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Berkeley's Puzzle

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1 The Possibility of Existence Unperceived

Berkeley famously claimed to be unable to conceive of existence unperceived, from which he famously concluded that existence unperceived is impossible. Here is the famous passage, section 23 of *The Principles of Human Knowledge*:

> But say you, surely there is nothing easier than to imagine trees, for instance, in a park, or books existing in a closet, and nobody by to perceive them. I answer, you may so, there is no difficulty in it: but what is all this, I beseech you, more than framing in your mind certain ideas which you call books and trees, and at the same time omitting to frame the idea of anyone that may perceive them? But do you not yourself perceive or think of them all the while? This therefore is nothing to the purpose: it only shows you have the power of imagining or forming ideas in your mind; but it doth not shew that you can conceive it possible, the objects of your thought may exist without the mind: to make out this, it is necessary that you conceive them existing unconceived or unthought of, which is a manifest repugnancy.

There is, in the literature on Berkeley, a standard objection to this argument. The objection is that Berkeley's argument depends on a confusion between conceiving and imagining. The most he is entitled to, the objection runs, is that we cannot imagine existence unperceived. There is a use of 'imagine' on which

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it means something like 'visually imagine', or 'imagine seeing'. Perhaps it is true that you cannot imagine seeing a tree, without imagining the tree being seen. But it hardly follows that you cannot conceive of a tree that is not being seen. You can, for example, write down a perfectly coherent block of prose in which the tree figures unseen by anyone. There will be no explicit or implicit contradiction in such a story. So Berkeley's inference from unimaginability to inconceivability, and hence to the impossibility of existence unperceived, is just a mistake.

There is, indeed, a subsidiary literature, challenging Berkeley even on whether it is possible to visually imagine a tree unperceived. The challenge was launched by Bernard Williams in 'Imagination and the Self' (1973), where he argued that just as in watching a film or a play, we do not in general take ourselves to be provided with the visual experience of some character in the film or play, so too we could, in imagining, be sketching the content of a scene without thereby sketching the content of anyone's perception of it.

I want, though, to focus on the standard objection to Berkeley's argument, because it seems to me to be an extremely superficial response; and reflecting on why it is unsatisfactory brings out something of the depth of Berkeley's line of thought here. The key point I want to make is that Berkeley is trying to respect a principle about the relation between experience and concepts that is both important and difficult to keep in place. This is what I will call the *explanatory role of experience*. The principle is that concepts of individual physical objects, and concepts of the observable characteristics of such objects, are made available by our experience of the world. It is experience of the world that explains our grasp of these concepts. The puzzle that Berkeley is addressing is that it is hard to see how our concepts of mind-independent objects could have been made available by experience of them. The resolution he finds is to acknowledge that we do not have concepts of mind-independent objects.

Berkeley's puzzle was formulated in a context defined by Locke. Locke too aimed to respect the explanatory role of experience. The problem he faced was that experience seems, on the face of it, incapable of providing us with the conception of anything beyond itself. So you might acknowledge that experience matters for grasp of colour concepts, on the grounds that colour properties, properly understood, are nothing more than propensities of objects to produce colour experiences in us; and having the colour experiences might be thought to be essential to grasping concepts of colour experiences. The trouble with this is that experience of shape, for example, also seems to play a role in grasp of shape concepts. Suppose you had someone who was taught the functional

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characteristics of a range of shape properties: that the round things roll, that the jagged things can be used for tearing, and so on. You can suppose that such a person learns that there are various properties $P_1, P_2, P_3, \ldots$ and so on, that have all these functional characteristics. Someone could learn all there is to know about the functional characteristics of shape properties, without it occurring to them that these are properties they encounter in experience. What does such a person learn when they find out that roundness is that perceived property—when, for the first time, they see what roundness is like? On one view, the person simply learns about yet another functional characteristic of roundness. They learn just what kinds of sensation roundness produces. That is not Locke's view. Locke is taking it that experience of shapes provides you with knowledge of what the categorical shape property is. The puzzle is to see how that can be. How can experience of shape provide you with anything more than the conception of a propensity to produce a particular type of experience? It is at this point that Locke is compelled to appeal to his notion of resemblance: the idea that the experience of roundness intrinsically resembles the shape property itself. This desperate manœuvre has no hope of success, and Berkeley's stricture, that there can be no intrinsic resemblance between an idea and a physical property, is perfectly reasonable. But for the present, the important point is to see the pressure that drives Locke to this position. The pressure comes to a head over our grasp of concepts of ordinary physical objects, such as the tree in the quad. We think that various modal and temporal properties are possessed by such an object: that it could have existed even if no one had ever observed it, that it could have been in existence now even though it was currently unobserved, and that it continues to exist even at times at which it is in fact unobserved. But how could experience play a role in making available to us the conception of such an object? Without Locke's notion of resemblance, Berkeley insists, the thing cannot be done. We must either deny that experience is what makes the concepts of the external world available to us, or we must admit that the only concepts we have are concepts of mind-dependent objects.

I will argue that we do have to acknowledge the explanatory role of experience, and that Berkeley's puzzle must consequently be taken seriously: how can experience of an object explain our grasp of the possibility of existence unperceived? And I will argue that what makes it difficult to find the resolution of this puzzle is the difficulty of finding a clear view of the conception of experience that we need to understand how experience could be what explains our grasp of concepts. The two mistakes it is easy to make are, first, to suppose that experience is exhausted by its propositional content, and second, that experience is only caused by the object it is of. I will argue that we have to think of

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experience of an object as a cognitive relation more primitive than thought about the object, that none the less makes it possible for us to think about that thing. I call this the *relational view* of experience.

2 Locke and Putnam's Proof

Locke supposes that simple ideas of perception are signs of their regular causes, whatever they are. And he thinks that we understand the words we use by connecting them to ideas of perception. Now consider a sceptical hypothesis, such as the proposition that, for example, my experiences of redness are not caused by redness but by something else, or the proposition that my experiences of squareness are not caused by squareness but by something else, or that my experiences of water are not caused by water but by something else. Locke's answer to this is that simple ideas 'conform to their archetypes', are 'real', 'adequate', or 'true'. His point is that since the simple idea is merely a sign only of its regular cause, whatever that is, and the word given meaning by its association with that idea therefore stands only for the regular cause of that idea, whatever it is, the sceptical hypothesis amounts to the hypothesis that the regular cause of a simple idea is not what the idea signifies; but whatever the regular cause of an idea is, that just is what the idea signifies. Here is Locke putting the case:

> simple Ideas, which since the Mind, as has been shewed, can by no means make to it self, must necessarily be the product of Things operating on the Mind in a natural way, and producing therein those Perceptions which by the Wisdom and Will of our Maker they are ordained and adapted to. From when it follows, that *simple* Ideas *are not fictions* of our Fancies, but the natural and regular production of Things without us, really operating upon us; and so carry with them all the conformity which is intended; or which our state requires; For they represent to us Things under those appearances which they are fitted to produce in us; whereby we are enabled to distinguish the sorts of particular Substances, to discern the states they are in, and so to take them for our Necessities, and apply them to our Uses. Thus the Idea of Whiteness, or Bitterness, as it is in the Mind, exactly answering that Power which is in any Body to produce it there, has all the real conformity it can, or ought to have, with Things without us. (*Essay*, IV. iv. 4)

I should emphasize that Locke's point here is about simple ideas generally; the last sentence of the quotation applies to all simple ideas of perception, not just to ideas of secondary qualities. If we put the upshot of this discussion in contemporary terms, and ask, How do I know that I am not a brain in a vat?,

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where the point of the question is that if I were a brain in a vat, the regular causes of my perceptions would be other than I take them to be, the answer is that my words just do stand for the regular causes of my perceptions, whatever they are. So it is a priori that I am not a brain in a vat. Locke's view here is, in fact, as will now be evident, a form of Putnam's argument that we can't be brains in vats.

One way in which Locke finds a role for experience here is that experiences are the vehicles of content. They are the reliable signs of their regular causes. But once we have reached this point, it is natural to wonder whether experience is really playing any essential role in the account of content. Surely, anything could serve as a reliable sign of its regular cause. Indeed, the main line of objection to the idea that there is an essential role for consciousness in our grasp of concepts comes from what I will call 'causal correlation' views of content. This embraces a vast family of different views. The idea common to all these views is that the prototype of all representation is one state of affairs being causally correlated with another, so that one can serve as a sign of the other. So the idea is that brain states can be causally correlated with external states of affairs, in that a brain state may be reliably produced by just one type of external condition, and so serve as a sign that the external condition obtains. The proposal is that this kind of causal correlation is all that is involved in all representations, whether the representations involved in cognitive processing or those involved in conceptual thought. This, of course, is a powerful idea, which can be developed in many different ways. And there may be types of representation for which it can, without much complication, provide a correct analysis. In any simple development of this view, though, there will be no immediate role for consciousness in explaining how we understand the representations we use. So it is natural to ask whether we cannot use a view like this to give an analysis of how we understand propositions about the world around us—the kinds of propositions we use in ordinary deductive inference, for example—without appealing to our experience of our surroundings. In that way you might hope simply to finesse Berkeley's problem. If our representations are caused by mind-independent objects, isn't that enough for us to have representations of mind-independent objects?

One way to see what is problematic in such a picture of content is to consider Hilary Putnam's (1981) reply to the sceptic. Putnam's reply, a reformulation of Locke's, depends very heavily on a 'causal correlation' view of content; it brings out quite dramatically what the view commits you to. Sceptical worries are often formulated as questions about the right whereby I take it that my perceptions are caused in the way I think they are. Perhaps, the sceptic says, my perceptions are caused in some quite different way: by the

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machinations of a malevolent demon or the operation of the vat-tending machinery. Putnam's point, in opposition to this kind of scepticism, is that the way in which my perceptions are caused will affect the contents of my thoughts. And however my perceptions are caused, the contents of my thoughts will be correlatively affected in such a way that they come out true. So I will always be right when I say, 'I am not a brain in a vat.'

This way of putting the matter misses the possibility that the sceptic might shrug aside these alternative causal hypotheses as simply dramatic devices which can be thrown away as inessential to his point. The key sceptical possibility, he may say, is that the perceptions I have may not be caused at all. They may have no external cause. Perhaps there is only a sequence of images. Perhaps all there is, constituting the entire universe, are images and the void. Another type of reservation has to do with the point that I might have lived a regular life for long enough for my words to have acquired all the usual references, but then have been envatted, without being advised of it, just five minutes ago. But let me set aside these reservations; I think they are correct, but not to my present purpose. I want instead to focus on another problem with this argument, which seems to me more instructive in bringing out the limitations of a causal correlation view of content.

The intuitive reservation is this. We ordinarily think that we know what the world is like. If the world is that way, it is not a bit like a vat. So, if you are told that were you to be in a vat, all your thought tokens would be systematically reinterpreted so that they came out true, this is not likely to seem reassuring enough. The world would still not be the way you think it is.

It is hard to formulate this puzzle competently, and I think the best way to do it is to recall Locke's position. Locke is certainly an externalist about content: on his view, simple ideas of perceptions are signs of their regular causes. They are signs of external phenomena in something like the way in which smoke is a sign of fire. The immediate problem this raises is that although my ideas are signs of their causes, I do not yet know what any of those causes are like. If all I ever get is smoke, how do I know what fire is like? Any causal correlation view will in the end face some version of this question. How can effects provide you, the subject, with any conception of what their causes are like?

This is where Locke introduces his notion of 'resemblance': some ideas, the idea of primary qualities, intrinsically resemble their causes. Those ideas do show what their causes are like. Ideas of secondary qualities, on the other hand, do not resemble their causes. They represent the world perfectly accurately, but they do not show you what the world is like. Now Locke's notion of resemblance is generally mocked. One possibility is that 'resembles' is interpreted in representational terms—the world is the way represented—in which case it

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does not get the intended effect; all we have is that the representations are, one way or another, being interpreted so that they come out true. Locke is trying to respect the explanatory role of experience, and merely appealing to it as a bearer of representations does not acknowledge its role in explaining how we can understand such representations. Alternatively, 'resemblance' requires that the intrinsic properties of the perceptual idea should be like the intrinsic properties of the object. That is the intuitively attractive idea at this point in the dialectic. But it is hopeless. Berkeley's rejoinder, that an idea can be like nothing but an idea, is, at this point, perfectly just.

Although Locke's solution does not work, the problem to which he was responding is perfectly real. It is, indeed, the key motivation for current disjunctivist or naïve realist views of experience, which criticize the conception of conscious experience as something that is merely an effect of external objects. As Bill Child (1994) puts it, if all you ever perceive are spots, how could that give you the conception of what it is to have measles? Or as John McDowell (1998) puts it, Locke's type of externalism leaves us with a view on which 'all is dark within'.

From this perspective, Putnam's proof is not reassuring. It simply writes large the darkness within. It merely emphasizes the conclusion that we have no conception at all of what the world is like. Wildly different scenarios, on which perceptions have massively different external causes, are all quite consistent with having a representational system within which you accept only truths. But what you would have commonsensically hoped for is some intimation that the world is the way you think it is. And you do not get that reassurance by being told that one way or another, your representational system is expressing truths. That is the intuitive reservation about Putnam's proof. When you think it through, it is actually a reservation about the causal correlation view of content, precisely because the causal correlation view of content, on any simple development of it, gives no role to consciousness in providing us with our conception of what the world is like. We can accept Putnam's proof only if we accept that we have no conception of what the world is like, only a set of representations which one way or another will be interpreted so as to come out true, whichever way the world is.

3 The Relational View of Experience

On a disjunctivist view of experience, there is no experiential factor in common between the case in which you see an object and the case in which you have a hallucination of such an object. When you see an object, the object

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itself is a constituent of your experience. The argument for this view is given by John McDowell in these words:

> The threat that the Cartesian picture poses to our hold on the world comes out most dramatically in this: that within the Cartesian picture there is a serious question about how it can be that experience, conceived from its own point of view, is not blank or blind, but purports to be revelatory of the world we live in. (1998: 243)

This objection to the common factor view is stated crisply by Bill Child:

> to think of conscious experience as a highest common factor of vision and hallucination is to think of experiences as states of a type whose intrinsic mental features are world-independent; an intrinsic, or basic characterisation of a state of awareness will make no reference to anything external to the subject. But if that is what experience is like, the disjunctivist objects, how can it yield knowledge of an objective world beyond experience, and how can it so much as put us in a position to think about such a world? (1994: 148)

Although McDowell and Child both tend to emphasize the epistemological dimension of this argument, I want to suggest that the argument that knowledge would not be possible on a 'common factor' interpretation is not the fundamental objection. The common factor theorist could as readily as anyone else define a notion of 'knowledge' that more or less matched the ordinary concept. For example, there is no evident difficulty in the idea that a 'common factor' perceptual image could be a reliable sign of an external phenomenon. If you already have the conception of that phenomenon, there is no particular difficulty about using a reliable sign of it to give you knowledge of it. The fundamental objection to the common factor approach is that, on it, experience cannot play its explanatory role: we cannot understand how experience, so conceived, could be what provides us with our concepts of the objects around us. As Child puts it, 'to conceive of experience in such terms is to make it unintelligible how our experience could put us in a position to . . . think about an objective, mind-independent world' (1994: 149).

This argument is very sketchy, but it is intriguing, and I want to work through how it should go fully enough to allow some serious assessment of it. The argument presses very hard the idea that experience of objects has an explanatory role to play. Experience of objects has to explain how it is that we can have the conception of objects as mind-independent. The objection to the common factor view is that, on it, experience of objects could not be what explained our having the conception of objects as mind-independent. There is something intuitive about this. On the common factor view, all that experience of the object provides you with is a conscious image of the object. The existence of that conscious image is in principle independent of the existence

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of the external object. The existence of the image, though, is dependent on the existence of the subject who has the conscious image. So if your conception of the object was provided by your experience of the object, you would presumably end by concluding that the object would not have existed had you not existed, and that the object exists only when you are experiencing it. We cannot extract the conception of a mind-independent world from a mind-dependent image; this is the traditional problem with Locke's doctrine of abstraction. It seems as though it ought to be possible, though, to extract the conception of a mind-independent world from an experience which has a mind-independent object as a constituent, which is what the disjunctive view ascribes to us.

I think that this is the intuitive argument to which the disjunctive view is appealing. I think it has some immediate force, but there are some issues that need further discussion here. It is striking how hard the explanatory role of experience is being worked. You might have thought that the immediate response of a common factor theorist to this argument is that the image provides the conception of an objective world simply by displaying the world as objective. Even if I am hallucinating, the objects I seem to see, seem to be mind-independent objects. So a common factor image can present objects as mind-independent; and surely that is all that is needed. The problem with this reply is that it takes for granted the intentionality of experience. That is, it takes it for granted that experience of the world is a way of grasping thoughts about the world. To see an object is, on this conception, to grasp a demonstrative proposition. There are many ways in which you can grasp a proposition: you can grasp it as the content of speech or as the meaning of a wink or a sigh. One way in which you can grasp a proposition is as the content of vision. The common factor theorist says that ordinary vision involves grasping demonstrative propositions as the contents of experiences. And you could grasp such propositions whether or not the external objects exist.

The disjunctive theorist might reply that this simply begs the question; the disjunctivist's view is, after all, that you cannot grasp demonstrative propositions whether or not the external objects exist. But the disjunctivist was trying to state an objection to the common factor view, so an attempt to shift the burden of proof at this point is simply to give up; the two views are equally probable. Anyhow, the disjunctivist has a better reply. The argument turns on an appeal to the explanatory role of experience. Experience is what explains our grasp of the concepts of objects. But if you think of experience as intentional, as merely one among many ways of grasping thoughts, you cannot allow it this explanatory role. Suppose someone said: 'Actually, reading newspapers is the fundamental way in which you understand the concepts of a mind-independent

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world. All your conceptual skills depend on your ability to read newspapers.' The natural response to this would be that reading newspapers does indeed involve the exercise of conceptual skills, but it is simply one way among many of exercising those conceptual skills. Just so, if all there is to experience of objects is the grasping of demonstrative thoughts about them, then experience of objects is just one among many ways in which you can exercise your conceptual skills. When we grasp thoughts as the contents of vision, or as the contents of newspaper reports, or as the meanings of signposts, they have different vehicles and different accompaniments, but that is all, on this view. At this point we do not have any way of explaining why there should be anything fundamental to our grasp of concepts about experience of objects.

It is when we press the explanatory role of experience like this that we can see the force of the disjunctivist's argument. We are not to take the intentional character of experience as a given; rather, experience of objects has to be what explains our ability to think about objects. This means that we cannot view experience of objects as a way of grasping thoughts about objects. Experience of objects has to be something more primitive than the ability to think about objects, in terms of which the ability to think about objects can be explained. The question now is whether the common factor picture of experience provides a view of experience on which it could be what explains our ability to think about objects. And at this point the question as to whether something essentially mind-dependent could provide for the conception of a mind-independent world really does seem forceful. Yet, once we have reached this understanding of the argument, we can see that there is also something wrong with the formulation of disjunctivism given by McDowell and Child. For they both take it for granted that the way in which to state the disjunctivist view is as the view that experience involves the grasping of demonstrative thoughts about objects, together with the claim that those demonstrative thoughts are object-dependent. But this robs experience of its explanatory role. For experience to have its explanatory role, it must be prior to, and not require, demonstrative thoughts. Disjunctivism is thus no better placed than the common factor view to acknowledge the role of experience in explaining how we have the conception of the world that we do.

Since disjunctivists do take experience of objects to be intentional, I will talk instead of the 'relational' view of experience, as being what is motivated by the above line of argument. On the relational view, experience of objects is a more primitive state than thought about objects, which none the less reaches all the way to the objects themselves. In particular, experience of an object is what explains your ability to grasp a demonstrative term referring to that object.

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Philosophers who discuss the role of experience in our understanding of concepts tend to suppose that it has to do primarily with verifying simple observational propositions about demonstrated objects, and perhaps with the role in action-explanation of simple observational propositions. But the common factor theorist could acknowledge that role for experience; the image could do that work. The relational view is asking how common factor images could do further explanatory work: that is, it is asking how experience can be what provides for the conception of objects as mind-independent. That is, experience of objects has to explain our ability to grasp the modal and tensed propositions that express the mind-independence of objects: it has to explain my understanding of propositions to the effect that the object could have existed even though I had not, or that the object exists even at times at which I am not experiencing it. The common factor view cannot acknowledge this role for experience; the relational view can.

4 Criteria of Identity

Our topic is the role of experience in providing the conception of objects as mind-independent. How can experience of an object provide you with a grasp of the idea that the object can continue in existence through gaps in the observation of it? How can perceptual experience of objects be what provides you with a grasp of the possibility of existence unperceived? This is Berkeley's puzzle.

It is natural to think that part of the answer here has to be provided by the subject's grasp of a criterion of identity for the objects perceived. Grasping that the object is mind-independent is a matter of grasping that the criterion of identity for the object does not depend on its relation to mental states or a mind. But what is it to grasp the criterion of identity for an object? We can think of grasp of the criterion of identity for a particular object as a procedural matter: it has to do with how you proceed in establishing or finding the implications of propositions about the object. For example, there is the kind of reasoning you have to engage in when you want to demonstrate that this tree, seen here, now, is the same one as the tree that you saw here yesterday. The ability to engage in this kind of reasoning constitutes your grasp of the identity of the tree over time. You know how to demonstrate that the tree encountered at one time is the same as the tree encountered at a later time. Or there is the kind of argument required to show that the tree I can see through this window is the same one as the tree I can see through that window. If you know how to verify this, then you know what it takes for it to be one and the same object that is in question. Mastery of these patterns of reasoning, which is a matter of what you do with

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the evidence available to you, constitutes your grasp of the criterion of identity for the object.

Grasp of these patterns of inference is a procedural matter: it is a matter of which inferences you regard as valid, which patterns of reasoning you use and regard as compelling. Grasp of these patterns of inference will constitute grasp of the identity of the object across time. It will also constitute a primitive grasp of what is possible for the object. Grasp of the patterns of inference relating to when there is still an object around, greatly changed perhaps, but still identical to our original, and when there is no such object, will constitute a grasp of when the object is still in existence and when it has stopped existing, for example. This will constitute a grasp of which changes it is possible for the object to survive, and which changes involve destruction of the object. It is often pointed out that our grasp of such principles as the necessity of identity or the necessity of origin can be seen as depending on our grasp of a priori truths such as 'if a is identical to b then, necessarily, a is identical to b', or, 'if a's parents are b and c, then, necessarily, a's parents are b and c'. (No doubt this second principle needs refinement, but these refinements are not to the purpose here.) The point is rather that a capacity to establish the antecedents of these conditionals already requires a primitive grasp of what is and what is not possible for the objects in question. Your willingness to argue that a is identical to b, even though there have been interruptions between the observations on the basis of which you referred to a and the observations on the basis of which you referred to b, is enough already to display some primitive grasp of the mind-independence of the things you are talking about.

In these terms, Berkeley's puzzle is: what justifies our use of such a pattern of inference? It does not sound right to say that we can lay down whatever criteria of identity—whatever patterns of use for singular terms—we like, since the correctness of a pattern of use surely does depend on which objects there are out there. And the kinds of inference that would be used to demonstrate that 'this river' is the same as 'that river' will be different from the kinds of inference involved in demonstrating that 'this woman' is the same as 'that woman'. So what makes it right to use one rather than another pattern of inference? In discussing this question, we should focus on how we establish identity statements in which at least one of the singular terms is a perceptual demonstrative, since (a) these terms seem to be the most basic singular terms we have, and (b) it is in our use of these terms that we are most likely to find the role of experience in justifying our use of particular criteria of identity.

The basic constraints have to be supplied by our understanding of the demonstratives, knowledge of which object is being referred to. Suppose that someone says to you, 'What is that mountain over there?' To understand the

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question, you have to know what is being referred to, which mountain she is talking about. The ordinary way in which you have this knowledge is by seeing the mountain. You could, of course, always construct some description that would uniquely identify the mountain: something like 'the mountain she is looking at' or 'the mountain that has caught her eye'. But ordinarily, if the mountain is right there in front of you, you do not need to construct any such description. You are conscious of the mountain itself, and that experience of the mountain is what allows you to interpret the demonstrative; it is because of the experience that you know what is being referred to. So, on the face of it, your experience of the object has to provide your justification for one pattern of use rather than another. Your experience of the object provides you with knowledge of the reference of the term, and it is your knowledge of the reference of the term that explains your knowledge of how to use it.

In effect, Berkeley acknowledges all this. He thinks that we do indeed have patterns of use that seem to imply the possibility of sameness of object through a gap in our perception of it, and that we suppose our experience of objects to provide us with a justification for this pattern of use. For we think that our experiences acquaint us with mind-independent objects. But, as he writes in the concluding sentences of section 23 of *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, the section with which I began, Berkeley thinks that there is a fallacy here. We think we can rely on experience of objects to justify the pattern of use. None the less:

> When we do our utmost to conceive the existence of external bodies, we are all the while only contemplating our own ideas. But the mind taking no notice of itself, is deluded to think it can and doth conceive bodies existing unthought or without the mind; though at the same time they are apprehended or exist in itself.

So what Berkeley says is: we think our experience of objects will justify the use of the ordinary patterns of inference, in which we do verify identities between objects over gaps in perception of them. We suppose that our perceptions do provide the mind-independent objects for which those patterns of inference would be correct. But that supposition is one that we make entirely because we make a mistake. The mistake is that, 'the mind taking no notice of itself', we forget that what the mind supplies is only more experiences. It cannot supply anything mind-independent. So the idea that experience of objects—whatever that is—can supply a justification for the use of these patterns of inference is just a mistake. It arises from supposing, of what is in fact an experience, that it could be a mind-independent object.

You might reply to this that what experience supplies is a range of propositions about the world around you, contents representing how things are. Since those

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propositions make reference to mind-independent objects, you might say, the mistake is in Berkeley's idea that experience can provide nothing more than what is mind-dependent; the content of an experience can involve reference to objects that are not mind-dependent. But as we have seen, that response simply does not acknowledge the role of experience in explaining our grasp of concepts. In particular, it would leave no room for an appeal to experience in justifying our use of patterns of inference that identify objects through gaps in our experience of them. If the propositional content of experience already involves the use of terms subject to these patterns of inference, it cannot be what justifies the use of these patterns of inference.

So long as we hold on to the picture of experience as either possessed merely of propositional content or as merely an effect of the environment acting on us, we will not be able to meet Berkeley's challenge. The challenge is to (a) respect the explanatory role of experience, and (b) describe how experience of objects can justify our use of the patterns of inference that express the mind-independence of experienced objects. The only way to do this is to acknowledge that experience is not exhausted by its propositional content—we have to do this to acknowledge that experience is what explains our grasp of propositional content—and to maintain that experience of an object is not merely an effect produced by the object. Rather, experience of the object involves the mind-independent thing itself as a constituent.

This is, I think, the common-sense picture. On the relational view, your experience of the object directly justifies your use of the pattern of inference. There is, on the one hand, the way in which you use the demonstrative in patterns of inference which establish informative identities in which the demonstrative figures. On the other hand, there is your experience of the object. And the pattern of use is justified by the experience of the object.

What we want is that your experience of the object should explain the correctness of, and causally sustain use of, the patterns of inference in which you use the demonstrative. It is often said that facts about what is or is not possible for an object—which changes it can undergo while continuing to exist, for example, and which changes would involve destruction of the object—have to be grounded in categorical facts about the way the object actually is. I think that we can see this idea as being articulated in the notion that the patterns of inference in which we use the demonstrative, which define our conception of what is and is not possible for the demonstrated object, are grounded in our experience of the thing. Similarly, it is sometimes said that an object, in contrast to an event, is 'all there at any one time'. I think that you can see this idea as being articulated in the point that the patterns of cross-temporal inference in which you use the demonstrative have an explanatory justification in your

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experience of the categorical object at a single time. Your experience of the object at a single time can causally sustain, and justify, your use of a particular pattern of inferences involving the term. It is when we conceive of experience on the relational view that we can see how experience, so conceived, provides us with a conception of objects on which they are, *pace* Berkeley, mind-independent.

5 Objects as Functional versus Objects as Categorical

I want finally to contrast another line of thought you might take in response to Berkeley. You could suppose that the notion of a physical object is a theoretical notion that we bring to bear on experience. You might think that we somehow grasp the notion of a physical object as a component in a theory designed to explain our experiences. This, the suggestion runs, would allow us to resist the relational conception of experience, on which the object is a constituent of the experience, and instead hold on to the picture of experience as merely an effect of the external world.

What would the theory look like? It would detail the kinds of link that hold between the earlier and the later stages of one and the same object. For example, we might here use Salmon's conception of mark transmission:

> Suppose the object would, in the absence of interactions with other objects, remain uniform with regard to characteristic Q over a period of time. Then a mark—a modification of Q into Q′—is transmitted over the period if the object has Q′ at all points throughout the period without additional interventions. (Salmon 1984: 148)

Suppose we take a simple example of mark transmission. Suppose that while at school you carved your initials on a desk. When you revisit years later, there they still are. The mark has been transmitted over the period. Just to work through how this illustrates Salmon's definition: in the absence of interactions with other objects, the surface of the desk would have remained smooth over the period from my arrival at the school to the present day. After my modification of the smoothness of the surface of the desk into one bearing my initials, the desk bore my initials at all points during the period without further modifications. So, by the definition, that mark was transmitted over the period. And the desk had the potential for the transmission of any of endlessly many such marks over the period.

We could regard the idea that there are physical objects that exist through gaps in our observation of them in the following way: we could regard this idea as amounting to the hypothesis that there are objects, their existence postulated

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by us, that are capable of transmitting marks over periods during which they are not observed by us. There will be more to the hypothesis that there are physical objects than this, of course: they will be assumed to have further functional characteristics, to do with the ways in which they interact with one another and with us, and the kinds of physical properties they have that determine how they behave in such interactions.

Would this give a way of replying to Berkeley's puzzle? The idea here is that experience is being appealed to only as providing the data which the postulation of objects, with their functional characteristics, is designed to explain. Experience does not provide us with any more direct conception of the object than that. So, on this view, there is no need to appeal to the relational conception of experience. We can as well hold on to the conception of experience as merely an effect produced by the object, so that an intrinsically identical experience could equally well have been the product of sunstroke. But we have none the less succeeded in explaining with what right we can claim to have grasped the possibility of objects existing unperceived by us.

There are, however, a number of problems with this proposal. The first is that we seem to have no right to postulate such a theory, given the kinds of data to which it is responsible. The point the sceptic quite rightly makes is that if we set up such a hypothesis as this, it is easy immediately to generate a variety of alternative hypotheses about the causation of experience, so conceived.

Secondly, it seems unlikely that we will in fact be able to formulate the required functional characterization of physical objects in such a way as to reflect accurately the ways in which we ordinarily think about physical objects. On this approach we have to try to reflect all the distinctions we make about sameness and difference of object in terms of the functional characterization alone. So, for example, we have to say that what makes it true that this tree now is the same as the tree I observed yesterday is the possibility of this tree bearing marks transmitted by the earlier tree. However, if we are not allowed to take the identity of the object as given in determining which marks are being transmitted, then we may find that all kinds of cases count as mark transmission in which we do not have identity of object. For example, if a forger copies a painting, then the marks on the forgery are there because of the markings on the original; but that does not make the forgery into the original painting. Or again, we can imagine that some objects might lose their marks easily; when you mark them, they simply reset themselves to their initial condition. In general, we would ordinarily think of these functional considerations about the relations between earlier and later objects as providing evidence for sameness or difference of object, rather than as actually constituting sameness or difference of object. We would think that sameness or difference of object is a categorical

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fact. We would think that sameness of object is the reason for the correctness of various counterfactuals, such as the counterfactuals relating to mark transmission. Seeing my initials carved on the desk is evidence for thinking that it is one and the same categorical object again. But, on the functionalist approach to physical objects that we are considering, there is no way of explaining how we could have formed such a conception of the physical object as categorical; physical objects have the status merely of posits invoked to explain experience.

If experience of the object is to be what explains our grasp of the object as categorical, then we cannot think of experience of the object as consisting merely of grasp of a demonstrative thought about the object; it has to be what explains our capacity for demonstrative thought about the thing. So experience of the object should not be regarded as consisting in grasping a thought about the object, 'in the mode: vision', as we might say. Rather, consciousness of the object has to be a more primitive state than thought about the object, which makes thought about the object possible by revealing the object to you. We cannot either, though, think of experience of the object as a matter merely of grasping what kinds of experience the object tends to produce in us; that would provide you with only the conception of yet another of the effects of the object, rather than with a grasp of the categorical object itself. So at this point there seems to be no alternative to the relational view of experience. We have to regard experience of the object as reaching all the way to the object itself, and thereby providing us with the conception of the categorical object.

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