

Phil. 270/570, 2/25: Wrapping up Epistemic Possibilities and Conservatism, Part 1: Berkeley and Reid (reading)

Epistemic possibilities: my flexible hypothesis:

S's assertion "It is possible that P_{ind} " is true if and only if (1) no member of the relevant community knows that P is false, and (2) there is no relevant way by which members of the relevant community can come to know that P is false -KDR, "Epistemic Possibilities," pp. 593-4

-flexibility, swaying together, accommodation, explanation, prediction?

Conservatism 1

1. Evidentialist skeptical arguments

Evidentialist Requirement [B-beliefs must be properly based on As to have status J] + Unmeetability [B-beliefs cannot be / are not properly based on As] → Skeptical conclusion [B-beliefs don't/can't have status J]

2. Berkeley's epistemology argument

Material objects vs. bodies, Berkeley's idealism vs. materialism; By sense or by reason?; No good inference and the starting point Berkeley assumes; the Force of Berkeley's skepticism about matter (esp. sect. 19); Reid's admission (321.6)

2. Reid on the perceptual process (II.A.)

How it doesn't go; How it goes

3. Reid's epistemology of perception (II.B.)

How it doesn't go: Berkeley (56a: bad inference?), Descartes ("some blind [natural] impulse"), and Hume ("natural instinct") on how we come to believe in MOs, and what it would take for such a belief to be rationally justified. Highly restrictive foundationalism [≈ Plantinga's "modern classical foundationalism" ([syl 19], p. 44.3)]

How it goes (esp. 327t)

Philosophical methodology, too (327b)

4. Reid case (defense by attack) against the skeptics

-thorough and consistent skeptics: 328.8-329.7

-semi-skeptics: 329.8-330.3

-wrap-up: 330.4-331.9

Berkeley's epistemological argument: *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* [Principles, 1710], Part I, sects. 18-20; plus sect. 56a

18. But, though it were possible that solid, figured, movable substances may exist without the mind, corresponding to the ideas we have of bodies, yet how is it possible for us to know this? Either we must know it by sense or by reason. As for our senses, by them we have the knowledge only of our sensations, ideas, or those things that are immediately perceived by sense, call them what you will: but they do not inform us that things exist without the mind, or unperceived, like to those which are perceived. This the materialists themselves acknowledge. It remains therefore that if we have any knowledge at all of external things, it must be by reason, inferring their existence from what is immediately perceived by sense. But what reason can induce us to believe the existence of bodies without the mind, from what we perceive, since the very patrons of Matter themselves do not pretend there is any necessary connexion betwixt them and our ideas? I say it is granted on all hands (and what happens in dreams, phrensies, and the like, puts it beyond dispute) that it is possible we might be affected with all the ideas we have now, though there were no bodies existing without resembling them. Hence, it is evident the supposition of external bodies is not necessary for the producing our ideas; since it is granted they are produced sometimes, and might possibly be produced always in the same order, we see them in at present, without their concurrence.

19. But, though we might possibly have all our sensations without them, yet perhaps it may be thought easier to conceive and explain the manner of their production, by supposing external bodies in their likeness rather than otherwise; and so it might be at least probable there are such things as bodies that excite their ideas in our minds. But neither can this be said; for, though we give the materialists their external bodies, they by their own confession are never the nearer knowing how our ideas are produced; since they own themselves unable to comprehend in what manner body can act upon spirit, or how it is possible it should imprint any idea in the mind. Hence it is evident the production of ideas or sensations in our minds can be no reason why we should suppose Matter or corporeal substances, since that is acknowledged to remain equally inexplicable with or without this supposition. If therefore it were possible for bodies to exist without the mind, yet to hold they do so, must needs be a very precarious opinion; since it is to suppose, without any reason at all, that God has created innumerable beings that are entirely useless, and serve to no manner of purpose.

20. In short, if there were external bodies, it is impossible we should ever come to know it; and if there were not, we might have the very same reasons to think there were that we have now. Suppose- what no one can deny possible- an intelligence without the help of external bodies, to be affected with the same train of sensations or ideas that you are, imprinted in the same order and with like vividness in his mind. I ask whether that intelligence hath not all the reason to believe the existence of corporeal substances, represented by his ideas, and exciting them in his mind, that you can possibly have for believing the same thing? Of this there can be no question- which one consideration were enough to make any reasonable person suspect the strength of whatever arguments he may think himself to have, for the existence of bodies without the mind.

....

56a. But it is demanded that we assign a cause of this prejudice, and account for its obtaining in the world. To this I answer, that men knowing they perceived several ideas, whereof they themselves were not the authors- as not being excited from within nor depending on the operation of their wills- this made them maintain those ideas, or objects of perception had an existence independent of and without the mind, without ever dreaming that a contradiction was involved in those words. . . .