

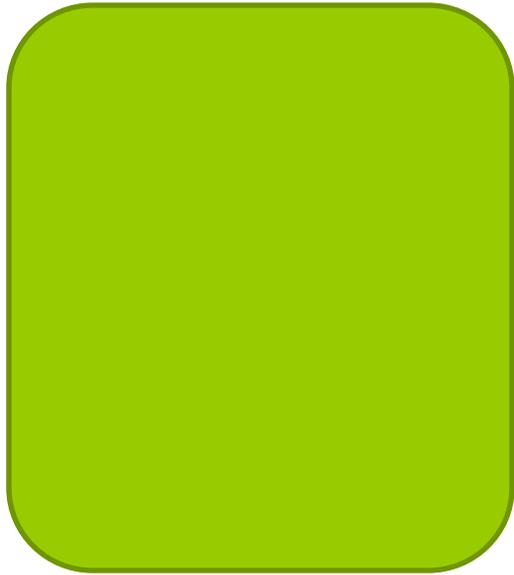
# V71LAR: Locke, Appearance and Reality

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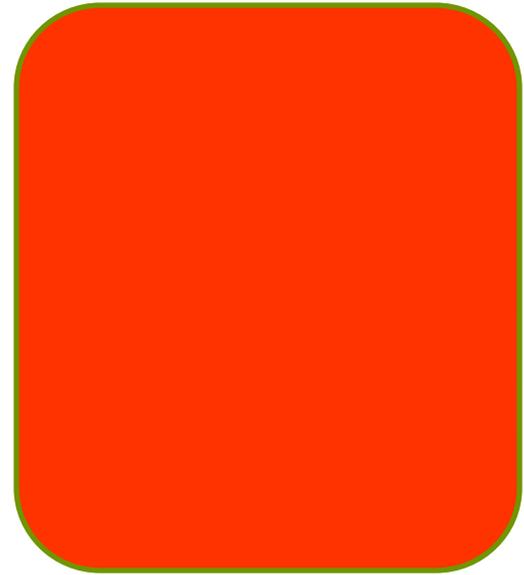
TOPIC 2: WHAT IS IT TO PERCEIVE  
AN OBJECT?

Are you getting this?

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Yes



No

# Illusion

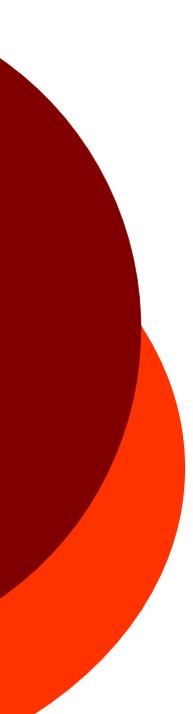
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# 1. Locke's Empiricism

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- “Let us suppose the mind to be...white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas; how comes it to be furnished?...Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in a word, from *experience*: in that all knowledge is founded” (II.i.2)
- **'Sensation'** is experience of external objects (e.g. tables, chairs) and their sensible qualities (e.g. red, oblong).
- **'Reflection'** is experience of the operations of our own minds (e.g. imagination, reason, belief, doubt).



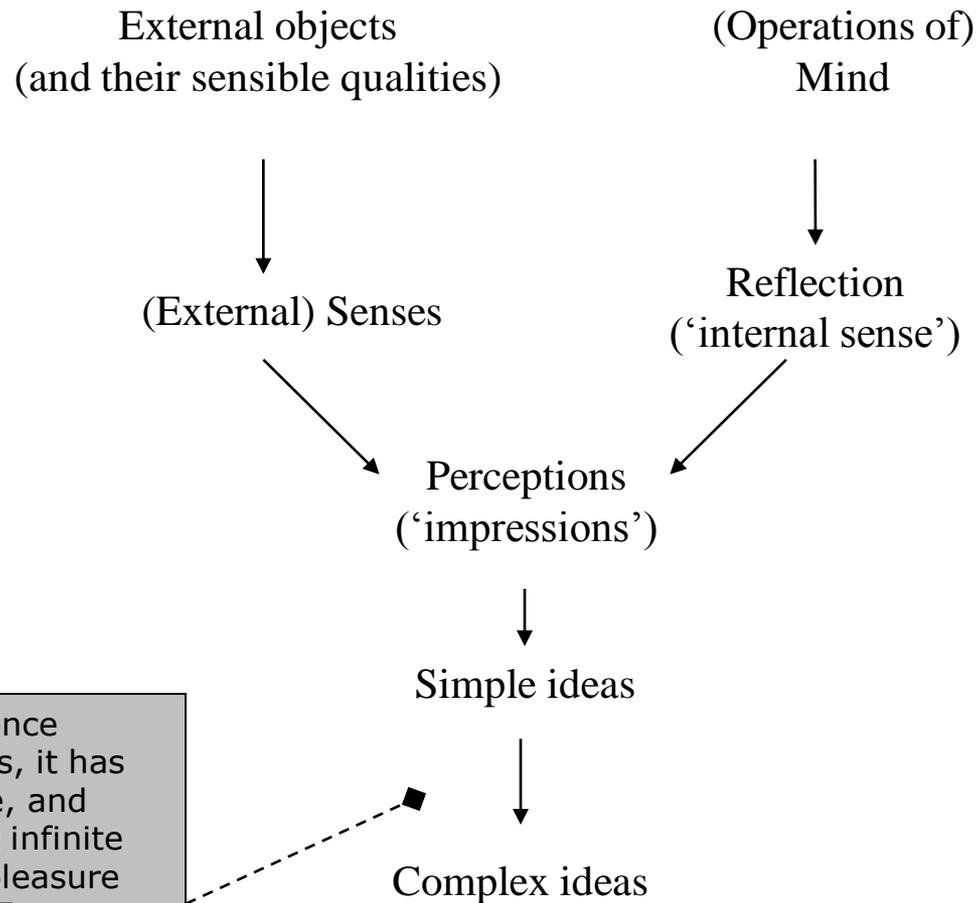
# 1. Locke's Empiricism, ctd.

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- For Locke, 'simple ideas' are those derived directly from sensation and reflection (II.ii.1).
- 'Complex ideas' are those constructed by operations of the mind, using simple ideas as raw materials (II.xii).

# 1. Locke's Empiricism, ctd.

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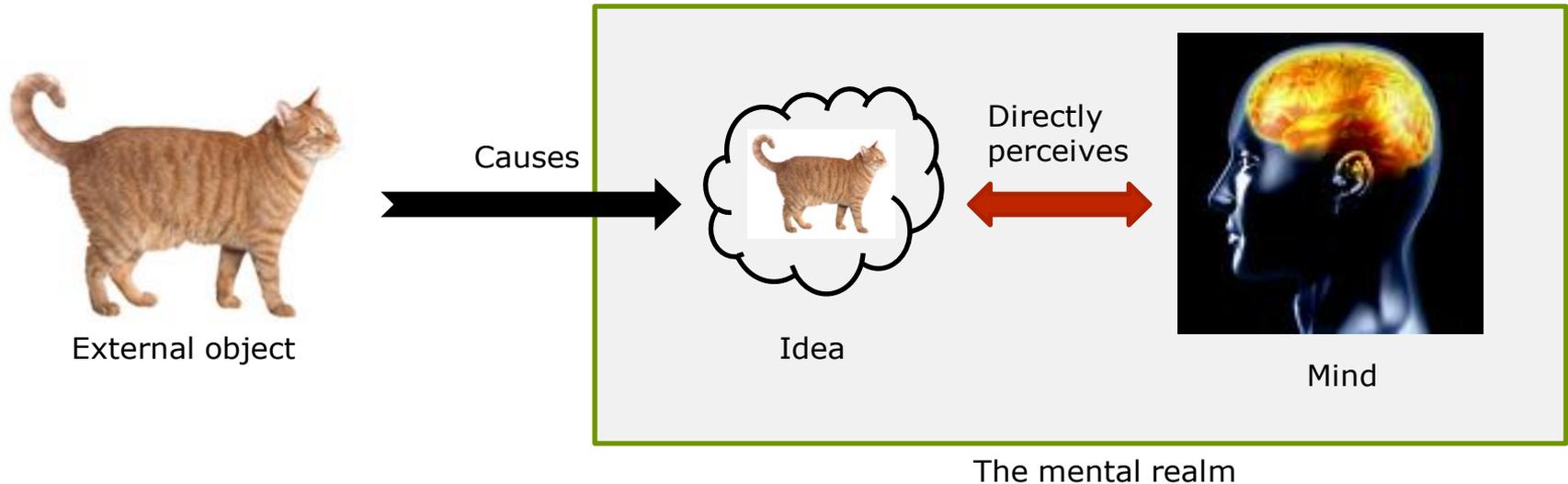
“When the understanding is once stored with these simple ideas, it has the power to repeat, compare, and unite them even to an almost infinite variety, and so can make at pleasure new complex ideas” (II.ii.2). E.g. Association, abstraction.

## 2. The Question of Perception

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- Subject S perceives object O if and only if ... WHAT?
- I.e. We want the *necessary* and *sufficient* conditions for an act to be an act of perception.
- Sufficient condition: The conditions such that, if an act satisfies them, then it is an act of perception.
- Necessary condition: The conditions such that, if an act is an act of perception, it satisfies them.
- Generally (see Baggini & Fosl §4.11)
  - *A if B*  $\Rightarrow$  B is sufficient for A
  - *A only if B*  $\Rightarrow$  B is necessary for A
  - *A if and only if B*  $\Rightarrow$  B is both necessary and sufficient for A.

# 3. Locke and Indirect Realism



- “What so ever the **mind** perceives in itself, or is the immediate object of perception, that I call **idea**; and the power to produce any idea in the mind, I call the quality of the **subject** wherein that power is.” (II.viii.8)
- This is the “traditional interpretation” of Locke. See Greenlee for doubts.

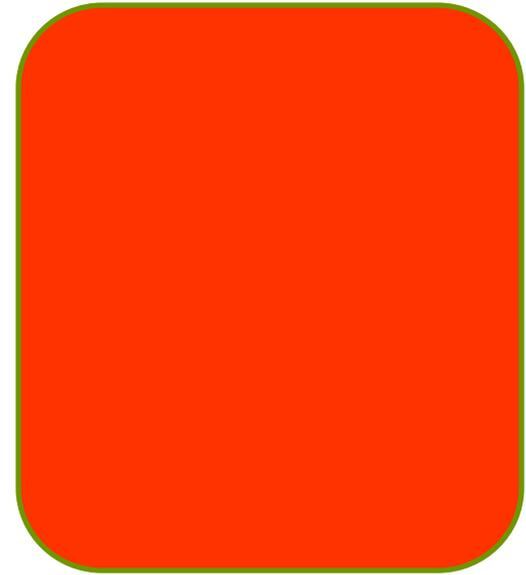
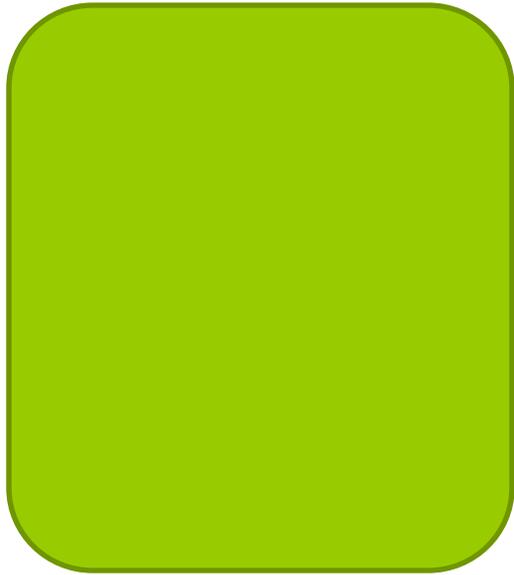
### 3. Locke and Indirect Realism, ctd.

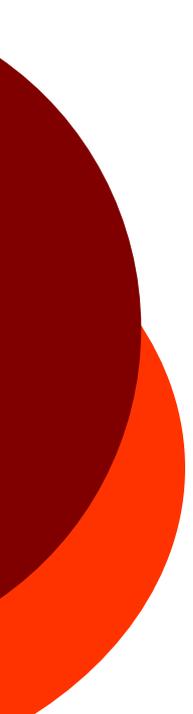
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- **Indirect Realism (IR):** S perceives P if and only if S perceives a mental image ('idea') which (a) represents O and (b) is appropriately caused by O.
- 'Mental images' variously called 'ideas', 'sense-data' or 'appearances'.

Clear?

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## 4. The Argument from Illusion

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- 1) In illusion it appears to the agent as if there is an object which is F.
- 2) In illusion there is no external object which is F.
- 3) Whenever it appears to an agent that there is an object which is F, there is some object which exists and which is F (and this is the immediate object of awareness).

Therefore:

- 4) In illusion there is some internal mental object which is F (and this is the immediate object of awareness). [From 1, 2 & 3]

## 4. The Argument from Illusion, ctd.

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- 5) Illusion and veridical perception can be subjectively indistinguishable.
- 6) If illusion and veridical perception involved different immediate objects of awareness, then they would never be subjectively indistinguishable.

Therefore

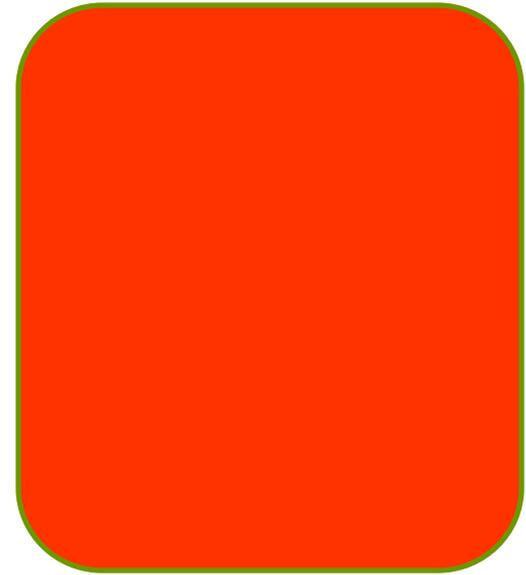
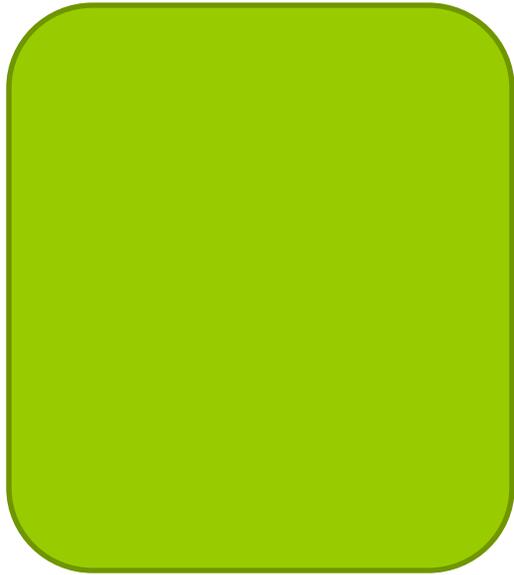
- 7) Illusion and veridical perception do not involve different immediate objects of awareness. [From 5 & 6]

Therefore

- 8) In both illusion and veridical perception there is some internal mental object which is F (and this is the immediate object of awareness). [From 4 & 7]

Clear?

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# 5. Direct Realism

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External object

Directly  
perceives

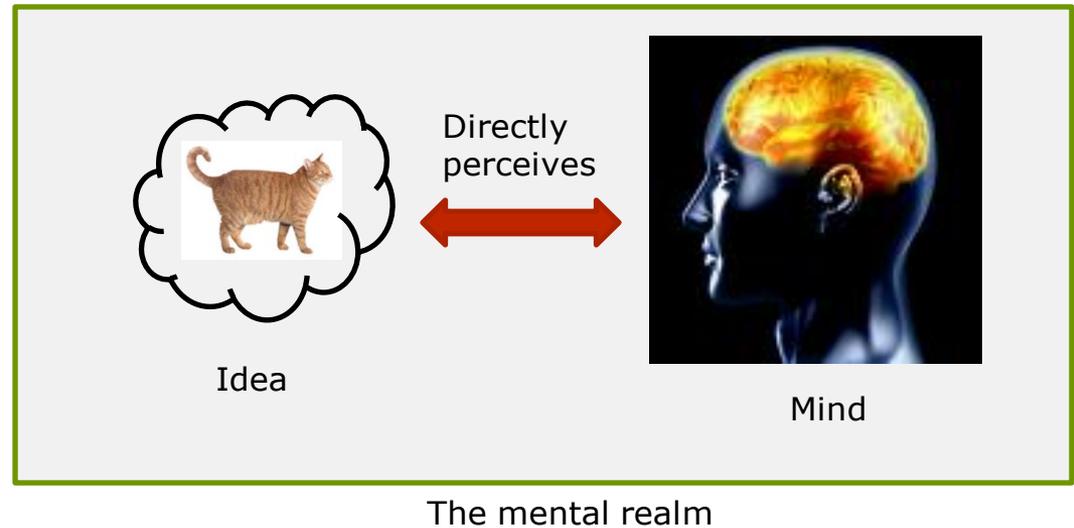


Mind

- **Direct Realism (DR):** Agents directly perceive external objects (i.e. agents do not perceive external objects through perceiving some internal intermediary).

## 6. Anti-realism

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- **Anti-realism:** There are no objects that exist independently of our (or some) ideas about them.

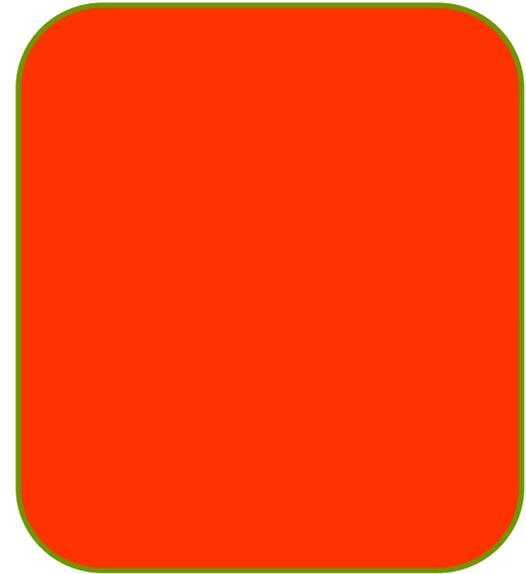
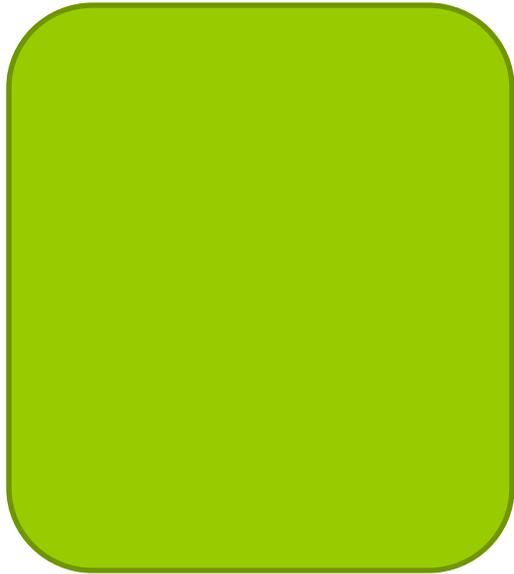
## 6. Anti-realism, ctd.

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- Some varieties of Anti-realism:
- **Eliminativism:** There are no ordinary objects (tables, chairs, cats, etc.).
- **Reductivism:** There are ordinary objects, but they are *nothing but* collections of ideas. 'To be is to be perceived' (Berkeley). Two types:
  - **Idealists:** Ordinary objects are *reduced to* collections of actual ideas.
    - E.g. "There is a table in the lecture hall" means the same as "Lecture-hall-table-ideas are now occurring".
  - **Phenomenalists:** Ordinary objects *reduced to* collections of actual *and possible* ideas.
    - E.g. "There is a table in the lecture hall" means the same as "Table-ideas *would* occur, if lecture-hall-ideas were to occur".

Clear?

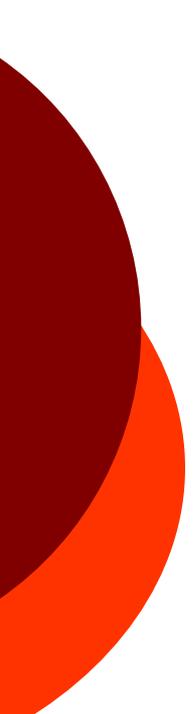
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# Summary of theories of perception

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| <b><i>Type of theory</i></b> | <b><i>Things we are directly aware of</i></b> | <b><i>Things we are ultimately aware of</i></b> | <b><i>Talk of tables and chairs is talk of...</i></b> |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Indirect Realism</b>      | Ideas   | External objects                                | External objects                                      |
| <b>Direct Realism</b>        | External objects                              | External objects                                | External objects                                      |
| <b>Eliminativism</b>         | Ideas   | Ideas   | Nothing at all (so should be abandoned)               |
| <b>Idealism</b>              | Ideas   | Ideas   | Actual Ideas  |
| <b>Phenomenalism</b>         | Ideas   | Ideas   | Actual and possible ideas                             |



# Key points for this lecture

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- Locke gives an account of the source of all our ideas *in experience*.
- On a traditional interpretation, Locke is an Indirect Realist about perception.
- The argument from illusion in favour of Indirect Realism.
- Alternatives to Indirect Realism: Direct Realism and Anti-realism.

# Reading and References

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## **Compulsory reading for your second seminar**

- E.J. Lowe *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Locke on Human Understanding* Chapter 3, first three sections (pp.35-47) & final section.
- Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Book II, chapters 1, 2 & 9.

## **References for this lecture**

- J. Baggini & P. Fosl. *The Philosopher's Toolkit*. [An excellent source for those new to philosophy].
- D. Greenlee "Locke's idea of 'idea'" in I. Tipton (ed.) *Locke on Human Understanding*.
- For full reading list for this topic, see module guide.

# Questions?

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