Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy

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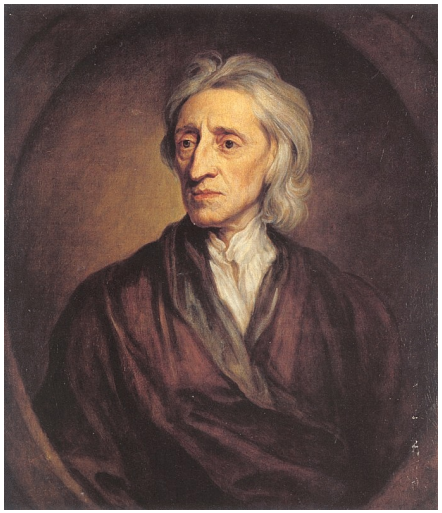
Spring 2016



Class #15
Locke and Berkeley
The Self
Abstract Ideas

Business

- Peer Reviews should be done.
  - You won't get a grade or responses until you finish yours.
- Midterm Prep is on line
- I'll send the Midterm Course Evaluations as soon as the Peer Reviews are done.
  - Complete by next Tuesday (during break) please!
- Folder Organization (Absences)

Empiricism Topics

✔1. The primary/secondary distinction

✔2. Locke's arguments against innate ideas

✔3. Empiricism and perception

✔4. Locke on Minds, Bodies, and Thought

☞5. Locke's account of personal identity

6. The doctrine of abstract ideas
   - Locke for
   - Berkeley against

7. Three arguments for idealism
   - against the reality of primary qualities

8. Idealist accounts of mathematics and science

Who Am I?

- The problems of material constitution seem to raise problems for identifying myself with my body.
- Descartes's soul theory is an alternative.
- Locke takes the self as a forensic concept, mainly useful for ascriptions of personal responsibility.
- Lots of thought experiments against other views and for his.

Team Activity
Locke's Thought Experiments

1. Heliogabalus and his hogs (§6)
2. Nestor or Thirsites (§14)
3. Prince and cobbler (§15)
4. Remembering Noah's ark (§16)
5. Cutting off a finger (§17–§18)
6. The day/night man (or Socrates) (§19–§23)

A. The same soul may house different persons.
B. The self follows consciousness.
C. The same body can have different people.
D. A person could have different bodies.
E. The self follows memory.
F. A soul could be housed in any kind of body.

Locke's Consciousness Theory of the Self

- "[A person] is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it..." (II.XXVII.9, AW 370a).
- Locke identifies the self with the thinking thing.
- What makes the same person over time, is consciousness, and, especially, connection through memory, which Locke calls consciousness extending backwards.
- Note: Locke's solution is non-substantial.
  - The self is a conceptual construction.

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Empiricism, Science, and Mathematics

- The empiricist has a challange to explain our knowledge of mathematics and scientific generalizations.
- It is difficult to see how experience can support universal claims.
  - About mathematical objects, which are not sensible.
  - About scientific laws which extrapolate from and go beyond that experience.
- In lieu of innate ideas, Locke's account relies on sensation, intuition and demonstration.
  - Using reason to discover relations among ideas of sensation.
  - "I do not doubt but it will be easily granted tht the *knowledge* we have of *mathematical truths* is not only certain, but *real knowledge*, and not the bare empty vision of vain insignificant *chimeras* of the brain. And yet, if we will consider, we shall find that it is only of our own *ideas" (*IV.IV.6, AW 404b).
- Psychological capacities for reflection
  - Contemplation, memory, discerning, comparison, composition, abstraction
  - Abstraction supports Locke's account of our knowledge of science and mathematics.
  - We start with an overview about how language works.

Words Do Not Stand for External Objects

"A child having taken notice of nothing in the metal he hears called gold, but the bright shining yellow colour, he applies the word gold only to his own idea of that colour, and nothing else; and therefore calls the same colour in a peacock's tail gold. Another that hath better observed, adds to shining yellow great weight: and then the sound gold, when he uses it, stands for a complex idea of a shining yellow and a very weighty substance. Another adds to those qualities fusibility: and then the word gold signifies to him a body, bright, yellow, fusible, and very heavy. Another adds malleability. Each of these uses equally the word gold, when they have occasion to express the idea which they have applied it to: but it is evident that each can apply it only to his own idea; nor can he make it stand as a sign of such a complex idea as he has not..." (Locke, *Essay* §III.II.3).

Words Stand for Ideas

- Ideas are like pictures in the mind.
- Terms stand for ideas, which correspond to objects, like chairs, people, or even circles.
  - "[It is] perverting the use of words, and bring[ing] unavoidable obscurity and confusion into their signification, whenever we make them stand for anything but those ideas we have in our own minds" (§III.II.5).
- Particular terms correspond to simple ideas.
- But there are too many particular things for them all to have particular names.
- We thus introduce general terms
  - 'This chair' vs 'chair' vs 'object'
- What are the ideas to which such terms correspond?

Team Activity

Lockean Abstraction

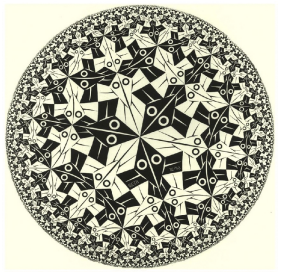
- Put the following ideas in order, from simple ideas of sensation to the most abstract ideas of reflection.
  - A. An idea of a chair
  - B. An idea of extension
  - C. An idea of furniture
  - D. An idea of hardness
  - E. An idea of material objects
  - F. An idea of matter
  - G. An idea of a still, extended thing about three feet tall
  - H. An idea of substance
  - I. An idea of things in one's home

Abstraction and Science

- Ideas of bodies and motion are the foundations of physical science.
  - $v = \Delta s/\Delta t$
- We can abstract to the term, ‘physical object’.
- General terms, and the abstract ideas to which they refer, apply to particular objects, but only to certain aspects of those objects.
  - “[A general] *idea* [of man] is made, not by any new addition, but only...by leaving out the shape, and some other properties signified by the name *man*, and retaining only a body, with life, sense, and spontaneous motion, comprehended under the name *animal*”(III.IIII.8, AW 378a).
- A progression of abstraction leads us from terms for particular sensations to terms for bodies.
- So, the term ‘bodies’, which we have constructed to stand for an abstract idea, refers to bodies, which are physical objects.

Abstraction and Mathematics

- General names are the foundation for formal sciences like mathematics and logic as well.
- We get knowledge of mathematical objects, which we do not experience, by a process of abstraction.
- Doughnuts and frisbees, and circles
- We leave out other properties, form an abstract idea, and coin a general term to stand for it.
  - We experience extended things, but not extension itself.



General Terms and Proofs

- Both the use of general terms and our ability to remember the distinct parts of a proof are essential to mathematics.
- “If...the perception that the same *ideas* will eternally have the same habitudes and relations is not a sufficient ground of knowledge, there could be no knowledge of general propositions in mathematics, for no mathematical demonstration would be any other than particular” (IV.I.9, AW 388b).
- The abstract generality of mathematical claims supports their certainty.
- “[The mathematician] is certain all his knowledge concerning such *ideas* is real knowledge, because intending things no further than they agree with his *ideas*, he is sure what he knows concerning those figures, when they have barely an *ideal existence* in his mind, will hold true of them also when they have real existence in matter, his consideration being barely of those figures which are the same, wherever or however they exist” (IV.IV.6, AW 404b).

Objectivity without Objects

- Locke's Nominalism:
  - "Universality does not belong to things themselves, which are all of them particular in their existence, even those words and *ideas* which in their signification are general. When therefore we quit particulars, the generals that rest are only creatures of our own making, their general nature being nothing but the capacity they are put into by the understanding of signifying or representing many particulars. For the signification they have is nothing but a relation that, by the mind of man, is added to them" (Locke, *Essay,* III.IIII.11, AW 379a).
- But Locke does not denigrate mathematical or moral knowledge.
  - "All the discourses of the mathematicians about the squaring of a circle, conic sections, or any other part of mathematics, *do not concern* the *existence* of any of those figures, but their demonstrations, which depend on their *ideas*, are the same, whether there is any square or circle existing in the world or not. In the same manner the truth and certainty of *moral* discourses abstract from the lives of men and the existence of those virtues in the world of which they treat" (Locke, *Essay,* IV.IV.8, AW 405a).
- Our knowledge of the external world is just mysterious, inexplicable without something like a rationalist's principle of sufficient reason.
  - "I think not only that it becomes the modesty of philosophy not to pronounce magisterially where we want that evidence that can produce knowledge, but also that it is of use to us to discern how far our knowledge does reach, for the state we are at present in, not being that of vision, we must in many things content ourselves with faith and probability" (Locke, *Essay,* IV.III.6, AW 394a).

Locke on Abstract Ideas

Summary

- According to Locke, our ideas of primary qualities, like extension, correspond to real properties of real, material objects.
  - Those ideas do not correspond to particular sensations.
  - We experience an extended chair, but not the extension itself.
- In order to form the idea of extension in general, or even the extension of a particular chair, we have to strip away the other qualities in our minds to form a new and abstract idea.
  - We create general terms to stand for the abstract ideas in our minds.
  - 'Body' stands for an abstract idea of body, which corresponds, somehow, to actual material bodies.
- Since we can not form an abstract idea of body, Berkeley argues, there is no reason to claim that there are any bodies.
  - The term 'bodies' stands for no idea at all.

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Berkeley on Abstract Ideas

If we thoroughly examine this tenet [materialism] it will, perhaps, be found at bottom to depend on the doctrine of *abstract ideas*. For can there be a nicer strain of abstraction than to distinguish the existence of sensible objects from their being perceived, so as to conceive them existing unperceived? Light and colors, heat and cold, extension and figures - in a word, the things we see and feel -what are they but so many sensations, notions, ideas, or impressions on the sense? And is it possible to separate, even in thought, any of these from perception? For my part, I might as easily divide a thing from itself. I may, indeed, divide in my thoughts, or conceive apart from each other, those things which, perhaps I never perceived by sense so divided. Thus, I imagine the trunk of a human body without the limbs, or conceive the smell of a rose without thinking on the rose itself. So far, I will not deny, I can abstract, if that may properly be called *abstraction* which extends only to the conceiving separately such objects as it is possible may really exist or be actually perceived asunder. But my conceiving or imagining power does not extend beyond the possibility of real existence or perception. Hence, as it is impossible for me to see or feel anything without an actual sensation of that thing, so is it impossible for me to conceive in my thoughts any sensible thing or object distinct from the sensation or perception of it. In truth, the object and the sensation are the same thing and cannot therefore be abstracted from each other (*Principles* §5, AW 447b-445a).

Team Activity

Berkeley on Abstraction

- "I admit myself able to abstract in one sense, as when I consider some particular parts or qualities separated from others with which, though they are united in some object, yet it is possible they may really exist without them. But I deny that I can abstract one from another or conceive separately those qualities which it is impossible should exist so separated or that I can frame a general notion by abstracting from particulars in the manner aforesaid—which two last are the proper meanings of *abstraction*" (*Principles*, Introduction §10, AW 441a).
- Classify each of the given mental acts as real ideas or illicit, faux abstractions.
  1. Focusing one's attention on the yellowness of a school bus
  2. Thinking of the nature of sweetness itself.
  3. Contemplating a geometrically perfect circle.
  4. Considering acceleration as the derivative of motion.
  5. Considering the acceleration of a ball dropped from a tower.
  6. Thinking of bodies, as extended things.
  7. Thinking of the size of this piece of paper.
  8. Having and idea of humankind.
  9. Thinking of a squirrel with two tails.
  10. Thinking of the first three prime numbers

Against Locke's Abstract Ideas

- Locke claims that we use reflection to construct an abstract idea of a triangle which stands for all triangles whether scalene, isosceles, or equilateral.
- Berkeley insists that we have no such ability.
  - "If any man has the faculty of framing in his mind such an idea of a triangle as is here described, it is in vain to pretend to dispute him out of it, nor would I go about it. All I desire is that the reader would fully and certainly inform himself whether he has such an idea or not. And this, methinks, can be no hard task for anyone to perform. What is more easy than for anyone to look a little into his own thoughts, and there try whether he has, or can attain to have, an idea that shall correspond with the description that is... given [by Locke] of the general idea of a triangle, which is *neither oblique nor rectangle, equilateral, equicrural nor scalenon, but all and none of these at once*?" (*Principles* Introduction §13).

We Use Particular Ideas to Stand for Other Ideas

- We have need of terms like ‘triangle’ which stand as universals.
  - They refer to various different objects.
- We can use particular terms generally without forming abstract ideas.
  - “A word becomes general by being made the sign, not of an abstract general idea, but of several particular ideas, any one of which it indifferently suggests to the mind. For example, when it is said *the change of motion is proportional to the impressed force*, or that *whatever has extension is divisible*, these propositions are to be understood of motion and extension in general, and nevertheless it will not follow that they suggest to my thoughts an idea of motion without a body moved, or any determinate direction and velocity, or that I must conceive an abstract general idea of extension, which is neither line, surface, nor solid, neither great nor small, black, white, nor red, nor of any other determinate color. It is only implied that whatever particular motion I consider, whether it is swift or slow, perpendicular, horizontal, or oblique, or in whatever object, the axiom concerning it holds equally true” (*Principles* Introduction §11, AW 442a).
- Particular terms stand strictly for my ideas.
- Hume adopts this solution, too.

Berkeley on General Terms

- We can use general terms, if we wish.
- We should not be misled into thinking that they correspond to some thing.
- Only discrete sensations and their perceivers exist.
- Berkeley thus extends Locke's conceptualism/nominalism to all general properties, and even to terms which collect several sensations into an object.
  - We have a bundle of sensations which form an experience which we call a red chair, say, or apple.
  - We use the term 'apple' to refer to a collection of sensory ideas.
  - It does not correspond to any abstract idea of apple, or of red, or of sweet.
  - The names 'apple' and 'chair' and 'red' are just convenient labels, and should not indicate any existence of the apple or chair or color beyond my current experience of it.
- We can give a name to commonalities among particular sensations, but this is just a name.
  - "In such things we ought to *think with the learned, and speak with the vulgar*" (*Principles* §51).

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