Early Modern Philosophy
Locke and Berkeley

Lecture 5: Berkeley’s Idealism
The plan for today…

1. What is idealism?

2. Common sense objections

3. The master argument

4. The sense perception argument

§1. What is idealism?
Eliminative Materialism

The only things that exist are bodies and their states.

Reductive Materialism

Ultimately the only things that exist are bodies and their states.

…the other things that exist are reducible to bodies and their states.
The archetypal early modern materialist is Thomas Hobbes…

‘…every perception is a motion in the parts of an animal’s body; these, though they are called ‘animal spirits’… are nevertheless bodies.’ (Thomas Hobbes, *Anti-White*)
**Eliminative Idealism**

The only things that exist are *minds* and their states.

**Reductive Idealism**

*Ultimately* the only things that exist are minds and their states.

…*the other things that exist are reducible to minds and their states.*
The archetypal early modern *idealist* is George Berkeley…

‘Some truths there are so near and obvious to the mind, that a man need only open his eyes to see them. Such I take this important one to be, to wit, that all the choir of heaven and furniture of the Earth, in a word all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any subsistence without a mind…’ (*PHK* §6 p.105)
The archetypal early modern dualist is René Descartes…

*Reductive Dualism*

Ultimately the only things that exist are *minds* and their states…

…and *bodies* and their states.
Transcendental Idealism

Bodies (and their states) are *mere appearances* and not *things-in-themselves*.

Absolute Idealism

Two meanings of ‘ideal’… a *mental* sense and a *normative* sense…
Does Berkeley think that \textit{esse is percipi}...?

...i.e. that \textit{to be is to be perceived}...?

‘...as to what is said of the absolute existence of unthinking things without any relation to their being perceived, that seems perfectly unintelligible. Their \textit{esse is percipi}, nor is it possible they should have any existence, out of the minds or thinking things which perceive them.’ \textit{(PHK §3 p.104)}
‘...besides all that endless variety of ideas... there is likewise something which knows or perceives them... This perceiving, active being is what I call mind, spirit, soul or my self.’ (PHK §2 p.103)

So Berkeley thinks that esse is percipi or percipere.

He thinks that to be is to be perceived or to perceive.

He thinks that the esse of bodies is percipi and that the esse of minds is percipere.
‘…The table I write on, I say, exists, that is… if I were out of my study I should say it existed, meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it…’ (PHK §3 p.104)

So *to be* is *to be perceivable*…?

…bodies are *permanent possibilities of sensation*…

This is *phenomenalism*…
§2. Common sense objections
Does Berkeley think that the tree in the quad exists when we no longer perceive it…?
P1 The mug in my office currently exists.

P2 The mug in my office is currently unperceived.

P3 If idealism is true, the mug in my office currently exists only if it is currently perceived.

C Idealism is false.
‘...yet we may not hence conclude [bodies] 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...

...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.’ (PHK §48 p.119)
‘...it is plain [bodies] have an existence exterior to my mind...

...There is therefore some other mind wherein they exist, during the intervals of my perceiving them...

...And as the same is true with regard to all other finite created spirits; it necessarily follows, there is an omnipresent eternal mind.’

(DHP p.114)
P1  The mug in my office currently exists.

P2  If idealism is true, the mug in my office currently exists only if it is currently perceived.

P3  Idealism is true.

C   The mug in my office is currently perceived.
P1 If idealism is true, it is possible for two people to perceive the same mug only if it is possible for two people to have the same idea in their minds.

P2 It is impossible for two people to have the same idea in their minds.

P3 It is possible for two people to perceive the same mug.

C Idealism is false.
‘If the term *same* be taken in the vulgar acceptation, it is certain (and not at all repugnant to the principles I maintain) that different persons may perceive the same thing; or the same thing or idea exist in different minds…

…But whether philosophers shall think fit to call a thing the same or no, is, I conceive, of small importance.’ (*DHP* p.129)
Identity in the *vulgar* sense of the word…

E.g. ‘These balls are all the same.’

…this is qualitative identity.

Identity in the *philosophical* sense of the word…

…this may be numerical identity.
If idealism is true, it is possible for two people to perceive qualitatively identical mugs only if it is possible for two people to have qualitatively identical ideas in their minds.

It is impossible for two people to have qualitatively identical ideas in their minds.

It is possible for two people to perceive qualitatively identical mugs.

Idealism is false.
P1  If idealism is true, it is possible for two people to perceive *one and the same* mug only if it is possible for two people to have *one and the same* idea in their minds.

P2  It is impossible for two people to have *one and the same* idea in their minds.

P3  It is possible for two people to perceive *one and the same* mug.

C  Idealism is false.
§3. The master argument
The Master Argument

‘...I am content to put the whole upon this issue; if you can but conceive it possible for one extended moveable substance, or in general, for any one idea or any thing like an idea, to exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving it, I shall readily give up the cause... I say, the bare possibility of your opinion’s being true, shall pass for an argument that it is so.’ (PHK §22 p.110)
The Master Argument

‘...it is necessary that you conceive them existing unconceived or unthought of, which is a manifest repugnancy.’ (PHK §23 p.111)

It is a contradiction that...

...I am thinking of an unthought-of body.
The Master Argument

I am thinking of an unthought-of body.

The *de dicto* reading…

I am thinking that $\exists x \ (x \text{ is unthought of})$

The *de re* reading…

$\exists x \ (x \text{ is unthought-of and I am thinking of } x)$
On the *de re* reading…
…it is a contradiction that I am thinking of an unthought-of body…

On the *de dicto* reading…
…it is *not* a contradiction that I am thinking of an unthought-of body…

But it is on the *de dicto* reading that Berkeley *needs* it to be a contradiction that I am thinking of an unthought-of body…
An alternative interpretation…

Berkeley is challenging us to complete the task of thinking of an unthought-of body.

Suppose we have successfully completed the task…

It follows that the body is thought-of.

But this contradicts what we have thought, viz. that the body is unthought-of.
A performative contradiction...

It isn’t *what I am thinking* that is a contradiction...

…it is the conjunction of *what I am thinking* and *the fact that I am thinking it*.

So *in the act* of thinking that P, I end up contradicting P.
There are other examples of this sort of thing in early modern philosophy…

Remember the *Cogito*…

It isn’t a contradiction that *I do not exist*…

…but it is plausibly a contradiction that *I do not exist* and *I am thinking that I do not exist*. 
Does the argument establish *too much*…?

It is supposed to establish that there cannot be *unthought-of* bodies…

But it seems to establish that there cannot be *unthought-of-by-me* bodies…

It is a contradiction that there is an *unthought-of-by-me* body and that *I am thinking of this body*. 
The argument is supposed to establish that there cannot be *unthought-of* bodies…

But it seems to establish that there cannot be *unthought-of objects*…

It is a contradiction that there is an *unthought-of-by-me object* and that *I am thinking of this object*.

So the *esse of minds* is also *percipi*…?
A deflationary interpretation…

P1 There is an unthought-of body.

P2 Every body is an idea (or a collection of ideas)

P3 There cannot be an unthought-of idea (or collection of ideas).

C There is a body that is both thought-of and unthought-of.
§4. The sense perception argument
‘It is indeed an opinion strangely prevailing amongst men, that houses, mountains, rivers… have an existence… distinct from their being perceived by the understanding… yet [we] may… perceive it to involve a manifest contradiction…
…For what are the forementioned objects but the things we perceive by sense, and what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations; and is it not plainly repugnant that any one of these or any combination of them should exist unperceived?’ (PHK §4 p.104)
The sense perception argument

P1 Houses, mountains, rivers etc. are objects that we perceive by means of our senses.

P2 The only objects that we perceive by means of our senses are ideas (or collections of ideas).

C Houses, mountains, rivers etc. are ideas (or collections of ideas).
The indirect realist objection…

P2 is true if and only if it is interpreted as…

The only objects that we directly perceive by means of our senses are ideas (or collections of ideas)

P1 is true if and only if it is interpreted as…

Houses, mountains, rivers etc. are objects that we indirectly perceive by means of our senses.
The sense perception argument

P1 Houses, mountains, rivers etc. are objects that we indirectly perceive by means of our senses.

P2 The only objects that we directly perceive by means of our senses are ideas (or collections of ideas).

C Houses, mountains, rivers etc. are ideas (or collections of ideas).
Direct and indirect sense perception…

‘…the senses perceive nothing which they do not perceive immediately: for they make no inferences. The deducing therefore of causes or occasions from effects and appearances, which alone are perceived by sense, entirely relates to reason.’ (DHP p.62)

So an object is directly perceived by the senses if and only if it is perceived wholly by the senses without the need for any inference by the intellect.
P1 Houses, mountains, rivers etc. are objects that we perceive by means of our senses.

P2 The only objects that we directly perceive by means of our senses are ideas (or collections of ideas).

P3 We do not indirectly perceive houses, mountains, rivers etc. by means of our senses.

C Houses, mountains, rivers etc. are ideas (or collections of ideas).
This helps Berkeley to avoid the charge of equivocation, but it still leaves him with work to do…

*The indirect realist objection*…

P3 is false.

*The direct realist objection*…

P2 is false.
Next week...

...more idealism.