From Locke to Berkeley

How Berkeley rejects Locke’s Metaphysical Realism in favor of what he calls “Idealism”
Locke Summary
Like Descartes, Locke believes that we perceive the “real” world only *indirectly*.

- We do not *directly* perceive material objects,
  – Just as we do not directly perceive people we see on T.V.;
- Rather, we directly perceive only *ideas* (sensations, things “in” our minds) that are caused by and *represent* material objects,
  – Just as, when watching T.V., we directly see only images on the screen.
Locke’s Causal Theory of Perception:

Indirectly aware of

Sensation

Matter

Directly Aware of

Mind

External World

Qualities are "in" objects

Causes

Object

Idea

Mind’s Eye

Locke’s Casual Theory of Perception
Do our sensations *resemble* their objects?

• Recall that Descartes’ big worry was whether or not there *were* any objects outside our minds.
  – (By the end of the 6th Meditation, he assures that there are.)

• But he said we also make mistakes in thinking that our ideas always resembled the objects in the real world that caused us to have those sensations.
Why should we believe that the ideas in our minds actually *resemble* the objects outside our minds that cause them?
In Locke’s Terms

• Even if we accept that the ideas in our mind are caused by real objects that exist outside our minds
  – (Locke never really questions this)

• Is it true that our ideas always resemble the qualities in the objects that caused us to have those ideas?
Locke’s Answer

• Only sometimes. *Some* of our ideas *do* resemble qualities in the objects, but some of them *do not*.

• Our ideas of primary qualities resemble those qualities.

• Our ideas of secondary qualities do not.
Primary and Secondary

• Locke divides qualities
  – (which, for him, are both *in the object*)
• into two kinds:
  – Primary qualities:
    • Such as size, shape, weight, location, etc.; and
  – Secondary qualities:
    • Such as color, sound, taste, smell and felt warmth or coolness.
The Crucial Difference

• Some qualities of objects cause ideas in us where these ideas actually *resemble* the qualities in the object.
  – These are “*primary qualities.*”

• Some qualities of objects cause idea in us where the ideas do not resemble the qualities in the object.
  – These are “*secondary qualities.*”
Are secondary qualities (really) only in the mind?

- Berkeley thinks so, but I think he is mistaken.
  - Locke says that qualities are “in” objects. This applies to secondary qualities too.
  - In the end, secondary qualities are “nothing but” collections of primary qualities (in the way that a table is “nothing but” a collection of pieces of wood).
  - So, the quality of being blue is in the object, while the sensation of blue exists only in our mind. And the quality of being blue (the quality of causing certain kinds of sensations in perceivers) does not resemble the ideas or sensations it causes.
The Upshot

• There is world that exists apart from our conscious experience of it. (This is what it means to be a Metaphysical Realist.)

  – But we do no directly perceive that real world. What we directly perceive are always and only ideas or sensations that exist only in our minds. In perception, these ideas or sensations represent objects in the real (material) world. (This is what it means to be a Representational Realist.)
• The sensations we directly perceive in sense perception, even when they represent mind-independent material objects, do not always resemble those objects.
  – Our ideas of secondary qualities “have no resemblance to them.” There is nothing in the real world “like” our sensation of blue.

• So, the real world is not (not always) the way it appears to us (non-illusory) sense experience.
  – There is a “real world,” but it does not appear to us in sense experience the way it really is.
What do you think?

• Doesn’t science tell us that the “real” world is a collection of atoms (or smallest particles) that cause our sensations but in no way resemble the sensations they cause?

• How do we reconcile the scientific picture of the world with our common sense picture?
  – Is science just wrong?
  – Is common sense wrong?
  – Can they both (in some sense) be right?
George Berkeley

The Principles of Human Knowledge
To *be* is to *be perceived*
“Obvious to the Mind…”

• “… all those bodies which compose the earth … have no… subsistence without a mind, … their being is to be perceived or to be known” [Principle 6]
  – “their esse is percipi” [Principle 3]—their “being” is in “being perceived.”
  • Trees, tables, human bodies, etc., exist only in being perceived; exist only in our minds!

• “… it follows, there is not any substance other than spirit, or that which perceives.” [Principle 7]
Berkeley’s Idealism:

• There is no such thing as “material substance.”
• *Real things* like tables, mountains, etc., exist only in being perceived. Their *esse* (“being”) is *percepi* (“being perceived”).
• The only real substance is mental, i.e., the only things that exist in the universe are mind/souls (and the ideas that exist “in” them).
• “Things,” like tables and chairs, mountains and bodies, exist only in our perceptions of them.
  – They exist only in our minds.
Berkeley Rejects (Metaphysical) Realism

• **Realists**, like both Descartes and Locke, believe that there is a world (the *material* world) that exists independently of whether or not any conscious mind experiences it.
  – Berkeley *rejects* this.
    • “*there is not any substance other than spirit*”

• Berkeley’s position is known as (metaphysical) **idealism**.
Berkeley Rejects Mind/Body Dualism

• “Dualists,” like both Descartes and Locke, believe that the world contains two fundamentally different kinds of “stuff”—mind and matter.

• Berkeley disagrees:
  • He believes in the existence of mind;
    – “that which perceives”
  • He does not believe in the existence of matter.
Berkeley

• Believes that, in the end, minds (souls, spirits, immaterial substances) are the only sorts of things that exist.

• Believes that “bodies” (all the things we can perceive with our senses) exist only in our consciousness of them—they are but “collections of ideas.”
From Locke to Berkeley
Causal Theory of Perception:

Indirectly aware of Sensation

Berkeley REJECTS this part of Locke’s picture.
Compare and Contrast
Locke:

• “Whatsoever the mind perceives in itself, or is the immediate object of perception, thought, or understanding, that I call idea…”

• That is, Locke believes that in “perception, thought, [and] understanding,”—in all forms of conscious awareness—what we are “immediately aware” of are always/only ideas in our minds.
Berkeley:

• “It is evident ... [that] the objects of human knowledge ... are either ideas actually imprinted on the senses, or else such as are perceived by attending to the ... operations of the mind ... [such as] memory and imagination ....”

• Berkeley agrees that in all forms of conscious awareness, what we are “immediately aware” of are always/only ideas in our minds.
Locke and Berkeley Agree:

• The only immediate objects of thoughts, sensations, perceptions, etc. (of any conscious experience) are ideas or sensations, i.e., things that exist only in our minds.
Where they disagree:

*Is there any world beyond (independent of) our ideas?*

- Locke: **Yes.**
- Berkeley: **No.**
Berkeley’s Idealism
Berkeley’s View:

- Objects (tables, chairs, bodies, etc) are simply “collections of ideas” that exist only in being perceived.
  – This is Berkeley’s Idealism.
Defending Idealism by Rejecting Materialism
**Berkeley’s Idealism:** There is only one fundamental kind of thing, mental things, i.e., minds or souls (and the ideas that are ‘in’ them).

**(What Berkeley calls) Materialism:**

The view that there are material things (that there is a “material substance”) in addition to mental things. This is what we called “dualism.” Later philosophers will use the term “materialism” for those who accept matter but *deny* mental substance.
Berkeley’s Claim: Materialism leads to skepticism

• Even if it is “possible that solid, figured, moveable substances ... exist without the mind, – yet how is it possible for us to know this?”

• If all that we directly know or experience are ideas in the mind (mental entities), we have no evidence for the existence of anything distinct from these ideas.
• We are directly aware *only* of ideas.
• Locke: We *infer* material objects as the causes of these ideas.
• Berkeley challenges this inference.
Even if we grant that we don’t directly perceive material substances, can’t we infer them as the best explanation of the ideas and sensations that we do perceive?

- Berkeley: But “by their own confession ... they own themselves unable to comprehend in what manner body can act upon spirit.”

--i.e., positing the existence of matter doesn’t really explain anything, since you can’t actually explain how matter causally influences mind.
“they [are] unable to … [explain how] body can act upon spirit.”

• For Dualists (like Locke and Descartes), mind and matter are two distinct kinds of substances—they have nothing in common.

• But if they have nothing in common, how can they causally interact with one another?
  – How can mind (“spirit”) make matter move?
  – How can matter (“body”) cause ideas in a (non-material) mind?
Berkeley: How could mind causally interact with matter?
The “Master Argument”
“I am content to put the whole upon this issue…” [P 22]

• “If you can but conceive it possible for ... anything ... to exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving it, I will readily give up the cause.”

• I.e., Berkeley is saying that if you can conceive of an object existing outside a mind, he will grant that there are such things.

• This seems too easy!
“Surely there is nothing easier than to imagine trees, for instance, in a park,... and nobody to perceive them.”

• “This ... is nothing to the purpose!” (i.e., it is irrelevant)

• “What is this ... more than framing ideas in your mind which you call ... trees and omitting to frame the idea of anyone that may perceive them.”

• “But do you not yourself perceive them or think of them all the while?”
If all we can be “directly aware of” are ideas, this means that all we can think about (all that we can conceive of) are ideas. So, on this view, we can’t conceive of material substance!

Berkeley: On Locke’s own view, we can’t even conceive of this part of his picture!
“A Manifest Repugnancy”

• On Locke’s view, says Berkeley, material substance is *impossible* because the very concept of it is *contradictory*.
  – Material substance, by definition, is something other than a mere idea.
    • But, on Locke’s own view, we can only think about ideas.
  – So, if we can think of material substance at all, it must be an idea.
  – So, material substance is an idea that is not an idea!
Real vs. Imaginary Things
“Real things and chimeras”

• Berkeley distinguishes perceptions (“real things”) from hallucinations (“chimeras”) internally.
  – i.e., not in terms of their relations to something “external,” but rather in terms of their relations to one another.

• Perceptions (of real things) are
  a) independent of our will,
  b) are “more strong, lively, and distinct than those of imagination,” and
  c) cohere together “in a regular train or series.”

  --Eg., You know you were just dreaming because your experiences don’t “fit” with those you had before waking up.

This is the important point!
Real things are ideas that cohere together properly.
“I do not argue against the existence of any one thing that we can apprehend … by sense or reflection.”

• Berkeley can agree (with a materialist) about which experiences are true perceptions and which are mere illusions.

• The only disagreement is about what this means.

  – The realist sees lack of internal coherence among ideas as evidence that they don’t correspond to anything external.

  – For the idealist, there is nothing “external” to correspond to. Real things just are those collections of ideas that cohere together internally. Chimeras just are those collects of ideas that don’t—cohere as we have learned to expect them to.
Truth/Reality

• (Locke’s) Realism:
  – Experiences are “true” when they correspond to a mind independent reality.
  
  – But, Berkeley notes, the only evidence for this purported correspondence is the fact that certain experiences cohere together in the ways we have learned to expect.
    • Since we can’t see anything but ideas, we can’t see if they correspond to anything external to the mind.

• (Berkeley’s) Idealism:
  – Experiences are “true” when they cohere together in the proper way.
  
  – “Reality” is simply that collection of experiences that internally cohere together appropriately.
    • This appeals to the same empirical evidence to distinguish “real things” from “chimera” as realism, but explains what the difference is differently.