

Introduction to Philosophy

Philosophy 110W
Fall 2014
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Class #6: The External World
Moore and Wittgenstein

Business

- Last précis now
 - Grades will be forthcoming on this assignment.
 - I urge you to keep writing before class.
 - Good habit
 - I'm happy to look at things if you want to send them to me, but we're moving on.
- Exegesis due on Thursday
 - Broader summary, still with attention to argument (integrate)
 - Not: compare and contrast
 - You may use one of your précis as a start.
- Also beginning space and time unit
- Slides and the website

Berkeley's Worry

- The empiricist (Locke) claims that all knowledge comes from experience.
- But we experience our sensations, not the causes of our sensations.
- So, we have no reason to believe in the material world.

Three Arguments for Idealism

1. From the sensibility of objects
2. From the relativity of perceptions
 - ▶ the major argument
 - ▶ We'll do a little exercise on this in a moment.
3. A reductive argument

Berkeley on Sensible Objects

The table I write on, I say, exists; that is, I see it and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed -meaning by that that if I was in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it. There was an odor; that is, it was smelled; there was a sound, that is to say, it was heard; a color or figure, and it was perceived by sight or touch. This is all that I can understand by these and the like expressions. For as to what is said of the absolute existence of unthinking things without any relation to their being perceived that seems perfectly unintelligible. Their *esse* is *percipi*, nor is it possible that they should have any existence out of the minds or thinking things which perceive them (*Principles* §3).

Berkeley's Arguments from the Relativity of Perceptions

- Locke's principles showed that the secondary qualities were not real.
- Berkeley extends the use of these principles against the primary qualities.
- “Why may we not as well argue that figure and extension are not patterns or resemblances of qualities existing in matter, because to the same eye at different stations, or eyes of a different texture at the same station, they appear various and cannot, therefore, be the images of anything settled and determinate without the mind?” (*Principles* §14).
- Five Groups and a handout:
 - Number, Shape, Extension, Solidity, Motion

Summary of Berkeley's Arguments From the Relativity of Perceptions

- Berkeley considers all of Locke's primary qualities as we experience them.
- He shows that these perceptions vary in the same way that perceptions of the secondary qualities do.
- All qualities are secondary qualities.
- We have no veridical primary qualities, representing a material world.

Berkeley's Reductive Argument Against the Primary Qualities

If it is certain that those original [primary] qualities are inseparably united with the other sensible qualities and not, even in thought, capable of being abstracted from them, it plainly follows that they exist only in the mind. But I desire anyone to reflect and try whether he can, by any abstraction of thought, conceive the extension and motion of a body without all other sensible qualities. For my own part, I see evidently that it is not in my power to frame an idea of a body extended and moved, but I must in addition give it some color or other sensible quality which is acknowledged to exist only in the mind. In short, extension, figure, and motion, abstracted from all other qualities, are inconceivable. Where, therefore, the other sensible qualities are, these must be also, namely, in the mind and nowhere else (*Principles* §10).

Berkeley's Reductive Argument, Regimented

R1. You can not have an idea of a primary quality without secondary qualities.

R2. So, wherever the secondary qualities are, the primary are.

R3. Secondary qualities are only in the mind.

RC. So, the primary qualities are mental, too.

Causes and Intermediate Instruments

- The materialist can always be asked about the cause of any event.
 - Infinite regress
- Only God (as the uncaused cause) can be taken as an ultimate cause.
 - Of ideas
 - Of a material world
- An all-powerful God could have no use for an intermediate instrument.
 - “Though we do the utmost we can to secure the belief of *matter*, though, when reason forsakes us, we endeavor to support our opinion on the bare possibility of the thing, and though we indulge ourselves in the full scope of an imagination not regulated by reason to make out that poor *possibility*, yet the upshot of all is that there are certain *unknown ideas* in the mind of God; for this, if anything, is all that I conceive to be meant by *occasion* with regard to God. And this at the bottom is no longer contending for the *thing*, but for the *name*. Whether therefore there are such ideas in the mind of God, and whether they may be called by the name *matter*, I shall not dispute. But, if you stick to the notion of an unthinking substance or support of extension, motion, and other sensible qualities, then to me it is most evidently impossible there should be any such thing, since it is a plain repugnancy that those qualities should exist in or be supported by an unperceiving substance” (*Principles*, §§75-6).

Locke's Error

The *ideas of primary qualities* of bodies are resemblances of them and their patterns do really exist in the bodies themselves, but the *ideas produced* in us *by* these *secondary qualities* have no resemblance of them at all. There is nothing like our *ideas* existing in the bodies themselves. They are, in the bodies we denominate from them, only a power to produce those sensations in us. And what is sweet, blue, or warm in *idea* is but the certain bulk, figure, and motion of the *insensible parts in the bodies themselves* which we call so (Locke's *Essay* II.VIII.15, emphasis in last line added).

Berkeley on the Resemblance Hypothesis

- RH1. My ideas resemble material objects.
- RH2. My ideas resemble their causes.
 - Berkeley rejects RH1, but accepts RH2.
 - Ideas can only resemble other ideas.
- “But, you say, though the ideas themselves do not exist without the mind, yet there may be things like them of which they are copies or resemblances, which things exist without the mind in an unthinking substance. I answer, an idea can be like nothing but an idea; a color or figure can be like nothing but another color or figure” (*Principles*, §8, AW 448b).
- My ideas resemble, we presume, the ideas in the minds of other persons.
- And, they resemble their causes, which are ideas in the mind of God.

Berkeley on God

“When in broad daylight I open my eyes, it is not in my power to choose whether I shall see or not, or to determine what particular objects shall present themselves to my view; and so likewise as to the hearing and other senses-the ideas imprinted on them are not creatures of my will. There is, therefore, some other will or spirit that produces them”
(*Principles* §29, AW 453a).

Not a presumption, but an inference.

Look Ma, No Problem of Sense Error

- On the materialist view, there is no yellow, no sweetness in external objects.
 - As applied to objects, terms for secondary qualities are mere names.
- Berkeley interprets terms for secondary qualities as referring to our mental states.
 - The lemon is yellow, since I really have a yellow sensory experience.
- Berkeley's account solves the problem of error for our beliefs based on the senses.
 - All ideas are independent.
 - We need not ascribe contradictory properties to an external object.
 - The problems of error that motivated Descartes and Locke are obviated.
- Berkeley has a new set of problems.



Intersubjectivity and Persistence

- How do we account for different people having similar experiences?
- How do we account for the fact that objects do not seem to go in and out of existence, that they persist?
- Berkeley posits God.
- “For, though we hold indeed the objects of sense to be nothing else but ideas which cannot exist unperceived; yet we may not hence conclude they have no existence except only while they are perceived by us, since there may be some other spirit that perceives them though we do not. Wherever bodies are said to have no existence without the mind, I would not be understood to mean this or that particular mind, but all minds whatsoever. It does not therefore follow from the foregoing principles that bodies are annihilated and created every moment, or exist not at all during the intervals between our perception of them” (*Principles*, §48).

The Limerick

There was a young man who said, "God
Must think it exceedingly odd
When he finds that this tree
Continues to be
When there's no one about in the quad."
"Dear Sir, your confusion is odd.
I am always about in the quad.
And that's why this tree
will continue to be
Since observed by, yours faithfully,
God."

Berkeley's World

- There are colors, sounds, and smells.
- The apple is just how I experience it.
- The mental world, while not a material world, is not a world of imagination.
- “The ideas imprinted on the senses by the author of nature are called *real things*; and those excited in the imagination, being less regular, vivid, and constant, are more properly termed *ideas*, or *images of things* which they copy and represent” (*Principles* §33).
- Berkeley's world is purely psychological.



Summary

Descartes through Berkeley

- We started the term by calling into question some of our most basic beliefs.
- Descartes argued that sense experience cannot lead to knowledge.
- Locke defended the principle that all knowledge derives from sense experience.
- Berkeley showed that such a commonsense principle led to serious questions about the existence of the material world.
- Now: two more-contemporary views

Skepticism

EW: There is an external world, made of physical things, with more or less the properties we ordinarily ascribe to those things.

- Descartes argues for EW via the existence of God.
- Locke presented an empiricist system in which we are able to gain knowledge of a material world.
 - He thus argues for EW via the veracity of some of our sensory apparatus.
- Berkeley showed that Locke's system led to the denial of the material world.
- Berkeley thus denies EW.

Moore and Wittgenstein

- Both agree that there is a problem with the question of how to prove the existence of the external world.
- Moore thinks that the proof is far easier than one might think, than the idealist makes it out to be.
- Wittgenstein thinks that the question is ill-formed, that assertions of the existence of an external world are fundamental and not open to doubt.

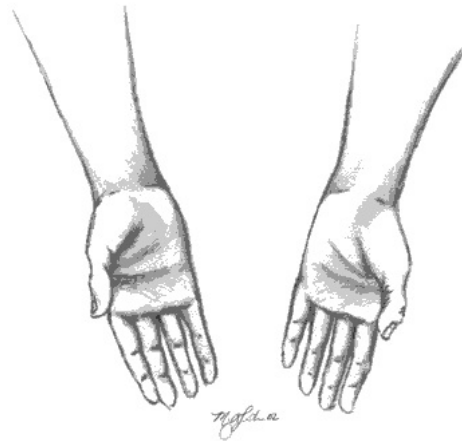
Moore's Three Conditions on Proof

For example: of EW

- C1. The premises must be different from the conclusion.
 - A valid argument can not merely restate the conclusion.
- C2. We can not argue from belief to knowledge.
 - 'I'll watch more baseball next year' follows from 'The Mets will have a better season'.
 - But I can not claim to know the former claim because I only believe the latter.
 - If I knew the latter, then I could know the former.
- C3. The argument must be of a valid form.
 - A valid argument is one in which the conclusion follows from the premises.
- In a valid, deductive argument, if the premises are true, the conclusion must be true.

Moore's Proof of EW

1. Here is a hand.
 2. Here is another hand.
- So, there are at least two human hands.
So, there is an external world (i.e. EW).



Moore's Meta-Argument

- Moore's paper contains two big arguments.
 - The proof of EW
 - The argument that EW is in fact a proof.
- We can call the latter argument a meta-argument.
- The meta-argument appeals to his conditions on proof.

Analysis of Moore's Proof

1. Here is a hand.
2. Here is another hand.
So, there are at least two human hands.
So, there is an external world.

C1. The premise has to be different from the conclusion.

C2. We can not argue from belief to knowledge.

C3. The argument must be of a valid form.

- Moore's argument is valid, so it does not violate C3.
 - ▶ Well, it's missing 'hands are objects in the external world', but we'll let that go.
- Moore makes it clear that he intends his premises to be known so that he does not violate C2.
- Still there are problems.

Problems with Moore's Argument

1. Here is a hand.
2. Here is another hand.
So, there are at least two human hands.
So, there is an external world.

C1. The premise has to be different from the conclusion.

C2. We can not argue from belief to knowledge.

C3. The argument must be of a valid form.

- The application of C1 to the proof of EW is weak.
 - ▶ We want premises to differ from conclusions so that we may avoid circular reasoning.
 - ▶ We can not assume that there is a hand in order to prove there is a hand.
 - ▶ Once we accept that here is a hand, it does follow that there is at least one hand.
 - ▶ The problem, as Descartes pointed out, is that we can start to wonder whether there is a hand.
- Does Moore violate C2?
 - ▶ If we consider the First Meditation, the premises of Moore's argument seem reduced to mere beliefs.

Moore's Response to Descartes

- “How am I to prove now that ‘Here’s one hand, and here’s another’? I do not believe I can do it. In order to do it, I should need to prove for one thing, as Descartes pointed out, that I am not now dreaming. But how can I prove that I am not? I have, no doubt, conclusive reasons for asserting that I am not now dreaming; I have conclusive evidence that I am awake: but that is a very different thing from being able to prove it. I could not tell you what all my evidence is; and I should require to do this at least, in order to give you a proof” (198-9).
- Is there an argument here?

Defeating the Skeptic

EW: There is an external world, made of physical things, with more or less the properties we ordinarily ascribe to those things.

- One way to defeat a skeptic is to provide a proof.
 - If you were skeptical that the tooth fairy existed, I could produce the tooth fairy.
- Another way to respond to the skeptic is to show that the skeptic's alternative makes no difference to any important questions.
 - Even if the world were Berkeleian, we would still act as we do.
- We might grant that the skeptic has a legitimate point, but that it does not matter.
- Wittgenstein points out that while Moore's commonsense approach feels good, if we accept that EW makes sense, then we have to look for some justification.
- According to Wittgenstein, the trick is to deny that the claim is sensible.

Wittgensteinian Themes

- Early Wittgenstein and later Wittgenstein agree that philosophical problems arise from misuse and misinterpretation of language.
 - ▶ Early Wittgenstein thought that we could clean up language according to its logical form and get rid of philosophical problems.
 - ▶ Later Wittgenstein thought we could only clarify our meanings by examining the actual uses of words.
- One relevant theme in *On Certainty* is Wittgenstein's belief that sentences have their meanings only in use.
 - ▶ Uninterpreted, a sentence has no meaning.
 - ▶ the ant crawling out a pattern that looks like Martin Luther King, Jr.
 - ▶ Mondrian's landscapes
 - ▶ ah kee ess oon ah may sah

Wittgenstein's Game Metaphor

- We use language in ways similar to playing a game.
- There are rules which govern the language game, rules which are at root conventional.
- We can dissolve philosophical puzzles by understanding the rules of the game.
- “The propositions which one comes back to again and again as if bewitched - these I should like to expunge from philosophical language” (§31).

Against Moore's Argument

Moore's view really comes down to this: the concept 'know' is analogous to the concepts 'believe', 'surmise', 'doubt', 'be convinced' in that the statement "I know..." can't be a mistake. And if that *is* so, then there can be an inference from such an utterance to the truth of an assertion. And here the form "I thought I knew" is being overlooked. - But if this latter is inadmissible, then a mistake in the *assertion* must be logically impossible too. And anyone who is acquainted with the language-game must realize this - an assurance from a reliable man that he *knows* cannot contribute anything (§21).

‘I Know That...’

- Prepending that phrase seems to make a move in the language game.
- It should have some effect on the meaning of the phrase.
- But, adding “I know that...” often just results in a very odd sentence.
- The oddity is acute when the original sentence is obvious.
 - ‘I know that $5+7=12$ ’.
- To make a mistake with a simple sentence, to be asserting our surety of this calculation, would be to make mistakes with the whole system.
- If $5+7$ were not 12, then we would have made some profound, and fundamental mistakes.
- Here, ‘I know that...’ seems to lack meaning.

Verification and Knowledge

- Wittgenstein says that believing someone who claims that there is a material world entails allowing that there is a way to verify that there is a material world.
- But, if we are questioning the existence of the material world, there is no way to verify it.
- “My believing the trustworthy man stems from my admitting that it is possible for him to make sure. But someone who says that perhaps there are no physical objects makes no such admission... Someone who asks such a question is overlooking the fact that a doubt about existence only works in a language-game. Hence, that we should first have to ask: what would such a doubt be like?, and don't understand this straight off” (§23-§24).

Two Moves

Using EW

- We can play a game in which doubt about such claims is a reasonable move.
 - Using 'There is a hand in front of me' to accept evidence of hand-waving.
 - Distinguishing between real and artificial hands
- We can play the game in such a way that it is not.
 - Berkeley and Johnson
- Moore seems to be making the first move, since he accepts that here is a hand.
- But, the first move is question-begging regarding the existence of an external world.
- Perhaps Moore is better off with the second move.

The Second Move

- There are no ways to verify the claim.
 - “There are e.g. historical investigations and investigations into the shape and also the age of the earth, but not into whether the earth has existed during the last hundred years” (§138).
 - “Doesn’t testing comes to an end” (§164)?
 - “Justification comes to an end” (§192).
- If I am dreaming, I can not assert a doubt about whether I am awake (since one does no asserting when one is asleep!)
- In this sense, EW is nonsense.
- Some propositions (like EW) are meaningful in some contexts, while being meaningless in others.

Practical Doubt and Philosophical Doubt

- As a practical matter, Wittgenstein is certainly right that we do not have doubts about the existence of the world.
 - Why do I not satisfy myself that I have two feet when I want to get up from a chair? There is no why. I simply don't. This is how I act" (§148).
- Still, we can avoid doubt about the existence of the external world without having proof.
- To say that we lack practical doubt is not to say that we lack philosophical doubt.

Evidence

- I am walking down the street and am shot to death. My soul hovers above my body and then I am somehow transported to the gates of heaven. St. Peter tells me that God is down the hall and to the left, and I go in for my welcome chat. I ask her if there is really a material world, and she tells me that indeed there is.
- Wittgenstein says that we should feel very distant from some one who experiences this.
- The feeling of distance does not entail that the account is false.

Summary

- Wittgenstein says repeatedly that justification must come to an end somewhere.
 - Moore thinks it comes to an end early.
 - Descartes thought it came to an end at God.
- Wittgenstein wants to ignore the whole project of justification for such claims.
 - They are not empirical claims, subject to justification at all.
 - They have a different status.
- If we accept Wittgenstein's views about meaning and evidence, we do seem pushed away from skepticism.
- But, we need not see claims about the existence of a material world as nonsense.
- We may just have an open question,