

Introduction to Philosophy

Philosophy 110W
Spring 2012
Russell Marcus

Class #6: The External World
Moore and Wittgenstein

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
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).

The Argument from the Sensibility of Objects

D1. Objects are sensible things.

D2. Sensible things are things with none other than sensible qualities.

D3. The sensible qualities are the secondary qualities.

D4. Those secondary qualities are strictly mental properties.

DC. So, objects are strictly mental, i.e. there is no physical world.

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).

Number



- For the argument for the relativity of number, consider what number we might give to a deck of cards.
- It is 52 cards, 4 suits, 13 ranks, 1 deck.
- “The same thing bears a different denomination of number as the mind views it with different respects. Thus, the same extension is one, or three, or thirty-six, according as the mind considers it with reference to a yard, a foot, or an inch. Number is so visibly relative and dependent on men’s understanding that it is strange to think how anyone should give it an absolute existence without the mind” (*Principles* §12, AW 449b).
- The number correctly applied to the object varies as we think of the object in different ways.
- It may be a property of a concept, rather than of an object.



Extension



- To show that extension is relative to the perceiver, consider the mite (a tiny insect) and a giant.
- What appears large to the mite can appear tiny to us, and minuscule to the giant.
- The size of an object is relative to perceiver, just as the color or taste is.
- I appear large to the mite, but to a giant, I appear small.
- Thus extension is a secondary property, too.
- This example is of utmost importance, since extension is the most plausible primary quality.

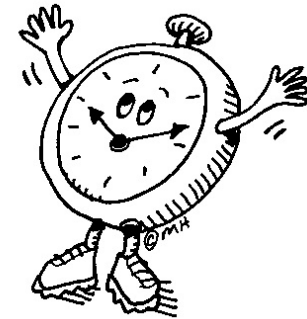
Shape



- To show that shape is relative to a perceiver, consider what we see under a microscope.
- Edges that appear straight to the naked eye will appear jagged when magnified.
- Consider our perception of a rectangular object, like a table.
 - ▶ The shape is never really seen as a rectangle, although we all infer that it is that shape.
 - ▶ What we really get from the senses about the shape is relative to the perceiver.

Motion

- The argument for the relativity of our perceptions of motion relies on an argument for the relativity of our perceptions of time, since motion is change in place over time.
- Our perception of time varies with the succession of our ideas.
- If our ideas proceed more quickly, a motion will appear more slow.
- Just as we can not rely on an external measurement of extension, since we have to agree on a standard unit measure, we can not rely on an external measurement of time.



Solidity

- Berkeley's argument for the relativity of solidity to the perceiver takes solidity to be resistance to touch.
- A strong person will find something soft that a weaker person will find hard.
- This is even more plausible if we consider giants and mites again.

Summary of Berkeley's Arguments From the Relativity of Perceptions

- Berkeley has considered all of Locke's primary qualities as we experience them.
- He has shown 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

- For Berkeley, only God can be taken as the true cause of my ideas.
- 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.

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... In truth, the object and the sensation are the same thing and cannot therefore be abstracted from each other (*Principles* §5).

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).
- But Berkeley's world is purely psychological.



Summary

- 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.

Bobby on Moore

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.

Kant

- Moore starts his article by referring to Kant's argument, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, of the existence of an external world.
- Kant's justification is called The Refutation of Idealism.
- Kant provides two arguments.

Kant's First Argument

- Space and time are essential to our ideas of externality.
- Thus, they are actually part of our experience of the world, rather than in the world itself.
- Since the external world is a world in space and time, there is obviously an external world.
- This argument begs the question of the existence of a world independent of our experience.

Kant's Second Argument

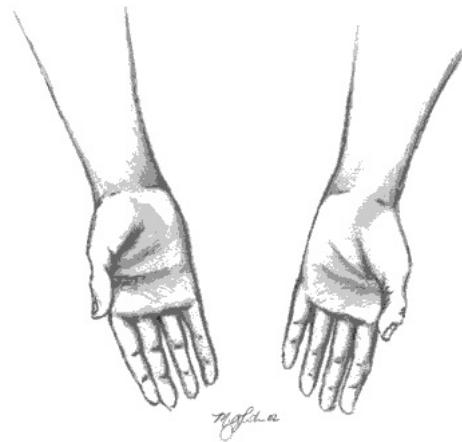
- The existence of an external world is presupposed by our understanding of ourselves as part of a world.
- We distinguish between changes in the world and changes in ourselves.
- When we move toward or away from an object, we do not think that the object changes, despite the changes in our visual field.
- When we stand still and watch the sun set, or as you watch me flail around the room, we attribute the changing visual field to changes in the world.
- The idealist claims that all such changes are internal.
- Kant argues that the idealist must presume the possibility of an internal/external distinction, a distinction between self and world, in order to claim that there is no such distinction, but that the idealist can not presume such a distinction if all we have is the flux of sensation.

Moore's Three Conditions on a Proof of EW

- C1. The premise has to be different from the conclusion.
 - A valid argument can not merely restate the conclusion.
- C2. We can not argue from belief to knowledge.
 - 'Some of you will be pleased with your second paper grades' follows from 'Some of the papers will receive As'.
 - 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 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 (i.e. EW).



Analysis of Moore's Argument

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.
- Moore makes it clear that he intends his premises to be known, so that he does not violate C2.
- There is a problem with C1.

C1 is too 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 here is a hand.

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).

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 Berkeleyan, 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
 - Dr. 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.

Wittgenstein's Logical Sentences

- Wittgenstein uses 'logical' in a specific way.
 - ▶ "What counts as an adequate test of a statement belongs to logic. It belongs to the description of the language-game" (§82).
- Logic is a kind of limit on our language game.
 - ▶ "I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false. The propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be learned purely practically, without learning any explicit rules" (§94-§95).

Using Logical Propositions

- The logical propositions, like 'I know that here is a hand' serve as a river bed on which ordinary empirical propositions flow.
- We can use them to teach the use of certain terms.
 - 'There are physical objects' teaches the term 'physical objects'.
 - '5+7=12' teaches the rules of arithmetic.



The River Bed

- Mathematics and what we ordinarily call logic are in the river bed.
- We can not defend our knowledge of particular river bed claims.
- How could you convince some one that you knew that $5+7=12$?
- You would have to convince them that you knew something much wider than that one proposition.
- Other riverbed statements:
 - EW
 - No human being has ever stood on the surface of the sun.

Wittgenstein's Twist

Further wrinkles

- Rules, like those in the riverbed, and those which distinguish the bed from the river, are conventional, and indeterminate.
- Sometimes, what looks like an empirical proposition turns out not to be so.
 - Moore takes 'here is a hand' as an empirical proposition.
- Wittgenstein is attempting to avoid both Moore's error and skepticism.
- We can change which sentences are like the river bed, and which ones are like the river.
- Appeals to inner states are irrelevant, if we look to use for meaning.

Do We Get the Rules by Induction?

- The basic process of induction is that we see a few examples and then come to a general rule.
- Wittgenstein thinks that there is a fallacy in this ordinary understanding.
- We do not so much derive the general rule from the few instances, but use the rule as a way of organizing the instances.
- “When we first begin to *believe* anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions. (Light dawns gradually over the whole.) It is not single axioms that strike me as obvious, it is a system in which consequences and premises give one another *mutual* support” (§141 - §142).

A Problem for Wittgenstein

- Wittgenstein is trying to explain the fact that some propositions seem meaningful in some contexts, while being meaningless in others.
- One solution is to ascribe meaning to river propositions, and meaninglessness to riverbed propositions.
 - ▶ If a meaningful proposition is taken as meaningless, it is clear that it has become part of the bed.
 - ▶ If a meaningless proposition becomes meaningful, it is because it has broken out of the riverbed and started into the river.
- Then there are no river bed propositions!
 - ▶ a fish resting in a pool on the side of the river

Doubt and Certainty

- Wittgenstein has come very close, in asserting the continuity of river and riverbed, to abandoning all hope for establishing claims about the world.
- If any proposition can be taken as bedrock, and any can be part of the river, it seems completely conventional whether we hold logic or mathematics steady, or whether we hold religious, or moral, or just crazy views as bedrock.
- We might even hold idealist claims as bedrock, or skeptical ones.
- Wittgenstein seems to have fallen quite near a position a lot like the skepticism he is trying to avoid.
- But: The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty (§115).

Does Doubt Presuppose Certainty?

- As a matter of fact, we do hold certain principles, logical and mathematical ones, fixed.
- Maybe one could assimilate some basic, obvious empirical principles, like that things do not go shooting off into space, to this set of fixed principles.
- But, does it follow from the doubts that we must have such fixed principles?
- Doubt surely entails belief.
 - In order to make a mistake, a man must already judge in conformity with mankind (§156).
 - Doubt comes *after* belief (§160)
- But, why does Wittgenstein think that doubt is the denial of certainty?

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,

Next Week

- Space and Time
- First Paper is due on Tuesday, in class.