BERKELEY LECTURE 1

1. *PHK* begins with an attack on the doctrine of abstract ideas as found in Locke. In order to understand this we need to know what abstract ideas are, and the intellectual pressures that forced Locke to postulate them.

2. The best starting-point is Locke's own doctrine of meaning (book III of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*). Two components of that doctrine are relevant here. First: all words stand for something: that is, Locke in effect treats all words like proper names. Second: words have a twofold meaning, direct and indirect. The *direct* meaning of a word was an *idea* (III.i.1, III.iv.1). The *indirect* meaning was the thing *outside* the user's mind that they referred to via the corresponding idea. (III.ii.5).

3. What this amounts to depends on what you mean by 'idea'. It is not wholly uncontroversial but it is generally accepted that Locke meant a kind of mental picture or image (suggested e.g. at II.x.5; but see Aaron, *John Locke* p. 199). And ideas signify things by resemblance to them.

4. The idea that words stand primarily for contents of your mind may be motivated in similar ways to the representational theory of perception. A word can be meaningful even though it doesn't stand for anything in the external world (e.g. 'Santa Claus'). Since Locke thinks that all meaningful words stand for *something*, it follows that they must stand for something in my mind. Or again, when people communicate, it is natural to think that what they are communicating (what their words are about) is what is in their minds (this line of thought is intimated but not explicitly stated at III.ii.5). Finally, the idea that resemblance is the way that ideas themselves refer to things derives perhaps from the thought that one's *thoughts* must latch on to their objects in a way that is not conventional but understood by all; for otherwise we could not infer from the fact that you and I are having the same thought to the conclusion that you and I are thinking of the same thing.

5. In any case Locke runs into difficulty when it comes to *general terms*: expressions like *horse*, *man*, *sacrifice*, *biscuit* that don't refer indirectly to any one object in particular but to many things indifferently. In one way Locke didn't treat these like proper names, as he acknowledged that they had no single indirect reference (III.iii.2-3). But in another way he did: he thought that they refer directly to a single idea—an *abstract idea*. These, like ideas annexed to proper names, refer by resemblance. But how can an abstract idea of a horse resemble *all* the horses? Locke's answer was that it contains *only* or resemblances of the simple features that are common to *all* horses (III.iii.6-7).

6. That is one route to abstract ideas. A second comes when we think of our capacity to *recognize* instances of a kind. The retention of an image in one's mind, against which we compare things that we perceive, is what enables us to recognize the things we encounter in perception as instances of a certain type (IV.iii.2).

7. Yet a third motivation arises when we consider the nature of general proof (cf. the experiment in *Meno*). How can a particular idea (say of a triangle) furnish us with knowledge about *all* triangles? The answer, you might think, is that it is *abstract*: containing as it does only ideas that are common to all triangles, any feature it is observed to contain can be affirmed with certainty of all of them. Berkeley makes somewhat more of this (PHK *Int*. 15) than does Locke (IV.ii.2ff.)

8. Berkeley claims: that AI's are impossible, that we do not in fact have them, and that they are anyway redundant. *Impossibility*. The definition of an abstract idea contains a contradiction. This is based on Locke's remark (IV.vii.9) that the abstract idea of a triangle consists of numerous inconsistencies: 'neither oblique, nor rectangle… but all and none of these at once' (PHK *Int*. 13).

9. This is somewhat unfair on Locke (see Craig in *Phil. Rev.* 1968). Locke's official view is not that we *add* the ideas of obliquity and rectangularity from that to get the abstract idea of a triangle, but that we *subtract* them. Abstract ideas are necessarily incomplete. However it is not clear that Locke gets away so easily.

10. *We do not in fact have them*. Berkeley's argument is based on his method of introspection (see PHK *Int*. 25). He says (*Int*. 10) that if he looks inside himself, he sees only particular ideas, determinate in every detail. Again this is a little unfair on Locke: our mental images (and that is certainly what Berkeley took ideas to be) are never wholly determinate.

11. *They are redundant*. Berkeley has two arguments for this. The first is that if abstract ideas are necessary for communication, then they should be used whenever people do communicate. But as Locke admits, it takes some pains to get them—not just anybody can do it (IV.vii.9). But children seem to manage all right: 'Is it not a hard thing to imagine, that a couple of children cannot prate together, of their sugar-plumbs and rattles and the rest of their little trinkets, till they have first tacked together numberless inconsistencies, and so framed in their mind *abstract general ideas*, and annexed them to every common name they make use of?' (*Int*. 14).

12. The second argument is that general proofs do not require the contemplation of abstract ideas, but that of particular ideas *considered in a particular way*. Once you see that the proof concerning the particular triangle only concerned features of it that are common to all triangles, you are straightaway in a position to affirm the conclusion of all triangles (*Int*. 16). These points score a pretty clear hit.

13. There is a third argument: Berkeley may allude to it (PC 599) its clearest statement is by Wittgenstein (Blue Book pp. 1-3). Even if we admit abstract ideas they cannot help with recognition in all cases: but then there is no reason to think that we *need* them in *any*.