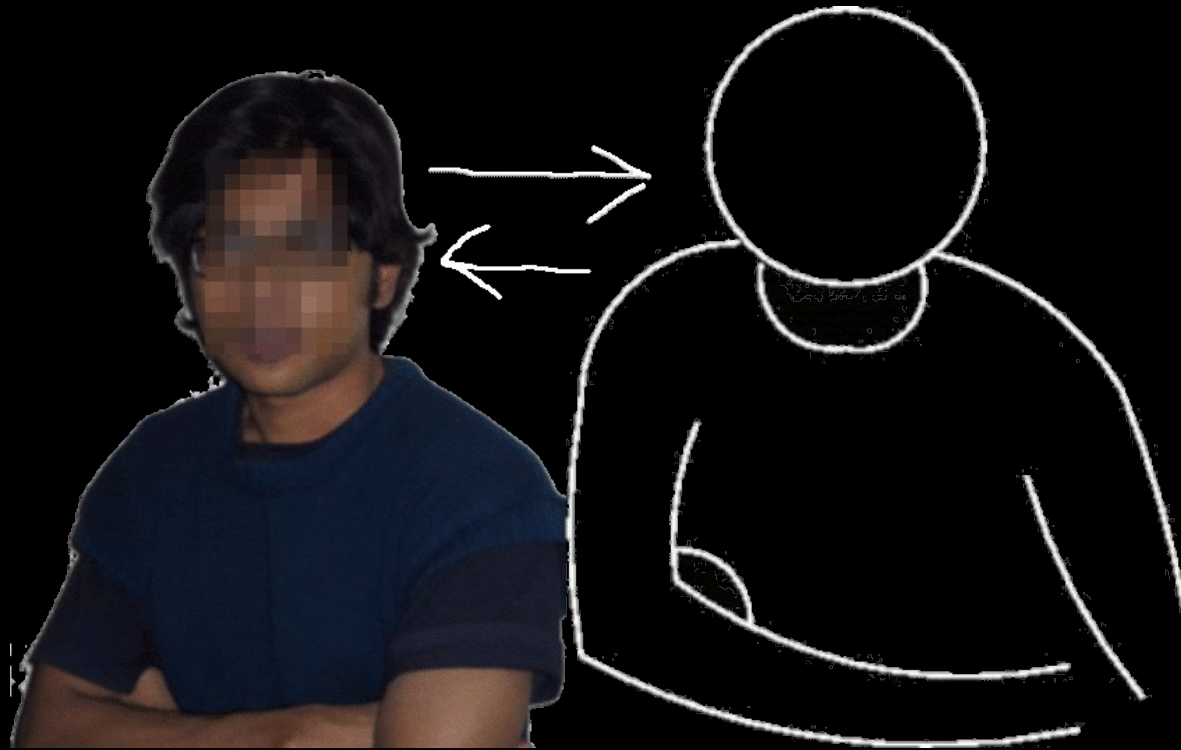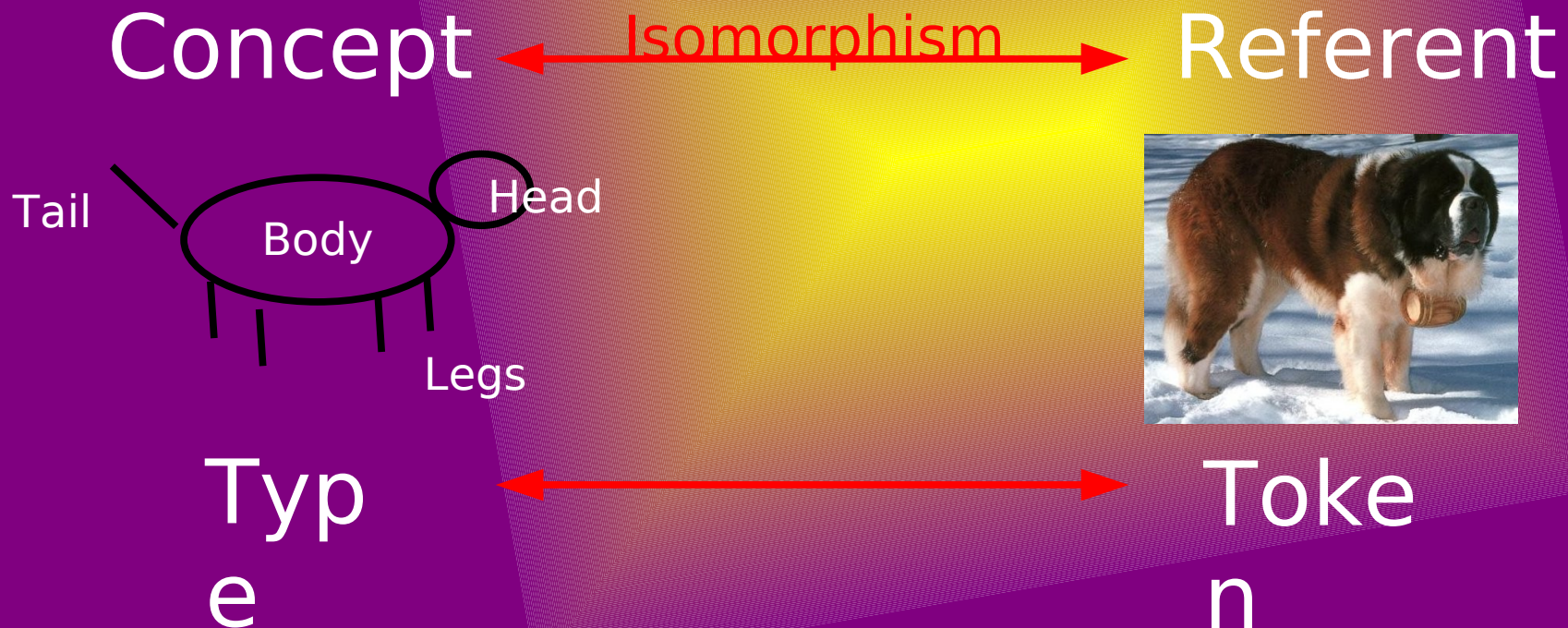# Rescuing Resemblance:

Responding to Common Objections to Resemblance-based Theories of Reference

Resemblance-Based Reference

...Means: relationship between a concept and its
referent is partially or entirely one of resemblance.

Concept   ← Isomorphism →   Referent

Tail

Head

Body

Legs

Type   ←————→   Token

The Allure of Resemblance

Jesse Prinz : [Prinz, pp. 26-28]

- Provide ready theory of concept acquisition.
- Seem to handle categorization well.
- Seem to fit well with some experimental psychology results.
- Tend to be parsimonious.

Who's interested?

John Locke? Concept empiricists

The Heart of the Problem

"Any two objects resemble each other in one way or another, but this does not mean that every object refers to everything else." [Prinz, p. 31]

In particular:

- **Resemblance** is symmetrical and reflexive.

$(a \otimes b) = (b \otimes a)$ $(a \otimes a)$

- Reference ***in most cases*** is neither symmetrical nor reflexive.

Goodman's Complaint

"The most naive view of representation might be put something like this: 'A represents B if and only if A appreciably resembles B'"or 'A represents B to the extent that A resembles B.' Vestiges of this view, with assorted refinements, persist in most writing on representation. Yet more error could hardly be compressed in so short a formula." [Goodman, p. 3]

Goodman Continues:

"Again, unlike representation, resemblance is symmetric: B *is as much like* A *as* A *is like* B, *but while a painting may represent the Duke of Wellington, the Duke doesn't represent the painting."* [Goodman, p. 4]

"As much like"?...

The Argument from Symmetry

$(a \otimes b) = (b \otimes a)$ But $(a \otimes b) = (b \otimes a)$ **?**

Two responses:

- Reconsider the nature of resemblance.

  Full resemblance may be an essential aspect of **resemblance simpliciter** *for philosophers, but that is not how people normally think about resemblance.*

- Remove part of the burden for reference from resemblance.

  Resemblance is largely a visual-based concept, but many concepts are not visual.

Resemblance Re-Examined

Duke of Wellington **?** Duke of Wellington's Portrait

"Contrast the image of a cat (such as a photograph) with a real cat. The real cat is a mammal, furry, alive, eighteen inches long (say), and composed of flesh and blood, while the image is not a mammal, not furry, not alive, five inches long (say), and composed of paper and Kodak chemicals." [Goldberg and Pessin, 1977]

But

There is a bidirectional mapping between aspects of the Duke and aspects of his portrait.

The Spitting Image Of...

"As much like" = "likeness"?

likeness (*n*): copy,
                    portrait

Portrait of the Duke as abstraction from the
Duke

From original to copy, a substantive and qualitative loss of information.
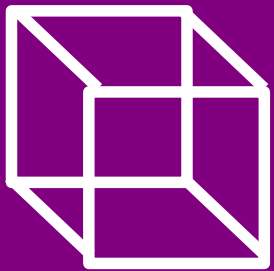
Duke as embodiment of the image in the
portrait

Filling in the details that the portrait of necessity leaves out.

Levels and Meta-Levels

Level
 a certain perspective

an abstraction away from that level

Meta-Level

"This is a square"?!

"This is a cube"

A Duke and His Portrait

- The portrait is a portrait *of the Duke* by virtue of being a   meta-level description of the Duke.

- If it were not a meta-level description of the Duke, it would not be a portrait of him.

- The defender against the "argument from symmetry" need only say that reference depends on resemblance in   the one direction and not resemblance in the other.

The Case of Identical Twins

- "Perfect" symmetry, but...
- Is this still resemblance, or is it something more?
- In any case, no level/meta-level relationship here.

- So: "perfect" resemblance wrong kind of resemblance for reference.

Reference Reconsidered

- **<u>linguistics</u>:** the relationship between nouns or pronouns   and the objects they name.

- **<u>concept theory</u>:** the relationship between concepts and the things they are about.

- **p<u>roposal</u>:** reference requires a relationship between one logical level, the meta-level (the word or the concept), and   another (what the word or concept picks out).

- **p<u>artial definition</u>:** a relationship from more abstract to more concrete.

Reflexivity and Self-Reference

Goodman again:
"An object resembles itself to the maximum degree but rarely represents itself; resemblance, unlike representation, is reflexive."

- "My friend Gene resembles Robert De Niro."
- "My friend Gene resembles my friend Gene." (or: "…resembles himself")

Two Paradigmatic Examples

This sentence has five words.

Ceci n'est pas une pipe.

Prinz's Solution

"Once we have admitted the insufficiency of resemblance in explaining intentionality, Goodman then argues that resemblance plays no role at all. Assume that my mental image of a dog cannot represent a dog solely in virtue of resembling one. To explain its intentionality, we might supplement the resemblance story by saying that my dog image is a perceptual state that was initially caused by my seeing a dog. Once we have introduced this causal story, the fact that my dog image resembles a dog seems to do no explanatory work." [Prinz, p. 31]

But: Is this Prinz's answer?

Proxytypes as Proxies

- Internal features play a role precisely *because* of their resemblance to features of their referents.
- Able to "stand in" for their referents in mental   simulations for the same reason.

"If concepts are proxytypes, thinking is a simulation process.... Tokening a proxytype is generally tantamount to entering a perceptual state of the kind one would be in if one were to experience the thing it represents. One can simulate the manipulation of real objects by manipulating proxytypes of them in their absence. The term 'proxytype' conveys the idea that perceptually derived representations function as proxies in such simulations. They are like the scale models that stand in for objects in courtroom reenactments."

Informational Semantics Without Atomism

*"...Proxytype theory is like informational atomism without the atomism."* [Prinz, p. 164]

On the one hand, my concept of RABBIT is a "correct" concept of RABBIT precisely because it reliably tracks rabbits.

On the other, its ability to track rabbits follows directly from its constitutive structure.

Imagism Updated

- *"One must abandon the view that concepts are* **conscious** *pictures."* [Prinz, p. 139, emphasis added]

- Instead? *"Highly structured, unconscious perceptual representations."* [Prinz, p. 139]

- Multimodal representations.
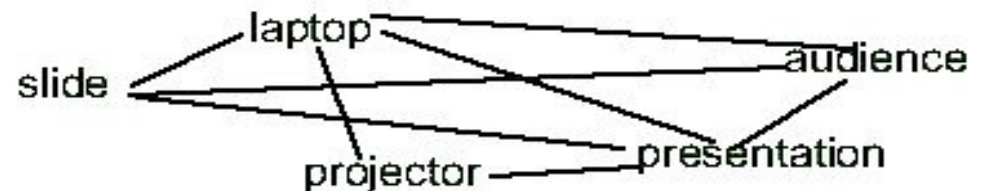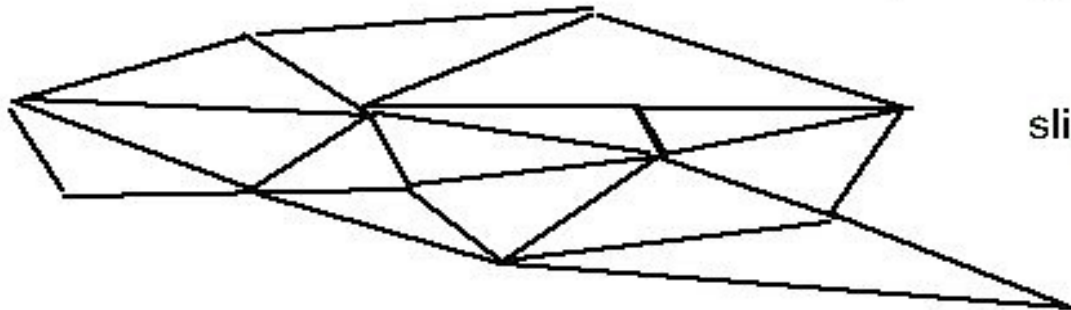
The Argument from Over-Generalization

We pick out two things as resembling each other precisely because we see a similarity that is qualitatively *different* from the minimal way in which everything resembles everything.

The Argument from Under-Generalization

- Berkeley's triangles and abstract thinking.
- Fodor's friend John.

- Wittgenstein's "man climbing a hill".

Two responses

Let resemblance bear only part of the burden.

Broaden the notion of resemblance.

Conclusions

- Not arguing *in favor of* resemblance-based theories so much as *against* the standard objections.

- In particular, Goodman's argument from symmetry is not all that it seems.

- The problem lies with our notions of resemblance and reference.

- Just as reference can be seen as a relationship across logical levels (from meta-level to level), so, too, one type of resemblance can be seen as involving a similar relationship across logical levels.

- The directional notion of resemblance I have identified qualifies as a suitable bearer of (partial) intentionality.

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Fodor, Jerry (1998). The Mind-Body Problem, PHILOSOPHY THEN AND NOW: An Introductory Text with Readings, ed. N. Scott Arnold, Theodore Benditt, and George Graham, Blackwell Publishers.

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