

“Reality” of our knowledge

1. Simple ideas

We are not the original cause of any of our simple ideas

otherwise the blind could dream in colour

And we can generally tell fairly accurately whether we are sensing or imagining

or sensing or remembering

So we can be sure that where we are experiencing simple ideas in sensation, there is something outside us that is causing that experience

we can't be confident that the thing is like the simple ideas

for that reason, we can't rule out the possibility that quite different things might cause same simple ideas

but we can at least be sure that where simple ideas change, there must be some change in the objects

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2. Complex modes

General rules, both moral and scientific, are based on examination of complex modes.

E.g. murder is a crime punishable by death

the internal angles of triangles equal two right angles

all bodies communicate motion on impact

Complex modes are collections of simple ideas put together by us.

We can put together any ideas we want so long as the result does not contain a contradiction

We can then proceed to compare these ideas with one another (or with their parts or their parts with one another), and intuit or demonstrate certain things about their relations

What follows from intuition and demonstration concerning relations of these ideas will necessarily be true of those ideas

it could not be otherwise without some change in the ideas themselves

It may also be non-analytic (more than merely “trifling”)

If there are substances corresponding to our complex ideas,

in the sense of being instances of the ideas, where the ideas are considered as “archetypes”

then those substances will necessarily have to exhibit the same relations

and so will have to conform to the principles we have discovered.

So general rules, both moral and scientific, can be based on examination of complex modes

and to the extent that they are, they will have more than merely inductive validity

they will be necessarily true

But it remains an empirical question, to be decided by sensation (not by intuition or demonstration) whether there are in fact any substances that exactly correspond to the complex modes taken up in any given general rule

So, while we can know scientific laws and principles, and know them with demonstrative certainty

it is a separate question whether anything exists that is described by those laws and principles

The existence of things described by them is only known by sensation.

In formulating systems of necessary truths we are nonetheless not building castles in the air.

We form our complex ideas by collecting the objects of experience together into such groups as are important to us for our purposes and then noting resemblances among the objects in each group.

Because we draw our complex ideas from the experience of objects and then see what we can discover in them

rather than see what we can discover in our complex ideas and then look to see whether there are any objects conforming to them

we generally do formulate scientific rules that correspond to reality

“Reality” of our knowledge
3. Existence of substances

We know our own existence by intuition.

We know the existence of God by demonstration.

We know the existence of other things by sensation.

Intuition of self-existence

Intuitive certainty of self existence is based on intuition of the relation of inherence between thought (evident to us in reflection) and some substance of which that thought is a modification

While Locke's reasons for claiming knowledge of the existence of myself may look Cartesian

his conclusions are far more restrictive than Descartes's

we have no idea what that substance is

we are in no position to make claims about the material or immaterial nature of the thing in us that thinks

about the immortality of persons

or about the persistence of same persons in same substances

Demonstration of the existence of God

Something cannot come from nothing

so whatever begins to exist must have had some cause of its existence

I began to exist, so at least one thing has begun to exist

so there must have been some cause of my existence

if that cause itself began to be, it requires a cause

we can't go back forever here

So there must be some cause that never began to be, but has existed from eternity

So there must be some cause that never began to be, but has existed from eternity

all the powers I find within myself must have been present in this eternal cause

otherwise some power would have come to be from nothing

so this first cause must have been originally intelligent (capable of thought)

moreover, all the powers I discover by sensation, and all other powers that might exist must arise from this cause

because if the various powers instead arose from different causes, the universe could not exhibit the order and purpose (in being so well designed as a fit place for us to live) that it does

So the first cause must be an eternal, intelligent being that is possessed of all the power in the universe, i.e., it must be God

Locke's demonstration and thinking matter

Last time, we saw that Locke maintained that we cannot rule out the possibility that matter could think

that is, that the substance that has the powers to bring out our ideas of a cohesion of solid parts, communicating motion by impulse

might also be a substance that has the powers to experience sensation as a consequence of impulse and initiate motion by thought (volition)

In arguing for the existence of God, Locke was careful to deny that this means that the powers of thought and will could have evolved or emerged from something that is *merely* material

A *merely* material substance would be a substance that has *only* the powers of cohesion and solidity

and Locke was at pains to attempt to argue that no arrangement of merely solid, cohering, and moving parts could ever constitute a pain or other sensation

or *initiate* (as opposed to *transmit*) motion

A *merely* material substance would need to have the powers of thought and volition “superadded” to it

by a being that already has such powers

Or it would have needed to be that way all along, from the beginning

Sensation of the existence of other things

We know the existence of other things only insofar as we sense them

(i.e., insofar as we experience ideas of sensation that we take to be caused by them)

since we know the existence of other things only by sensation, when we are not actually sensing them we cannot know that they continue to exist

since we have experience of minds only by reflection, which makes us aware only of our own mind, we have no experience of other minds

our lack of knowledge in both these particulars is not serious because it is made up for by reasons for belief:

faith in revelation in the case of other minds

testimony of other minds in the case of unperceived existence