

PHIL 971–Kantian Conceptualism

Handout 2

9/5/13

1 Information Conveyed

1.1 Presentation and Representation

Presentation: What is conveyed is the thing itself

Representation: What is conveyed is some sign or proxy for something else

1.2 Sense and Reference

Semantic Value: The semantic value of an idea is that feature of it which determines whether thoughts or judgments in which it occurs are true or false

- The semantic value of a thought is its truth value
- The semantic value of a component of a thought is its contribution to the determination of the truth value of the thought

What is conveyed in understanding a thought or having an idea?

- The semantic value (Russellian)
- The determiner of semantic value (Fregean)

1.3 The Problem of Empty Thoughts

- Presentationalist/Russellian views have difficulty accounting for empty thoughts/thoughts of non-existent objects/properties.
- We can think of non-actual things, how could we do so if the Presentationalist/Russellian account were correct?

2 Scholastic Background

2.1 Provenance of the Term 'Idea'¹

- In the Augustinian tradition an 'Idea' was an archetype in the mind of God. Roughly, a kind of Platonic form existing in the mind of God after which he generates the particulars that populate the created world

¹ I used the word 'idea' because it was the standard philosophical term used to refer to the forms of perception belonging to the divine mind ... (3rd Replies, AT VII: 181).

2.2 Perception and Hylomorphism

- All extant beings are distinguished in terms of 'matter' and 'form'
- Cognition is the result of the mind's taking on the form, but not the matter, of the cognized thing

3 Descartes on Ideas

3.1 Corporeal ideas

- Images in the brain, ultimately imprinted on the pineal gland²
- Descartes prescind from using the term 'idea' to denote such corporeal images³

3.2 Mental ideas

- all ideas have intentionality⁴
- clear and distinct vs obscure and confused⁵
 - a phenomenological distinction?

3.3 The Formal-Objective Reality Distinction⁶

Formal reality: the reality a thing possesses in virtue of being an actual or existing thing

Objective reality: the reality a thing possesses in virtue of being "in" the mind

- All ideas have objective reality "by their very nature" (VII: 41)
- All actually existing things (including ideas) have some degree of formal reality
 - formal containment: the cause actually exemplifies the quality or type of quality produced in the effect
 - * fire formally contains heat
 - eminent containment: has the ability to cause the relevant effect without actually (or possibly) exemplifying the quality or type of quality produced in the effect
 - * fire eminently contains blackness
- The formal reality of some entity is asymmetrically dependent on the reality of another entity with a greater degree of reality
 - Infinite substance (God)
 - Created finite substances
 - Modes of substances
- The objective reality of an idea also comes in degrees and is reflected by the degree of formal reality of the cause of the idea⁷

² It is not those [figures] imprinted on the external sense organs, or on the internal surface of the brain, which should be taken to be ideas - but only those which are traced in the spirits on the surface of the gland H [the pineal gland]...For I wish to apply the term 'idea' generally to all the impressions which the spirits can receive as they leave gland H (Descartes, XI: 176-7).

³ Here my critic [Hobbes] wants the term 'idea' to be taken to refer simply to the images of material things which are depicted in the corporeal imagination; and if this is granted, it is easy for him to prove that there can be no proper idea of an angel or of God. But I make it quite clear in several places throughout the book, and in this passage in particular, that I am taking the word 'idea' to refer to whatever is immediately perceived by the mind (Descartes, VII:181; cf. VII:366).

⁴ Some of my thoughts are as it were the images of things, and it is only in these cases that the term 'idea' is strictly appropriate - for example, when I think of a man, or a chimera, or the sky, or an angel, or God (AT VII: 37).

⁵ My nature is such that so long as I perceive something very clearly and distinctly I cannot but believe it to be true (VII: 69; cf. 36, 65; III: 64).

⁶ And although the reality which I am considering in my ideas is merely objective reality, I must not on that account suppose that the same reality need not exist formally in the causes of my ideas, but that it is enough for it to be present in them objectively. For just as the objective mode of being belongs to ideas by their very nature, so the formal mode of being belongs to the causes of ideas - or at least the first and most important ones - by their very nature. And although one idea may perhaps originate from another, there cannot be an infinite regress here; eventually one must reach a primary idea, the cause of which will be like an archetype which contains formally all the reality which is present only objectively in the idea. So it is clear to me, by the natural light, that the ideas in me are like images which can easily fall short of the perfection of the things from which they are taken, but which cannot contain anything greater or more perfect (AT VII: 41-2).

⁷ Undoubtedly, the ideas which represent substances to me amount to something more and, so to speak, contain within themselves more objective reality than the ideas which merely represent modes or accidents (VII: 40).

3.4 The Material–Objective Distinction⁸

An idea taken 'materially': an idea as an act or operation of the mind—
i.e. a mode of a mental substance or 'Idea_m'

An idea taken 'objectively': an idea as what is made present to the mind
(either in presentation or representation of some further entity)—an
'Idea_o'

3.5 Cognitive Content and Sensation

- All cognitive content is understood in terms of ideas 'taken objectively'
– i.e. in terms of having an Idea_o
- What about sensory ideas?
 - In having a sensory idea something is present to the mind (i.e. there is a phenomenology which characteristically accompanies the idea_m)⁹
 - Not obvious that, for many sensory ideas, there is a corresponding formally real quality¹⁰

4 Malebranche on Ideas & Sensation

4.1 Ideas in God

All objects of cognition are ideas existing in the mind of God – they play three key roles:

1. Archetypes from which created particulars are generated by God
2. Allows for grasp of essences (by which one grasps a priori all the possible modifications of which a thing with that essence is capable)
3. Are that by which (in combination with sensation) we perceive material particulars–bodies
 - we perceive bodies by means of perception of ideas (so perception is indirect)
 - our perception of bodies is accompanied by a non-representational/non-ideational component–viz. sensation

4.2 Four Arguments

1. The argument from intentionality
 - there are no thoughts which lack an object, but not all objects are actual, ∴ what we think exists in God^{11,12}
2. The argument from presence (the "strolling soul")¹³

Colin McLear

⁸ 'Idea' can be taken materially, as an operation of the intellect, in which case it cannot be said to be more perfect than me. Alternatively, it can be taken objectively, as the thing represented by that operation; and this thing, even if it is not regarded as existing outside the intellect, can still, in virtue of its essence, be more perfect than myself (AT VII: 8).

⁹ The things which I perceive clearly and distinctly in them [i.e. in my ideas of bodies] are very few in number. The list comprises size, or extension in length, breadth and depth; shape, which is a function of the boundaries of this extension; position, which is a relation between various items possessing shape; and motion, or change in position; to these may be added substance, duration and number. But as for all the rest, including light and colours, sounds, smells, tastes, heat and cold and the other tactile qualities, I think of these only in a very confused and obscure way, to the extent that I do not even know whether they are true or false, that is, whether the ideas I have of them are ideas of real things or of non-things (VII: 43).

¹⁰ For example, the ideas which I have of heat and cold contain so little clarity and distinctness that they do not enable me to tell whether cold is merely the absence of heat or vice versa, or whether both of them are real qualities, or neither is. And since there can be no ideas which are not as it were of things, if it is true that cold is nothing but the absence of heat, the idea which represents it to me as something real and positive deserves to be called false; and the same goes for other ideas of this kind (AT VII: 43-4).

¹¹ It is certain that nothingness or the false is not perceptible or intelligible. To see nothing is not to see; to think of nothing is not to think (ST 4.11, 320).

¹² When a madman or someone asleep or in a high fever sees some animal before his eyes, it is certain that what he sees is not nothing, and that therefore the idea of this animal really does exist (ST 217).

¹³ We see the sun, the stars, and an infinity of objects external to us; and it is not likely that the soul should leave the body to stroll about the heavens, as it were, in order to behold all these objects. Thus, it does not see them by themselves, and our mind's immediate object when it sees the sun, for example, is not the sun, but something that is intimately joined to our soul, and this is what I call an idea. Thus, by the word idea, I mean here nothing other than the immediate object, or the object closest to the mind, when it perceives something (ST, 217).

- (i) perception requires its object to be "present" to the soul (or mind)
- (ii) the soul cannot "stroll about" to behold bodies
- (iii) \therefore there must be something distinct from the body which is present to the soul¹⁴

3. The argument from properties

- properties are not the kinds of things that could be represented by contingent, ever-changing, modes (ST 4.11.3 322-3)

4. The elimination argument¹⁵

4.3 Ideas & Sensations

- Ideas represent parts of reality—viz. primary qualities
- Sensations represent nothing (they are not representational)
 - awareness of sensation is called 'consciousness'
 - * sensations are immediate objects of consciousness¹⁶
 - * sensations have the sensory features (secondary qualities) while we typically and mistakenly ascribe to material objects¹⁷
- Every perception of a physical body involves some non-ideational component (viz. sensation)

¹⁴ But as for things outside the soul, we can perceive them only by means of ideas, given that these things cannot be intimately joined to the soul . . . [H]ere I am speaking mainly about material things, which certainly cannot be joined to our soul in the way necessary for us to perceive them, because with them extended and the soul unextended, there is no relation between them. (ST 218-9).

¹⁵ We assert the absolute necessity, then, of the following: either (a) the ideas we have of bodies ...come from these bodies ...; or (b) our soul has the power of producing these ideas; or (c) God has produced them in us while creating the soul or produces them every time we think about a given object; or (d) the soul has in itself all the perfections it sees in bodies; or else (e) the soul is joined to a completely perfect being that contains all intelligible perfections, or all the ideas of created beings. (ST 3.2.1, 417).

¹⁶ The things that are in the soul are its own thoughts, i.e., all its various modifications—for by the words thought, mode of thinking, or modification of the soul, I generally understand all those things that cannot be in the soul without the soul being aware of them through the inner sensation it has of itself...Now, our soul has no need of ideas in order to perceive these things in the way it does, because these things are in the soul, or rather because they are but the soul itself existing in this or that way—just as the actual roundness and motion of a body are but that body shaped and moved in this or that way (ST 3.2.1, 218).

¹⁷ Heat, pain, and color cannot be modifications of extension, for extension can have only various figures and motion. Now there are only two kinds of beings, minds and bodies. Therefore, pain, heat, color, and all other sensible qualities belong to the mind (E XI, 634).

5 Reid on Sensation & Perception

5.1 Ideas

- There are no ideas, insofar as these are construed as mental **images** which represent via a resemblance relation¹⁸

5.2 Mental Acts

There are three fundamental kinds of mental act¹⁹

1. Sensation
2. Memory
3. Imagination

5.3 Sensation

- Sensation does have any similarity to anything non-sensory
- Awareness of sensation is not (in an of itself) awareness of the cause of the sensation²⁰
- Sensation is a mode of minds not bodies²¹
- The being of a sensation is to be perceived²²

5.4 Reid's Account of Perception

- Three elements of perception²³
 - i. conception or **simple apprehension** of a thing
 - may be either propositional or non-propositional in structure
 - ii. belief
 - conceptual & propositional assent
 - iii. immediacy
 - non-inferential acquisition of belief
 - * note that Reid seems to be thinking primarily in terms of acquisition of belief and not justification of belief
- Reid articulates at least one, and perhaps two, non-conceptual aspects of sense perception—viz., the accompanying sensation, and the simple apprehension

6 Non-conceptual Content

- To what extent are the categories of the phenomenal, the conceptual, and the representational distinguished or conflated by the early modern tradition?

¹⁸ We shall...endeavour to make it appear, that no solid proof has ever been advanced of the existence of ideas; that they are a mere fiction and hypothesis, contrived to solve the phenomena of the human understanding; that they do not at all answer this end; and that this hypothesis of ideas or images of things in the mind, or in the sensorium, is the parent of those many paradoxes so shocking to common sense, and of that scepticism which disgrace our philosophy of the mind, and have brought upon it the ridicule and contempt of sensible men (41).

¹⁹ If, therefore, we attend to that act of our mind which we call the perception of an external object of sense, we shall find in it these three things. First, Some conception or notion of the object perceived. Secondly, A strong and irresistible conviction of its present existence. And, thirdly, That this conviction and belief are immediate, and not the effect of reasoning. (EIP II. v: 96).

²⁰ He is conscious that he is not the cause of it himself; but cannot, from the nature of the thing, determine whether it is caused by body or spirit, by something near, or by something at a distance (38).

²¹ It is, indeed, impossible that it can be in any body: it is a sensation, and a sensation can only be in a sentient thing (38).

²² This is common to all sensations, that, as they cannot exist but in being perceived, so they cannot be perceived but they must exist (39).

²³ If, therefore, we attend to that act of our mind which we call the perception of an external object of sense, we shall find in it these three things. First, Some conception or notion of the object perceived. Secondly, A strong and irresistible conviction of its present existence. And, thirdly, That this conviction and belief are immediate, and not the effect of reasoning. (EIP II. v: 96).

	with phenomenal properties	without phenomenal properties
intentional, representational	occurrent thoughts, mental images	beliefs, desires, intentions
nonintentional, nonrepresentational	raw feels—e.g., pains and what babies have when they see colored objects	"the merely physical"

Figure 1: Rorty 1979, 24

- The inherited view is to construe the representational as non-phenomenal and the phenomenal as non-representational
- why carve things this way?
 - epistemic worries (e.g. 'directness' of perception)
 - ontological worries (e.g. phenomenal stuff can't be physical stuff)
- Is the notion of 'non-conceptual' content really just (or perhaps motivated by) the notion of phenomenal character or qualia?

7 Further Reading

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