

Philosophy Group Notes

- Locke, Berkeley & Descartes on minds & bodies
- Possibly divide minds & bodies for each philosopher
- Thought experiments? Make comments on comparisons between the philosophers

Locke empiricism, Berkeley idealism, Descartes mind-body distinction
Everyman or non-philosopher to stand in as audience surrogate, someone to ask the questions audience would have
Colloquial dialogue
Could have religious & irreligious person

Final idea:

Two people engaged in a discussion of mind & body, call on the philosophers as supporting evidence (then we can have colloquial dialogue, make connections between philosophers, & call on the specific arguments of each philosopher)

Philosophers interrupt when their arguments are being called on to develop them further

Two laymen could be regular college students or maybe not, who knows...
(scholars of a certain philosopher?)

Workload:

Isla and Swati: Starting dialogue

Roles:

Nicholas: Descartes

Pippa: Berkeley

Hal: Locke

Swati: Psych major

Isla: Religious studies major

Meet again on the 16th at Opus 2 at 4:15, be done by the 19th to present to Sean

Presentation Format:

Two students begin by discussing whether or not soul exists:

Maybe religious studies major begins by saying she's writing a paper and wants to know what the psych major thinks about the existence of the soul

Psych major responds

We'll have introductory period where student will say something to the effect of "well, Berkeley says..." and Berkeley will give a quote; this will introduce who is who and then students ask another question and this opens up the debate

Questions:

1. Is there a soul and is it separate from the mind?

-Highlight: Berkeley thinks that soul=mind

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2. How about from the body?

3. How do you account for connection of mind and body? (Or are they connected at all?)
4. How do we posit the existence of other minds?
5. Does the mind know its surroundings through abstraction?

For the philosophers: please type up a brief response to each of these questions in your philosopher's voice, perhaps also addressing what you know the other philosophers would say.

For the students: please start framing the dialogue that will provide the introduction to all of these questions and set the scene for the philosophers to converse with one another.

PLEASE DO THIS IN THE SCRIPT BELOW!!

Script (Rough):

Hey guys, I'm working on putting all of this stuff into a dialogue format, I'll put my stuff in blue as I go

I: Hey Swat I have a thought-provoking question? If you could download your brain onto a computer, so that you brain could effectively survive your body after you die, would you do it?

S: well I don't know, I feel like that wouldn't really account for the soul.

I: but your mind and everything in it would be preserved isn't that the same thing? I mean, you've taken Intro to Psych, the brain is just neurons and synapses. If it's totally psychical it can be downloaded like any other kind of information.

S: I don't know, that seems a little simple to me

John Locke: Excuse me but can I interject here

I: Who is that?

JL: Pleasure to meet you, John Locke, professor of psychology

I: okay Professor Locke, what do you think about all of this

JL: well, quite frankly Isla I think that you opinion would benefit from a little more faith and a little less skepticism

I: oh is that so?

JL: Your skepticism about the existence of a non-physical mind is a result of the relative certainty with which you believe in extended, physical substances. However, our concept of physical substance is no different from our concept of non-physical substance. We group the objects of our perception into categories--"dogs", "apples", etc--based on collections of simple sensible qualities that each of them share. What we don't know is how these simple qualities exist on their

own. So, we suppose that they exist in and are supported by some common subject that we call physical "substance"--although the

nature of this general substance is unknown to us when separated from our simple ideas. Similarly, we suppose that the operations of our mind--thinking, willing, fearing, doubting, etc.--belong to another type of substance that we call the soul, because we cannot conceive of how these simple ideas can belong to or be produced by the body.

I: I guess I see. I'm just not sure I'm convinced that something that is not of psychical substance can do something substantive.

JL: It is no harder to conceive of how thinking should exist without matter than it is to conceive of how matter should think. We cannot expect to understand the substance that an infinite God has created with our finite minds.

B: Could I interject? I'm George Berkeley, professor of Religious Studies.

I: what do you make of all this professor Berkeley

B: Regarding the soul, I believe that all people are possessed of the notion of a soul or spirit, which "knows or perceives ideas, and exercises diverse operations, as willing, imagining, remembering about them." Notions are concepts derived from the operations of the mind, and must not be confused with ideas, which are immediately and directly perceived. It is important to note that the mind itself also is not an idea, for ideas are passive and minds active. "A spirit is one simple, undivided, active being: as it perceives ideas, it is called the understanding, and as it produces or otherwise operates about them, it is called the will. Hence there can be no idea formed of a soul or spirit."

Rather, we know the mind through the effects it produces. In this regard, I and my contemporary Locke are in partial agreement. He posits that one has a relative idea of a substance and from this is able to discern a particular substance on the basis of its relation to a directly perceived idea. It is my belief that we discern our own minds through their abilities to perceive determinate ideas.

S: so you're of the opinion that the soul isn't really a noun so much as a verb. It's not so much what it is but what it does.

B: I'd say that's about right

Locke: The difference between Berkeley and I on this subject is mostly semantic: what he considers a notion closely resembles what I call a complex idea. I do not reject the mind as being an idea insofar as our idea of the mind is a substance one which constitutes modes of thinking and active movement. Because the faculties of mind are related in the same way to a substance as the qualities of objects are to some general physical substance, the mind must be

something that actually exists. These ideas fall under the same, fourth category of ideas: ideas that make themselves a way and are suggested to the mind by all the ways of sensation and reflection.

Descartes: Je dois parler! Vous êtes une bête Berkeley. Je m'appelle Descartes, un grand philosophe! I must step in to correct your errors! I believe that I am a mind whose existence is defined by reason. I exist in a Platonic, absolute sense. The self is intellect or understanding from which imagination could be stripped without destroying it. My mind is not, therefore, perception, for perception is external, like imagination. I can imagine a triangle but do not therefore understand its properties. Conversely, I can understand the difference between a chiliagon and circle but not clearly see the difference: my imagination--perception--is not my mind. Reason, intellect is. We clearly disagree. You define the mind as a form of activity, a clearing house of notions received or distributed as distinct from the compilation of notions that is the "material" world. I reject your and Locke's notion of the mind as a perceiving entity about which a "clear idea" cannot be formed for I believe strongly in the true existence of the mind and, since God is not a deceiver, it must be so. To use modern parlance, I cannot be reduced to a cpu passing graphical data.

Berkeley: In suggesting that there is a material world, which is separate from or independent of the mind, you commit an error, for there is no world beyond our minds and ideas, thus no sensible objects can be said to exist as anything other than a collection of finite mental substances, which are ideas. We can sense objects and anything sensible must have sensible qualities, and sensible qualities are secondary qualities by the doctrine of my contemporary Locke.

Secondary qualities thus being mental in nature leads us to the conclusion that all sensible objects are likewise strictly mental constructs. *Esse is percipi*, to be is to be perceived. To elaborate, let us attempt to separate existence from perception: if two things can be conceived of separately, then they can exist separate in reality. But any conception of a state of affairs is by definition existing perceived by the mind. Thus we cannot conceive of an unperceived

object and no unperceived object can exist. We return again to the conclusion *esse is percipi*. Matter, by the materialists' definition, exists unperceived because it supposedly does not depend on the operations of the mind. Yet we cannot conceive of a material object which is unperceived of. Thus we must conclude that matter is impossible

Locke: Generally speaking, I believe that the nature of the basic substance of matter is as unknown to us as the soul. However, it is clear to me that all of our knowledge about the body is derived from the memories of those simple, physical qualities that we perceive. On one hand, there are primary qualities of matter that exist in the physical objects themselves, independent of our perception of them: solidity, extension, motion, number, and figure. These

qualities can be changed, but never divided out. On the other, the primary qualities of matter interact with our perceptual faculties to produce subjective, sensory-dependent secondary qualities: color, taste, smell, sound, etc. Secondary qualities are subjective and relative.

Descartes: I believe that God is the one true substance from which we are derivatives, given form by His "concurrence." God exists because I have a notion of perfection that could not stem from myself because I am imperfect. He must therefore be, for nothing comes from nothing and so perfection cannot come from the vacuum of imperfection. And, since He is perfect and extant, it follows that there must be a material world for perfection entails honesty.

I may thus organize matter according to His supremacy: formal substance--that is, a chair, my head, or God--is higher than objective substance--the notion of a chair, head, or God; these two main categories may be further subdivided into degrees--modes, finite substances, and infinite substances. Only God, an infinite formal substance, has True, independent existence. We are but poor player and our thoughts, shadows.

Isla: It seems like you all have some very different ideas about the outside, or material world, and whether we can prove it's existence. But I'm curious about what this means for original question. What is the specific relationship between say, my body and my mind, rather than mind and body in general.

Locke: The connection between mind and body is fundamental to my account of human understanding. Although the soul is the substance responsible for thought, conscious--useful-- thought cannot exist without the body. Moreover, it seems that our faculties of mind exist without the body, but are of little use to us. Consider the differences in the nature of thought for dreaming and waking states. When awake, our experiences and thoughts are imprinted upon our minds

and memories are stored in the brain. However, in a dreaming state, our thoughts are illogical, loosely based in reality, and hardly if ever remembered. In the dreaming state our souls operate free from our physical organs in a pure state that is less intelligible, contributing little to our idea of self. Thoughts which one has no memory of cannot be laid by them. Therefore, it takes a fundamental interaction between the organs of the body and the spirit to have meaningful thought.

Berkeley: The materialist may argue that we need material objects to understand our ideas, such as connecting the mind to a material body to understand its operations. However, this is false. The existence of matter would not explain whereby we come to our ideas. For how can one substance causally affect another substance of a fundamentally different kind? Locke himself pointed out that "we are fain to quit our reason" when we suggest that substances may affect others of a different kind, like motion producing color. Thus ideas can only be like ideas and the production of ideas or sensations in our mind could not be the causal result of the motion of some extended thing, such as a body, if we were to believe in the existence of the material world.

Descartes: I cannot comment on the interaction between the material, extended world and the immaterial mind or soul. That there is a correlation I will vouch for, but that they are separate it is to me

clear. The mind is "merely a thinking thing," indivisible and so lacking extension, clearly separating it from matter, whose essence is extension and divisibility. I know from my senses that there is a sort of connection between my body and me for when I need "food or drink, I suffer hunger or thirst," but I cannot therefore say that material and immaterial are one. I might suggest that God facilitates the seeming accordance of the extended world and our minds, giving the appearance of connection between the two, but that is merely speculation. Perhaps I am the captain of a bark with God as my tiller? *gallic shrug* Princess Elisabeth once asked me this very question and I shall answer you as I answered her: "je ne sais pas!"

Swati: So these are all explanations of how to understand the relationship between my mind and my body, but, for example, how can I know about the relationship between Isla's mind and body? How do I know that Isla even has a mind?

Locke: A useful way to posit the existence of other minds is by considering the differences in movement between the physical and the non-physical. The only idea of movement from one body onto another is of passive motion, in that we would never expect one body to move another without it borrowing its motion from something else. On the other hand, we have an idea of active motion of the mind, as it begins and stops motion through impulse or will--both of which are within our comprehension. Moreover, we know that we can only control the motion of our own bodies. Thus, there must be other minds for other bodies to will their active movement.

Berkeley: It is impossible for us to conceive of any object that is unperceived or unthought of, for in order to conceive of any such object, we must necessarily be conceiving of it. Thus we cannot say other minds exist because we experience them. Rather, we assume the existence of other minds through notions, inferred from the effects other minds produce on our own. Again I draw the distinction between ideas and notions: we do not have an idea of the mind because ideas are passive and minds active. Notions then allows us to distinguish our own individual mind as the thing that perceives some determinate idea, and the minds of others as those which cause some determinate idea.

Descartes: Mes amis, I cannot vouch for your existence. You may be, peut être, but you may not be. I am unsure of a causal connection between myself and my body and so I do not know how your seemingly sentient representations are tethered. You may very well be captained by minds but I cannot say. Your minds are not clear and distinct. I know that I am and that there is a God. I believe, because of the evidence presented to me by an honest God that there is a material world. I can strongly suspect "that there may be some truth" in your sentience because I intuit it but that is all.

Isla: So you all have ideas about how to understand the outside world, whether it be mental or physical. Are there other distinctions by which you understand the material world?

Locke: Abstraction is a process by which ideas of general categories are formed from commonalities between particular things. This uniquely human faculty is necessary for communication, as there are too many particular things to give each their own name, and no reason to do so, as there are many things that share approximately the same characteristics, such that a general idea is representative of all of them. Abstraction is also a clear example of how innate

faculties of mind are able to operate on sensory experiences to furnish our otherwise blank minds with ideas.

Descartes: I consider my very being, my soul, the process of abstraction, for the general principles of the world, compiled and extracted, is reason, and I am at my core, a reasoning entity. If my imagination were stripped from me, I should still be myself if I had but my reason, for, bien sur, minds have no extension. Imagination is the imagining, imaging, or things. It has extension and so could be stripped from me. I am the process of a mind turning "towards itself and looking at one of the ideas in it." In this, Locke, we partially agree, though I do not think the mind a tabula rasa requiring furnishing. The premise of my third meditation is to find Truth as a tabula rasa, having stripped myself of belief in the sensory world. I arrive at the Truth of God and everything that flows from him by reason alone, making Truth logically self evident, not a data set.

Berkeley: The belief in the ability of abstraction to which my contemporary Locke so ardently adheres is entirely mistaken. In the capacity that 'abstraction' can mean "considering one property of an object apart from other properties," I will concede we have this ability. But we cannot "abstract one from another, or conceive separately, those qualities which it is impossible should exist so separated." To do so would be to attempt to separate the thing from itself because

all material objects are really just collections of ideas, thus object and sensation are the same. That which Locke calls abstraction is fallacious. He purports that general terms obtain meaning by generalizing all and only those properties belonging to the term based on particular experiences. Yet the mental operation he describes is impossible. Whenever we think of a 'general' term, we must necessarily think of that term using particular properties. I cannot, for

example, hold in my mind the idea of a box that has the general quality of size, but no determinate size. So-called general terms do not correspond to anything; there are only discrete sensations and perceptions. One might ask how we are able to know the world through sensory ideas alone, to which I would answer that it is God alone, the infinite spirit, who is the cause of sensory ideas. I have already established that matter cannot be the cause because it does not

exist, and ideas cannot cause other ideas because they are manifestly passive. Nor can I myself be the cause of my ideas because ideas depend on the mind and thus cannot have any characteristics they are not perceived to have. Since sensory ideas present themselves to the mind of the perceiver involuntary and their content is beyond the perceiver's control, then it must be that sensory ideas do not originate in the mind. Thus we must conclude that some other spirit with

causal power enough to create the stunning complexity and synchronicity of our sensory ideas is the cause. There is no other spirit so infinite, powerful and benevolent as God.