Early Modern Philosophy
Locke and Berkeley

Lecture 8: Berkeley on Other Minds
The plan for today...

1. The threat of solipsism
2. Ideas and notions
3. The continuity argument
4. The independence argument
5. Other minds
§1. The threat of solipsism
Simple metaphysical solipsism

The only mind that exists is my mind.

Simple epistemological solipsism

The only mind that I can know exists is my mind.

These claims would be true if I were the sole survivor of a nuclear holocaust.
Idealism

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

...the other things that exist are reducible to minds and their states.

Sophisticated Solipsism is the conjunction of Simple Solipsism and Idealism.
Sophisticated Metaphysical Solipsism

Ultimately, the only thing that exists is my mind and its states.

Sophisticated Epistemological Solipsism

The only things that I can know exist are my mind and its states...

...and things that are reducible to my mind and its states.
Remember the Master Argument...

P1 There is a ‘manifest repugnancy’ involved in my conceiving that there is an unconceived-of body.

P2 It is possible that P only if there is no ‘manifest repugnancy’ involved in my conceiving that P.

C It is impossible that there is a unconceived-of body.
Why P1...?

Because the body would have to be both conceived-of and not conceived-of.

But the same logic yields...

P1 * There is a ‘manifest repugnancy’ involved in my conceiving that there is an *unconceived-of-by-me* body.
The Solipsistic Master Argument...

P1  There is a ‘manifest repugnancy’ involved in my conceiving that there is an unconceived-of-by-me body.

P2  It is possible that P only if there is no ‘manifest repugnancy’ involved in my conceiving that P.

C  It is impossible that there is a unconceived-of-by-me body.
In this case we can avoid the threat of solipsism by changing our explanation for P1...

P1 Every body is an idea.

P2 Every idea is conceived-of.

C There is a ‘manifest repugnancy’ involved in my conceiving that there is an unconceived-of body.
§2. Ideas and notions
Berkeley denies that we have any *idea* of our mind...

‘I own I have properly no idea, either of God or of any other spirit; for these being active, cannot be represented by things perfectly inert.’ (*DHP*, p.114)

P1  Ideas are ‘perfectly inert’.

P2  Minds are not ‘perfectly inert’.

C   Ideas cannot represent minds.
This looks like a confusion of the vehicle and content of representation...

P1  None of my ideas is red or round.

P2  Tomatoes are red and round.

C   Ideas cannot represent tomatoes.
But Berkeley still thinks we know our mind...

‘I do nevertheless know, that I... exist as certainly, as I know my ideas exist... I know this immediately, or intuitively...’ (DHP, p.115)

And he thinks we know another mind, viz. God...

‘...though I perceive Him not by sense, yet I have a notion of Him, or know Him by reflexion and reasoning.’ (DHP, p.115).
‘You admit... there is spiritual substance, although you have no idea of it...

...while you deny there can be such a thing as material substance, because you have no notion or idea of it. Is this fair dealing?

...To act consistently, you must either admit matter, or reject spirit.’ (DHP, p.115-116)
P1  We have no idea of matter.

P2  If we have no idea of X, X cannot exist.

C   Matter doesn’t exist.

But Berkeley doesn’t think we have an idea of spirit...

So he must conclude by the same reasoning that spirit doesn’t exist...
P1 The idea of matter is contradictory.

P2 If the idea of X is contradictory, X cannot exist.

C Matter doesn’t exist.

Berkeley doesn’t think we have an idea of spirit...

But he doesn’t think the idea of spirit is contradictory.
§3. The continuity argument
The continuity argument...

P1 Bodies exist continuously.

P2 Bodies are not continuously perceived by any human mind (or by human minds in concert).

P3 A body exists at $t$ only if it is perceived at $t$.

C Bodies are continuously perceived by a non-human mind (or by non-human minds in concert).
The argument is plainly valid...

P1 and P2 are clearly true...

P3 is a consequence of idealism...

P3a All bodies are ideas.

P3b An idea exists at \( t \) only if it is perceived at \( t \).

P3 A body exists at \( t \) only if it is perceived at \( t \).
One problem with this argument is that it doesn’t get us anything resembling God...

Perhaps it is angels working in shifts who are perceiving bodies even when we aren’t...

Another problem is that it seems to introduce a vicious circularity into Berkeley’s argument for idealism...
The consistency-with-common-sense argument...

C It is not a consequence of idealism that either bodies are continuously perceived by a human mind (or by human minds in concert), or bodies do not exist continuously.

P1 Bodies are continuously perceived by a non-human mind (or by non-human minds in concert).
A vicious circularity...?

Berkeley’s justification for idealism seems to depend upon on the premise that bodies are continuously perceived by a non-human mind (or by non-human minds in concert).

But Berkeley’s justification for this premise seems to depend upon idealism!
Two possible responses...

Berkeley’s justification for idealism *does not* depend upon on the premise that bodies are continuously perceived by a non-human mind (or by non-human minds in concert)...

Berkeley’s justification for this premise *does not* depend upon idealism...

But Berkeley’s other argument for the existence of God also depends upon idealism...
§4. The independence argument
Step 1 of the independence argument...

P1  Ideas cannot cause anything.

P2  Bodies are ideas.

C1  Bodies cannot cause anything.

C2  The only things that can cause anything are minds.
Ideas cannot cause anything.

‘Whoever shall attend to his ideas, whether of sense or reflexion, will not perceive in them any power or activity...’ (*PHK* §25, p.111).

‘A little attention will discover to us that the very being of an idea implies passiveness and inertness in it, inasmuch as it is impossible for an idea to do anything.’ (*PHK* §25, p.111).
P1a  Ideas can cause something only if we can perceive in them some sort of force or power or energy.

P1b  We cannot perceive any sort of force or power or energy in ideas.

P1  Ideas cannot cause anything.

Why shouldn’t we reject P1a?
Hume denies that we can perceive force or power or energy in anything at all.

From this it follows that either (a) nothing is a cause...

...or (b) it is not a necessary condition of something’s being a cause that we can perceive in it some sort of force or power or energy.
Step 2 of the independence argument...

P3    Every change in our ideas has a cause.

C3    Every change in our ideas is caused by a mind.

P4    The changes in our sensations are not caused by our minds.

C4    The changes in our sensations are caused by some other mind.
P4    The changes in our sensations are not caused by our minds.

‘When in broad day-light I open my eyes, it is not in my power to choose whether I shall see or no, or to determine what particular objects present themselves to my view...

...There is therefore some other will or spirit that produces them.’ (PHK
Step 3 of the independence argument...

P4  The changes in our sensations are regular.

P5  If the changes in our sensations are regular, the cause of our sensations must be one mind, not a committee of minds.

P6  If one mind causes all of our sensations, this mind is all-powerful.
P7 If the changes in our sensations are regular, they help us to pursue our own happiness.

P8 If the changes in our sensations help us to pursue our own happiness, and the cause of these changes is a mind, the cause of these changes is perfectly good.

C5 The cause of the changes in our sensations is some other mind, and this mind is all-powerful and perfectly good.
§5. Other minds
Is it just me and God...?

What about everyone else?
‘...we cannot know the existence of other spirits, otherwise than by their operations, or the ideas by them excited in us...

...I perceive several...changes... of ideas, that inform me there are certain particular agents like my self...’ (PHK §145, p.157)

But isn’t God the cause of the changes in our sensations...?
‘...though there be some things which convince us, human agents are concerned in producing them...

...yet it is evident to every one, that those things which are called the works of Nature...

...that is, the far greater part of the ideas or sensations perceived by us...

...are not produced by, or dependent on the wills of men.’ (PHK §146, p.157-158)
What is the best explanation of the changes in our sensations?

E1 One all-powerful and benevolent mind causes all of the changes.

E2 Some of the changes are caused by an all-powerful and benevolent mind; other changes are caused by lesser minds.

E3 All of the changes are caused by lesser minds.
Why not E3...?

Because some of the changes in our sensations are perfectly regular, and help us to pursue our happiness.

Why not E1...?

Because some of the changes in our sensations are not perfectly regular, and do not help us to pursue our happiness...?
A neglected possibility...

The changes in our sensations are caused by a not quite all-powerful and perfectly good mind.

Perhaps God has off-days...

Isn’t this a more parsimonious explanation...?
Have a good vacation!