

Issues with Indirect Realism and responses

Scepticism about the existence of mind-independent objects

- We must infer the existence of objects beyond the mind, as we are only aware of sense data.
- Our senses can deceive us.
- Our sense data does not correspond with any material reality, e.g. if I am a brain in a vat, or the Cartesian Demon is deceiving me.
- These show that the inferences are not valid, therefore, not sufficient for knowledge.
- Since we cannot directly observe reality, we cannot know it exists (THE VEIL OF PERCEPTION) our sense data creates a veil between us and reality which we cannot remove/penetrate to discover the material world.



The external world is the best hypothesis (RUSSELL).

Russell accepts that no deductive proof of the nature of a material reality is possible. But, he believes that scepticism can be resisted and offers his best hypothesis or explanation. His argument is that we have an instinctive belief in the existence of a material reality which corresponds with our sense data, therefore, we should only reject such beliefs if they prove to be incoherent. So, Russell is putting the issue back onto the sceptic by asking for proof of why believing in a material reality is wrong. His argument makes good sense of our experiences, it explains why our sense data appear in regular and predictable ways, as Locke pointed out.

Response to the issue of the existence of mind-independent objects

Involuntary nature of our experience (LOCKE)

- We are not in control of our sense data.
- Sense data does not come from me.
- Therefore the source of it must be external (outside of me).

RUSSELL'S CAT EXAMPLE: If the cat appears at one moment in one part of the room, and at another in another part, it is natural to suppose that it has moved from the one to the other. But if it is merely a set of sense-data, it cannot have ever been in any place where I did not see it; thus we shall have to suppose that it did not exist at all while I was not looking, but suddenly sprang into being in a new place. If the cat exists whether I see it or not, we can understand from our own experience how it gets hungry between one meal and the next; but if it does not exist when I am not seeing it, it seems odd that appetite should grow during non-existence as fast as during existence. And if the cat consists only of sense-data, it cannot be hungry, since no hunger but my own can be a sense-datum to me. Thus the behaviour of the sense-data which represent the cat to me, though it seems quite natural when regarded as an expression of hunger, becomes utterly inexplicable when regarded as mere movements and changes of patches of colour.

The coherence of various kinds of experience (LOCKE and COCKBURN)

- Our different senses cohere with each other.
- We can see a fire and feel a fire.
- We can hear and see a bus moving.
- Cockburn says we learn to associate the way objects feel to the touch and the way they appear to the eye. I can predict how things may look just by touching them.
- The senses offer support for each others testimony, so there is one external cause for both of them.
- Locke knows this is not a deductive, valid argument, as just because our senses cohere does not mean that they must be caused by material objects, e.g. dreams do not correspond to a material reality, yet I can feel, hear and see objects. But, Locke hopes his argument for the existence of material objects is reasonable enough and the best explanation for our experiences.

ISSUE: Ideas cannot be like material objects (BERKELEY)

Berkeley argues that Russell's view is an incoherent one.

- All sense data including primary qualities are mind-dependent.
 - We only have awareness of our own sense data.
 - The qualities we perceive in objects require a perceiving mind to exist. Since matter is said to be unperceiving, it cannot have such properties.
- P1: My idea of a tree has certain sensible qualities, green, tree shaped etc.
P2: But, these sensible qualities depend on the mind.
P3: To say that my idea of a tree resembles the real material tree is like saying something visible can resemble something invisible.
P4: Ideas are changing, whereas material objects are supposed to be permanent and unchanging.
C1: Anything outside of the mind, like matter, cannot have any such qualities.
C2: A supposed material object could not be like or resemble my idea of it.