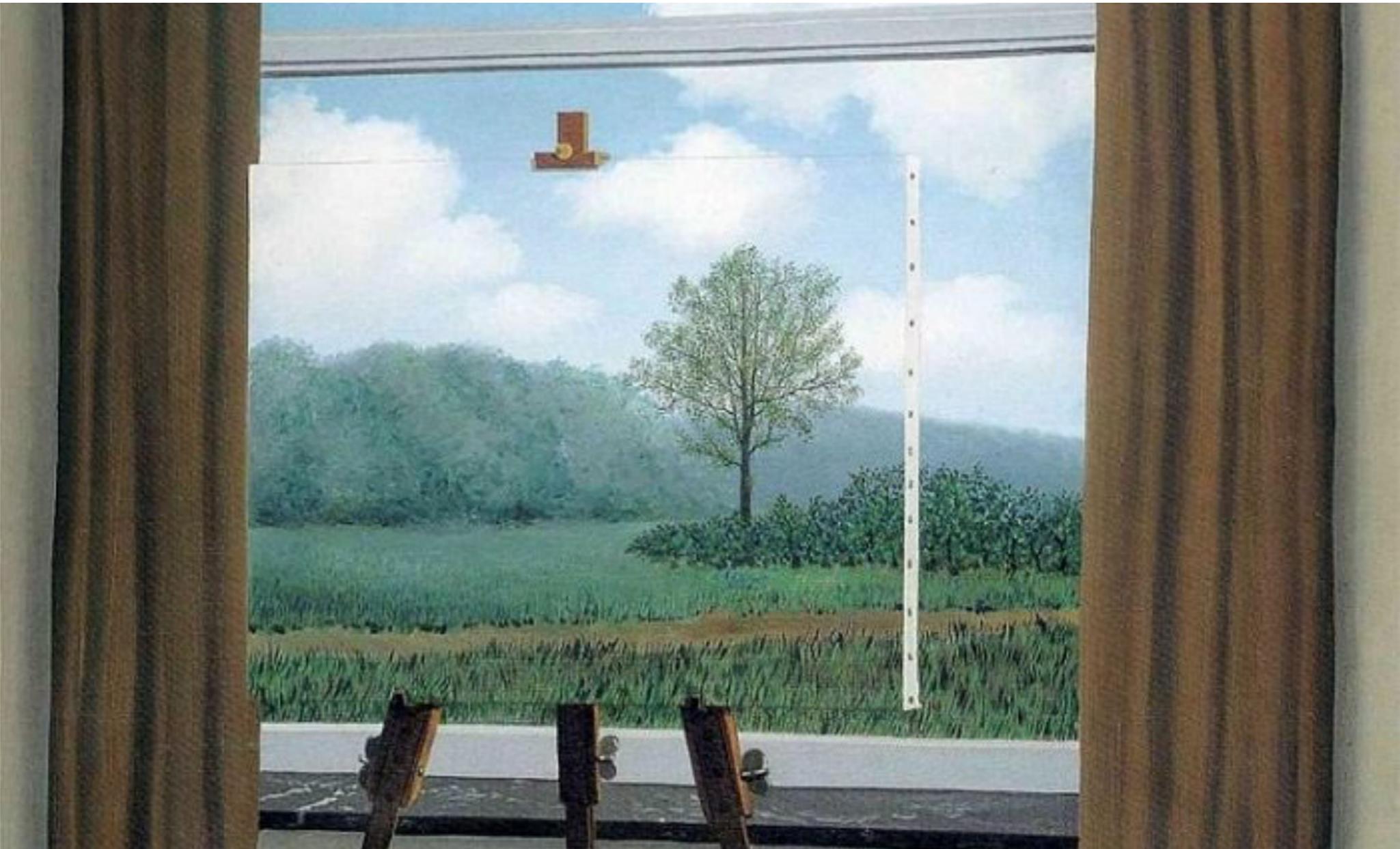


M.G.F. Martin

- So the Common Kind Assumption together with Experiential Naturalism imply that Naive Realism is false
- “...contrary to the Naive Realist’s starting assumption, if the hallucinatory experience is a relation to an object of awareness, it is to a mind-dependent one, and hence the perception is a relation to a mind-dependent object, not the mind-independent object that the Naive Realist hypothesises.”

But now what?

- Let's assume that the Causal Argument is successful. Does it follow that we are presented with mind-independent or non-physical ones? Not obviously.
- Strictly speaking, its conclusion is that causally matching HALLUCINATIONS (a) seem to present us with something (give introspective evidence for the existence of its object), but that (b) if they present us with something this thing is not mind-independent.
- Both the Sense Datum theorist and the Naive Realist assume that an experience that seems to present you with an object (gives introspective evidence for the existence of its object) indeed *does* present you with some object.



Representationalism

G.E.M Anscombe

‘The intentionality of
sensation: a
grammatical
feature’ (1965)



G.E.M. Anscombe

- “In the philosophy of sense-perception there are two opposing positions. One says that what we are immediately aware of in sensation is sense-impressions, called “ideas” by Berkeley and “sense-data” by Russell. The other, taken up nowadays by “ordinary language” philosophy, says that on the contrary we at any rate see objects (in the *wide* modern sense which would include, e.g. shadows) without any such intermediaries.” (Anscombe 1965:65)

G.E.M. Anscombe

- “It is usually part of this position to insist that I can’t see (or, perhaps, feel, hear, taste or smell) something that is not here, any more than I can hit something that is not there...”
- “I wish to say that both these positions are wrong; that both misunderstand verbs of sense-perception, because these verbs are intentional or essentially have an intentional aspect. The first position misconstrues intentional objects as material objects of sensation; the other allows only material objects of sensation.” (Anscombe 1965:65)

Intentional uses of ‘see’

- “When you screw up your eyes looking at a light, you see rays shooting out from it.”
- “Move these handles until you see the bird in the nest.” (Squint-testing apparatus; the bird and the nest are on separate cards.)
- “I hear a ringing in my ears.”





- **Argument:** Suppose that Paul hallucinates a pink square object. Then there is something that Paul hallucinates. But what Paul hallucinates is not a real pink square physical object—after all, Paul is hallucinating, not seeing. Therefore, what Paul hallucinates must be a mental object, an idea or an appearance.
- “I shall not here comment on all that is wrong with this argument. When Paul hallucinates in the above case, he has an experience of a pink square object. This experience has content—it represents a pink square object. *There is*, then, a definite content to Paul's hallucinatory experience. But there is no object, mental or otherwise, that Paul hallucinates.”

(Tye 2002: 448-49)



Michael Tye

Perceptual representation

- Both the Sense Datum theorist and the Naive Realist assume that an experience that seems to present you with an object indeed *does* present you with some object
- The Representationalist (Intentionalist) rejects this assumption. An experience can seem to present you with an object without actually presenting you with anything
- The Causal Argument can now be used to argue that perceptual experience is not a presentation, but a representational mental state (like a belief or thought)

“According to accounts of this kind, a subject’s perceptual experience is a psychological state/event with a representational content, a content that represents her environment to be a certain way. The representational content of a subject’s experience is specified in terms of its veridicality conditions. These are the environmental states of affairs that have to obtain if the environment is to be the way the subject’s experience represents it to be.”

– Matthew Soteriou 2016:32

Perceptual representation

Nadya sees a tomato on her kitchen table

1. **Mode:** Nadya's experience is a specific kind of mental state. It is a *perceptual* experience as opposed to, say, a desire or a belief, and it is a *visual* experience, not an auditory or olfactory one
2. **Content:** Nadya's experience is of a *tomato on her kitchen table*. It represents the world to be a certain way. The mental state is veridical or accurate if the world in fact is that way.



Cognitive representation

*Nadya **believes** that there is a tomato on her kitchen table*

1. **Mode:** Nadya's belief is a specific kind of mental state. It is a belief as opposed to, say, a desire or a perceptual experience
2. **Content:** Nadya's belief is about *there being a tomato on her kitchen table*. It represents the world to be a certain way. The mental state is veridical/accurate if the world in fact is that way.



Perceptual representation

If perception is a representational state, then:

1. Perceptual experiences have an intentional or representational content just as other mental states (beliefs, desires, thoughts)
2. Being in a representational state of this kind does not require the existence of its objects. All that is needed is that the object is represented
3. We are not aware of the contents or representations themselves, but of the objects and scenes represented
4. Illusions and hallucinations are non-veridical experiences: they represent the world to be a way it is not



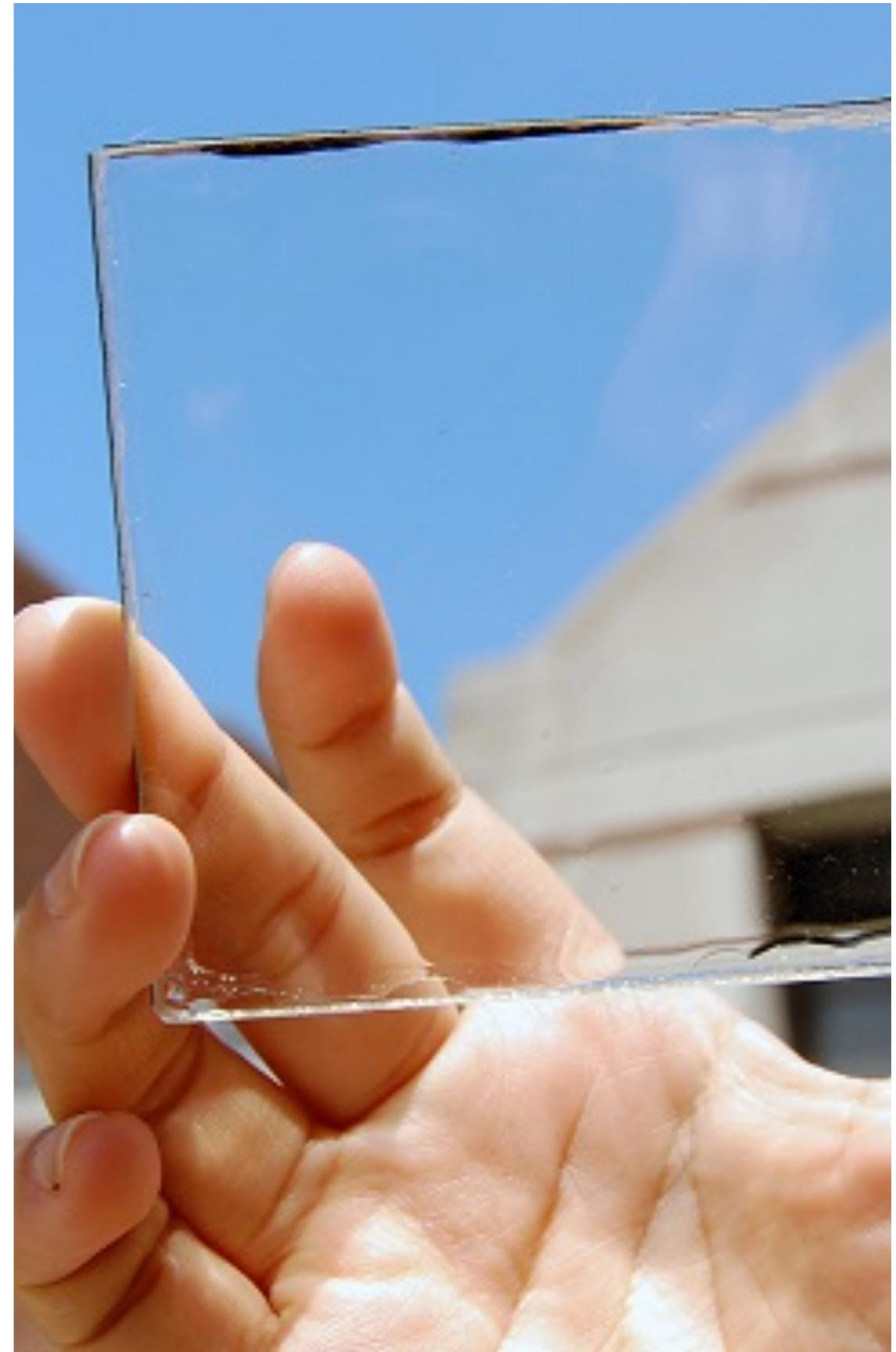
Perceptual representation

If perception is a representational state, then:

1. Representational content is (in part) responsible for the distinctive phenomenology of perception
2. *Weak representationalism*: Experiences with the distinctive phenomenology of perception are representational states.
3. *Strong representationalism*: There can be no difference in the phenomenal character of two perceptual experiences without a difference in their representational content.
(phenomenology supervenes on content)



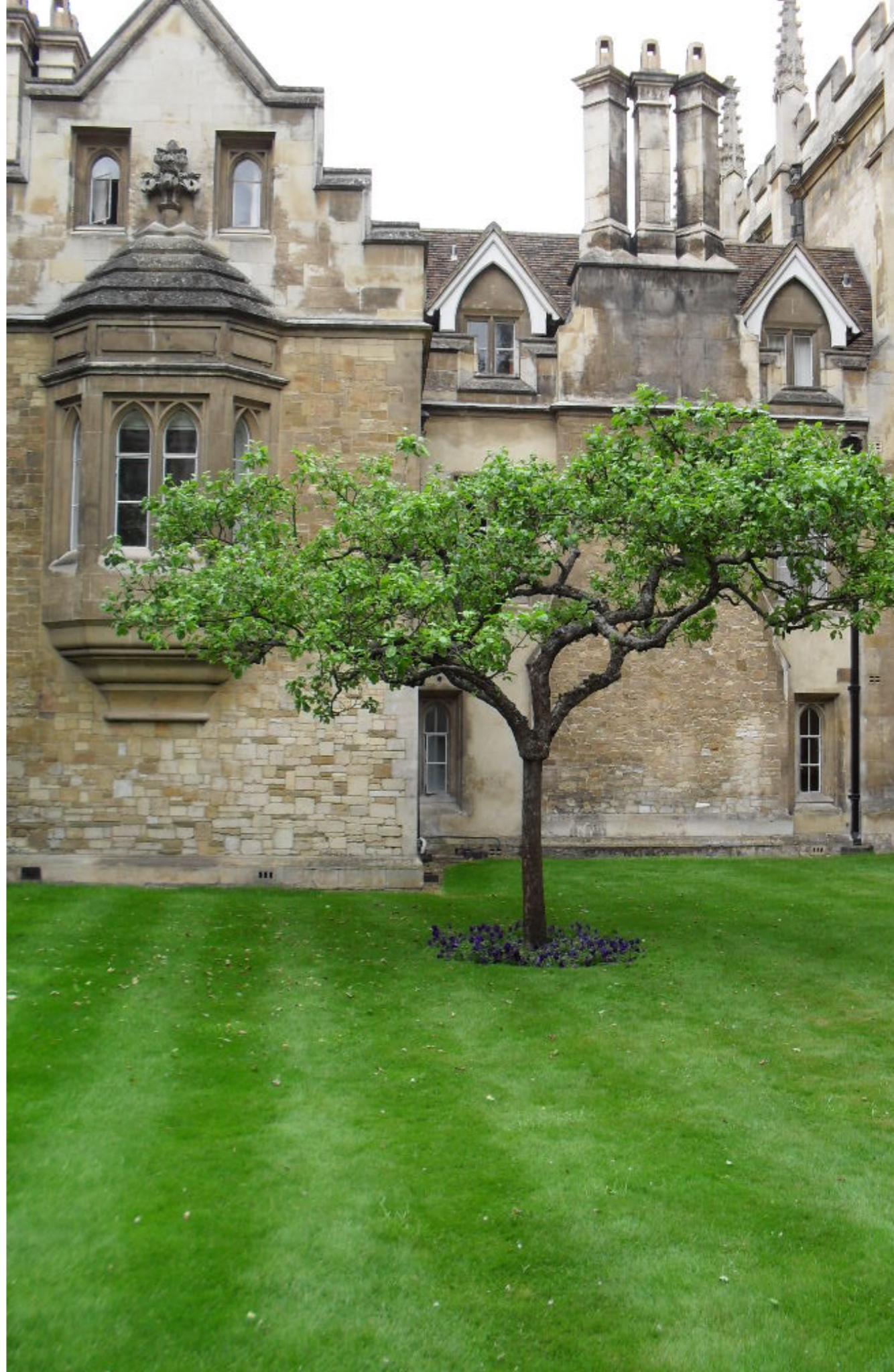
Argument from Transparency



Transparency

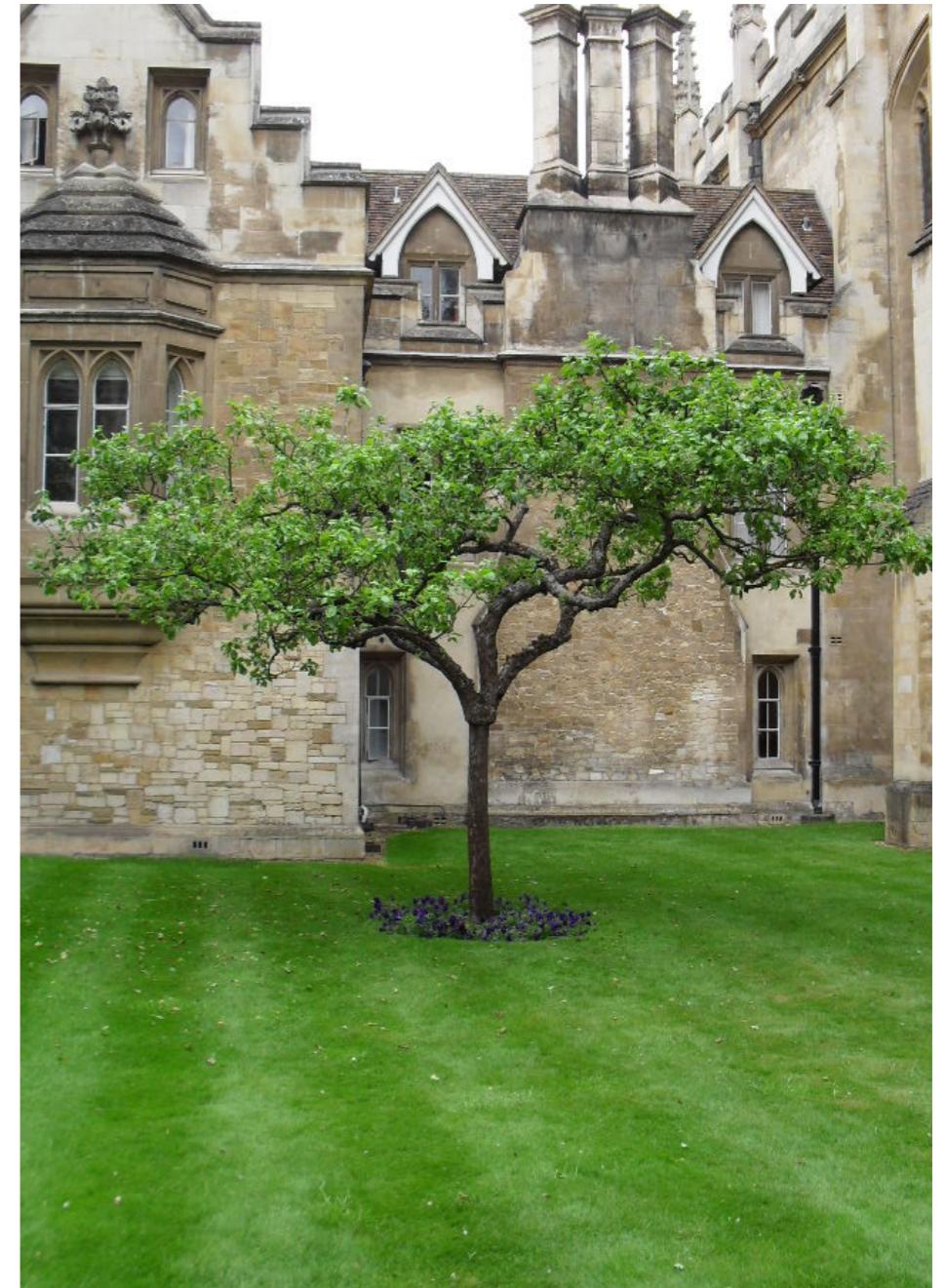
- The Representationalist can exploit Moore's Transparency observation
- “Look at a tree and try to turn your attention to intrinsic features of your visual experience. I predict you will find that the only features there to turn your attention to will be features of the presented tree. . . ”

(Harman 1990:39)



Argument from Transparency

- When we introspect our experience of a tree we seem to be presented with something that seems to be a tree. And so...
 - A. Perception is a presentation of a tree
 - B. Perception is a presentation of a mind-dependent sense datum that merely seems to be a tree
 - C. Perception is a representation of a tree
- Transparency brings out that it is only the object of perception that makes a difference to the phenomenology
- The second is clearly the *worst* account of the phenomenology of perception

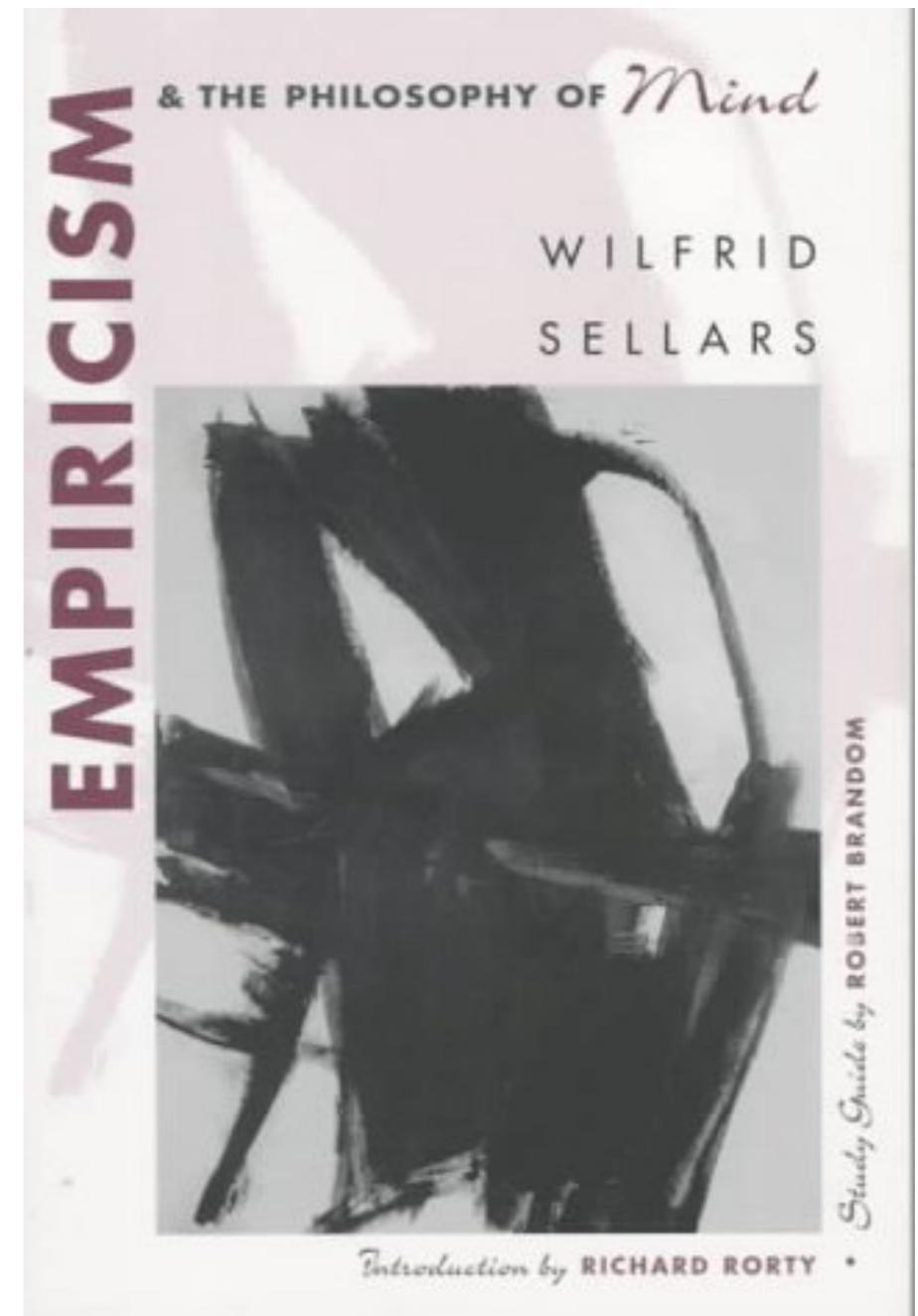


The Myth of the Given



Wilfrid Sellars (1912-1989)

- *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (1956)
- Recall, both the Naive Realist and Sense-Datum theorist assume that some items are simply *given* in experience (presentation).
- But perception seems a source of knowledge (justified true belief)
- How are perceptual beliefs justified?



“[W]e may well experience a feeling of surprise on noting that according to sense-datum theorists, it is particulars that are sensed. For what is known, even in non-inferential knowledge, is facts rather than particulars, items of the form something’s being thus and so or something’s standing in a certain relation to something else. It would seem, then, that the sensing of sense contents cannot constitute knowledge, inferential or non-inferential....”

– Sellars, 1956:3

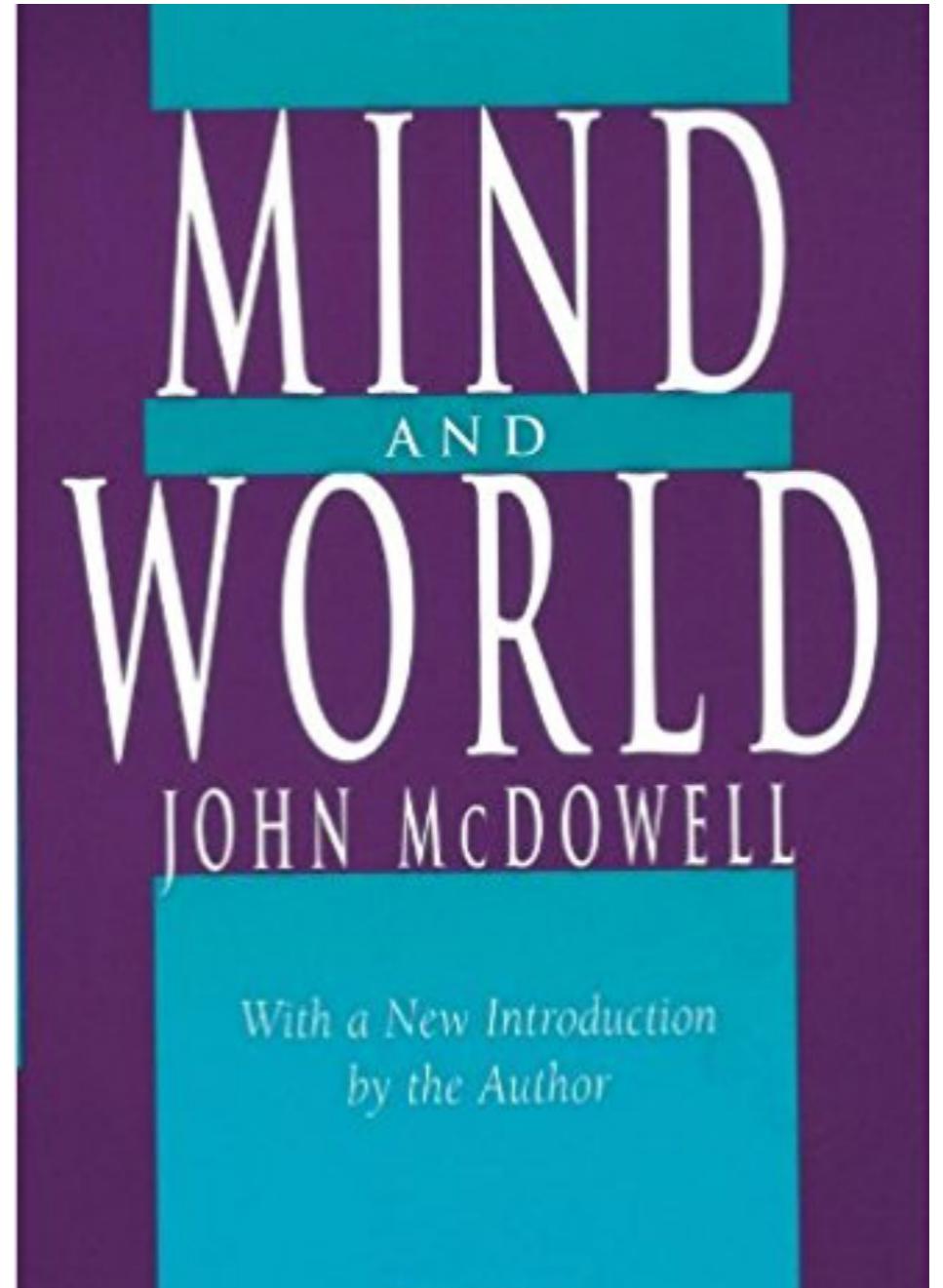
Problems with ‘The Given’

- Sellars observes that being presented with a blue patch doesn't provide us with justification to believe that there is a blue patch
- Any justification would need to have the form of a true proposition, a conceptual content you could express in language ('there is something blue out there'). Sense-data cannot be of that form.
- (Compare, using a tomato as a premise in an argument!)



McDowell's reply

- *Mind and World* (1994)
- We can meet Sellars' challenge only if we suppose experience itself has conceptual, propositional content
- To have a perceptual experience is always to experience that things are thus-and-so
- So understood, experience presents us with facts (propositions) we can know



Example

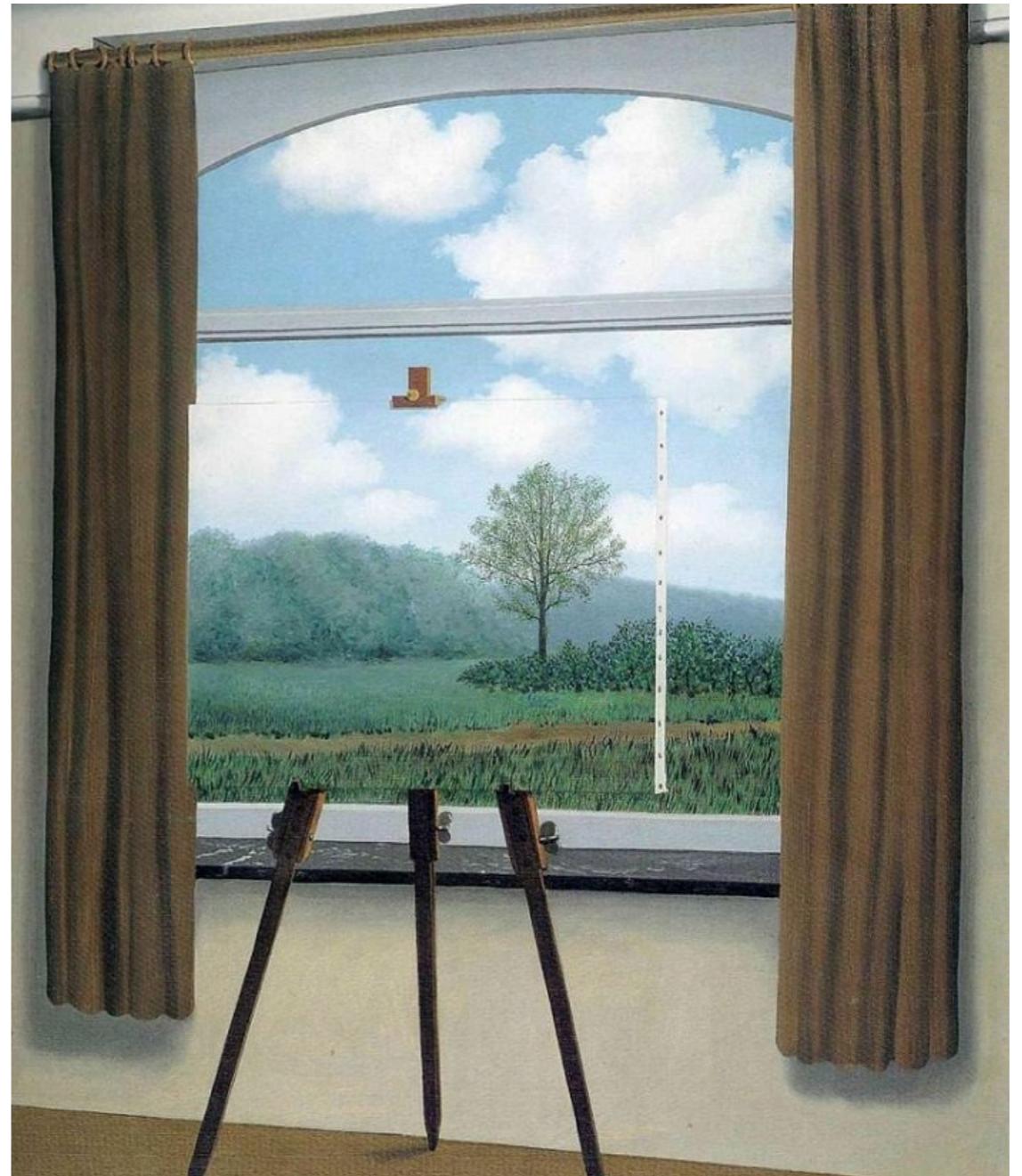
Nadya sees a tomato on her kitchen table

- Her experience, if veridical, represents the following fact: *that there is a tomato on the table*
- Nadya can take her experience at face value, and form the belief that there is a tomato on the table
- The belief is justified by the reasons to believe that are available to Nadya when she has the experience



Questions

- Is it defensible that the content of perception is propositional?
(Why not think it is like the content of a picture?)
- What would a Naive Realist have to do to meet Sellars' challenge? Is this feasible?
- If perception and belief are both representational states, then what explains the distinctive phenomenology of perception?



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