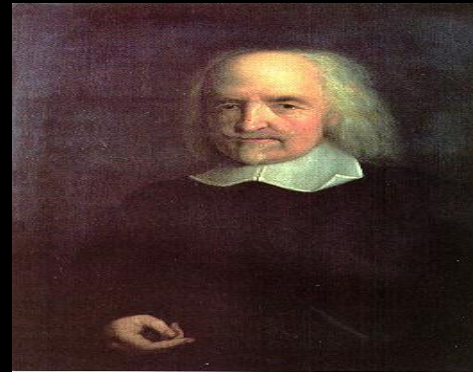
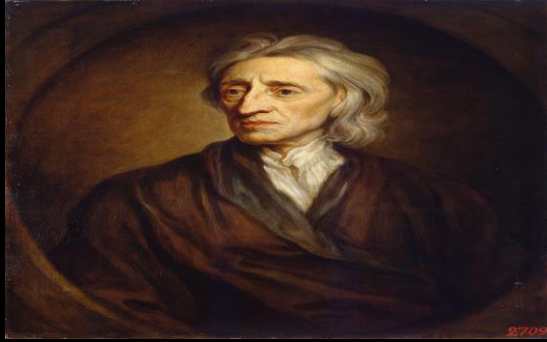


# Abstract Ideas & Language (Locke, Hume, Berkeley & Hobbes)



# Main Themes

1. Primary/Secondary Distinction
2. Existence of a Material World
3. Abstract Ideas
4. Uses and Origins of Language
5. True Knowledge/Reality
6. Final Causes/Appeals to God

# Primary/Secondary Distinction

The starting point for conceptions of the feasibility of abstract ideas and the meaning of language are the ways each philosopher thinks about the distinction (or lack thereof) between primary/secondary qualities

# Locke vs. Berkeley/Hume (Primary vs. Secondary)

- Locke distinguishes between primary and secondary qualities in part because secondary qualities appear to be dependent upon the primary qualities (ex: taste of almond nut dependent on texture)
- Berkeley and Hume disagree: The only things we can know are ideas that are generated as a result of sensations
  - Thus, only ideas exist (Berkeley)
  - Can we really imagine an object without secondary qualities that exists independent of us?
  - Again: try to imagine a person without secondary qualities

# Locke v. Berkeley/Hume (Cont.)

- Locke would argue that what he meant by “secondary quality” was merely the *idea* of a secondary quality, not the quality itself
- Locke concedes that knowledge about secondary qualities does not provide evidence about objects
- Locke reasons that based on what *appears to be*, there is a material world; knowledge of this material world is however less certain than that of mathematics or God

# Locke&Berkeley/Hume Conclusions (Primary/Secondary)

- Berkeley's main argument rests upon the assertion that we can't truly imagine an object that does have any secondary qualities
- Locke doesn't disagree with that – but we can form an abstract idea
- Additionally, we have the ability to smell, hear, taste, feel pain etc.
  - How else to account for these abilities than to posit that odor/sound/taste (secondary qualities) exist? Don't secondary qualities have the ability to produce sensations in us?

# Primary/secondary distinction (Hobbes)

- Only primary qualities (objects) are motion and extension
- Secondary qualities (qualities) are the result of motion within an object
- For example: red is the motion of the sun hitting an object

# Existence of a Material World

Views regarding primary/secondary qualities and abstract ideas determine their beliefs about the existence of a material world



# Existence of a Material World

- Locke believes the evidence suggests there is a material world
- Berkeley rejects the existence of a material world – there is no distinction between primary and secondary qualities, and thus only ideas exist
- Hume takes a different interpretation – he neglects to make a metaphysical claim

# Hobbes - Material world

- Only material world
- If one can conceive of x without y -> x exists without y
  - Ergo the body can exist without a mind
- All memories are physical reverberations of experiences
- The above and Hobbes' ideas of language are an implicit argument for his materialism

# Abstract Ideas

- Berkeley's Objections to Locke
- Hume's presentism

# Berkeley's Objections to Locke's Conception of Abstract Ideas

- Berkeley has several issues with the doctrine of abstract ideas
- Berkeley agrees that it is in fact possible to generate abstract ideas
- However, these abstracted ideas don't correspond to any material objects, they are simply groupings of our sensations
  - Can we really visualize the abstract man that Locke suggests?

# Berkeley's Objections (Cont.)

- Locke says that when we form an abstract idea of man, we keep all the qualities and properties that are found in all men, and eliminate idiosyncrasies; the resultant image is our abstract idea of man
- What would this look like? It seems impossible to visualize a human image that incorporates all heights, builds, colors etc.
- Thus, the concept that we get from the abstraction of specific persons – people – doesn't correspond to anything that exists
- → We still don't have evidence of bodies

# Summary for Abstract Ideas

- Locke does concede that what when we visualize something abstract like “people” or a “triangle,” the image does not correspond to something that exists in the material world
- Berkeley argues that we can’t picture these images since we’ve never seen them and they defy logic
- However, Berkeley seems to be attacking Locke on the basis of a very strict interpretation of Locke’s theory of knowledge
  - While Locke does say that all of our knowledge comes from sense experience, his poignant example of mathematical abstraction gives him some flexibility
  - If we are able to apply the idea of “motion” to physics, presumably we can do this with “people” in our minds

# Conclusions for Locke vs. Berkeley

- Overall, Locke's argument seems stronger, but contains two potential issues:
- (1) The comparison of mathematical abstraction to the abstraction of people, for instance, isn't wholly consistent
  - We've been able to apply "motion" to theories in physics in a clear way, reifying it via formulas; the same cannot be said about the abstract image Locke thinks we generate when we think of "people"
- (2) The evidence for physical, external objects doesn't appear to be meaningfully stronger following Locke's arguments, even if he is right about the way we abstract and hold knowledge

# Hobbes - Abstract ideas

- Ideas: combination of sensations
- But imagination (the idea) and memory (the decay) are the same thing



# Uses and Origins of Language

- Locke differs from Berkeley and Hume in that he doesn't object to general in terms
  - In fact, Locke believes the *only* way for us to communicate effectively is via the use of general terms
  - We accomplish the use of general terms by abstracting
- Hume provides an explanation for our use of general terms
- Berkeley says that we can use general terms if we want, but since we can not abstract, we should be careful not to be misled into thinking that these terms correspond to anything real.

# Language - Hobbes

- Speech comes from God
- Hobbes is a nominalist
- name => voice of man imposed on object
- Names are designed to remind a person what an object is
  - Esp in compound-word-heavy languages
- One name => many things it represents
- “tree” means each tree

# Language - Hobbes

- Uses of speech:
  - A. register by reflection/thought what causes things
  - B. to trade knowledge
  - C. pronounce our wills and purposes so as to find allies
  - D. For innocent enjoyment

# Leibniz's criticism

- “Hobbes seems to me to be a super-nominalist. For not content like the nominalists, to reduce universals to names, he says that the truth of things itself consists in names and what is more, that it depends on the human will, because truth allegedly depends on the definitions of terms, and definitions depend on the human will. This is the opinion of a man recognized as among the most profound of our century, and as I said, nothing can be more nominalistic than it. Yet it cannot stand. In arithmetic, and in other disciplines as well, truths remain the same even if notations are changed, and it does not matter whether a decimal or a duodecimal number system is used” (Leibniz 1670, 128).

# Leibniz's criticism of Hobbes

- Guess what Hobbes, a rose by any other name is just as sweet!
- Even if the notation for a number is changed, the quantity that the old and new notations represent remains the same ( $100 = 10^2$ )

# True Knowledge

- Hume believes in matter of fact and relation of ideas
  - With a few exceptions (i.e. missing shade of blue)
  - He's also not sure that we can know the self, or past experiences
- Berkeley doesn't believe in the general laws advanced by physics and math, for instance
  - These systems describe our world, but don't explain the final causes
- Locke's empiricism leads him to the inference that there is a material world, but he concedes that he cannot be entirely sure
  - This contrasts with Berkeley, who takes issue with Locke's reluctance to claim total certainty
  - Berkeley believes in the natural laws, but has no explanation for their origins other than God

# Final Causes & Existence of God

Locke and Berkeley appeal to God as an important part of their philosophies; Hume rejects the necessity of God, while Hobbes doesn't really incorporate God

# Final Causes & Existence of God

- Hume would object to Berkeley's appeal to God
- Hume's skepticism leads him to conclude that he is unsure as to whether God exists
- Berkeley characterizes Locke - and presumably Hume as well - as skeptical atheists



# Hobbes on God

- We have no image of a Deity
- God could be the first cause, in a physical sense
- Mentions “God” in a few places in *Leviathan*

# The Role of Skepticism

- All these philosophers are empiricists; they all start with the belief that knowledge comes from the senses
- Some of their major differences are related to their varied approaches to skepticism
- Locke is a skeptic in the sense that while he believes there is a material world, he doesn't claim total certainty
- Hume's philosophy contains a much higher degree of skepticism – this is the result of his unwillingness to go beyond immediate sense experience
- Berkeley is not skeptical – God is the cause of all ideas...but this is different from Descartes
- Hobbes is highly skeptical of anything "fancy" - anything not obviously material. This view comes from his materialist views.