

V71LAR: Locke: Appearance and Reality

TOPIC 4: SUBSTANCE AND ESSENCE

Questions for today

- Ontological questions for this topic...
 - **Ontology** = The science or study of being; that branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature or essence of being or existence. [From *Oxford English Dictionary* online]
- What is the distinction between objects (e.g. trees) and their qualities (e.g. being 70ft tall)?
- Do some properties of objects constitute their *essence*?

A linguistic distinction

- “Woody’s joke was extremely funny”
- “The English sky is grey”
- “Beeston is funky”
- “Gold is a shiny, heavy, yellow metal”
- “Nottingham is between Derby and Grantham.”

| (linguistic) subjects | predicates |
|------------------------------|-------------------|
| `Beeston’ | `is funky’ |
| `the English sky’ | `is grey’ |
| `Gold’ | `is shiny’ |
| Etc. | Etc. |

A corresponding metaphysical distinction?

| Objects, entities or kinds of stuff | Properties or qualities |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Beeston | funkiness |
| The English sky | greyness |
| Gold | Being shiny |

- **Locke calls the latter *Modes*:** '*Modes* I shall call such complex *Ideas* which, however compounded, contain not in them the supposition of subsisting by themselves, but are considered as Dependences on, or Affections of substances; such are the *Ideas* signified by the Words *Triangle, Gratitude, Murder, etc.*' (II.xii.4). [NB. Triangularity in general]
- **And the former Locke calls (*Particular*) *Substances*:** 'The *Ideas* of *Substances* are such combinations of simple *Ideas*, as are taken to represent distinct particular things subsisting by themselves; in which the supposed, or confused *Idea* of Substance, such as it is, is always the first and chief (II.xii.6).

What are qualities?

- On a popular view, they are *universals*. E.g.
- Beeston is beautiful. The Mona Lisa is beautiful.
Beeston is in Nottinghamshire. The Mona Lisa is in Paris.
- Gold is yellow. Cheese is yellow.
- **In general:** It is possible for the same quality to be *instantiated* in two different places at one time.
 - A universal is an entity that can be multiply-located.
 - Substances (e.g. Beeston) are not universals.

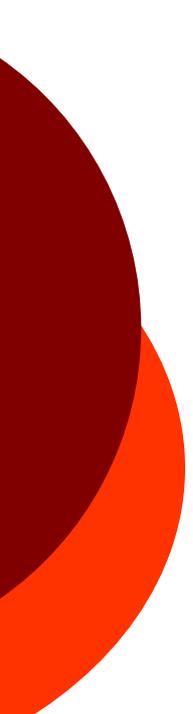
Other distinctive features of qualities as universals

- 1) They explain resemblances between distinct substances.
- 2) They are dependent entities. (Locke: "...not imagining how these simple ideas can subsist by themselves, we accustom ourselves to suppose some *substratum*, where in they do subsist." II.xxiii.1)
- 3) They are exemplified or instantiated (or predicated of) substances.

What are substrata?



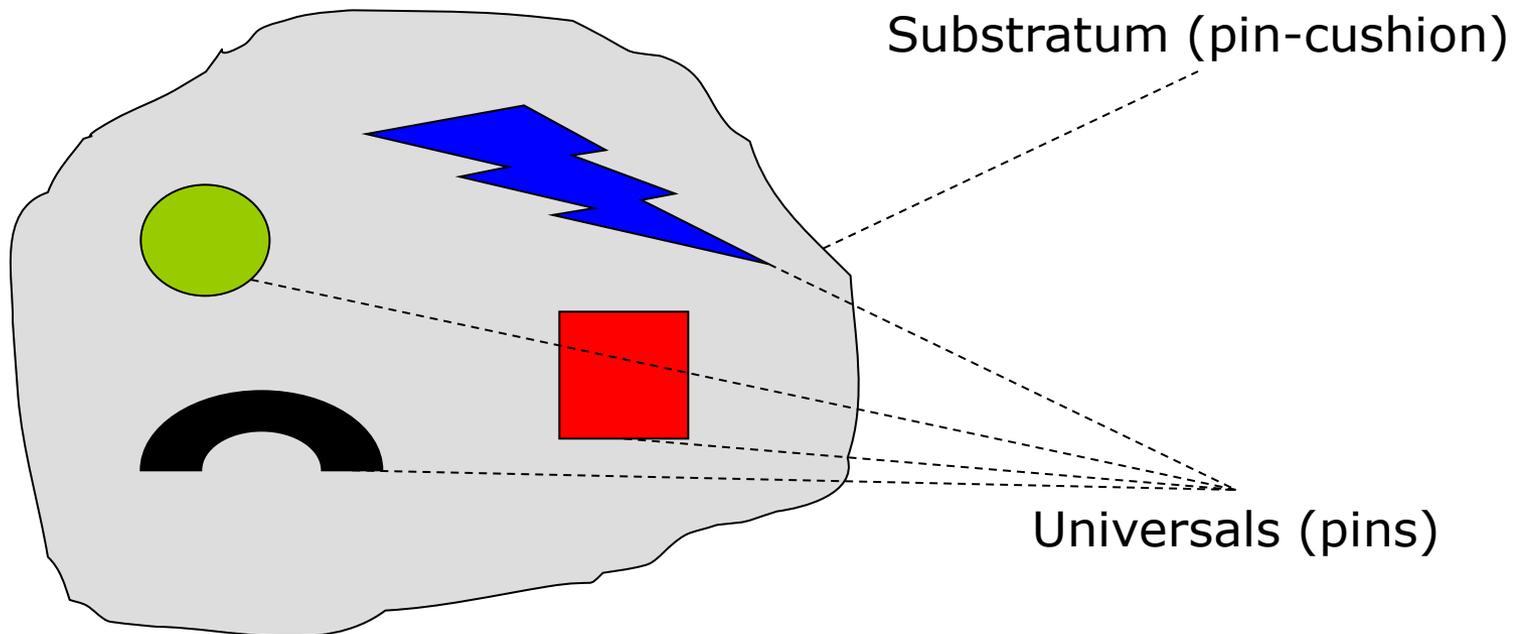
- **His qualities:** Human, made of skin and bones, is a biped, is a greyish off-pink colour, wants to rule the world, and so on.
- **Substance (what Locke calls 'substratum', or 'pure substance in general'):** A bearer of qualities that which the qualities *inhere in* or *attach to*.
 - Lowe, p.87 "A concrete, individual persisting thing, a bearer of qualities, not itself predicable of anything else, and constituting a unified whole rather than a mere aggregate of other things."



Other features of substrata

- They are particular (not universal).
- They are individual (countable).
- They persist through changes in (some of) their qualities.
- Ontologically primary: they 'support' their qualities, which cannot exist without them (Locke II.xxiii.2).

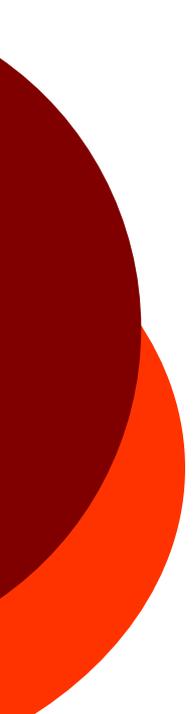
The pin-cushion model of concrete particulars



Summary of the pin-cushion view:

A concrete particular ('particular substance'), like George Bush, is made up of two sorts of things:

- Universals – giving qualitative character.
- Substratum – giving concrete particularity.



An argument for substrata

- 1) Universals are abstract and multi-located.
- 2) Physical objects are concrete and singly located particulars.
- 3) The form or qualitative character of a material object is given by its universals.
- 4) The particularity/concreteness of a material object cannot be given by its universals.
 - It must be given by something else: a substratum

Therefore, there must be substrata!

An analytic empiricist objection to substrata (*Essay II.xxiii.2*)

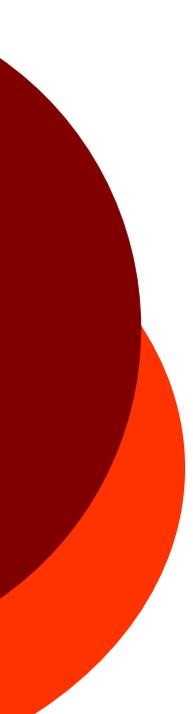
- All our ideas are made up of copies of experiences.
- Experiences gives us ideas of qualities.
- So, all our ideas are of qualities.
- Therefore, I cannot have an idea of a substratum.

- Hence, for Locke, a substratum is 'something I know not what' (II.xxiii.2).

- (See also G. Berkeley *Principles of Human Knowledge* sections 16-17.)

Material and Immaterial substrata

- Just as material substrata are 'those things in which qualities inhere', immaterial substances are 'those things in which perceptions take place' (a theatre of the mind, if you like)
- Strangely, though Berkeley rejected the notion of material substance, he was happy with the notion of immaterial substance (e.g. minds, God).
- Hume had the consistency to deny both:
 - "...when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble upon some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade...I never catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception." *Treatise of Human Nature* I.iv.6



A logical objection to substances

- Either: 'being a substrata' is itself a quality, in which case there needs to be a further substrata in which that quality inheres (and we get a regress).
- Or: 'being a substrata' is not itself a quality, in which case substrata are utterly featureless (Lowe p.75: "how is an utterly featureless 'something' different from *nothing at all?*").

An alternative, sanitised, interpretation of Locke on substances

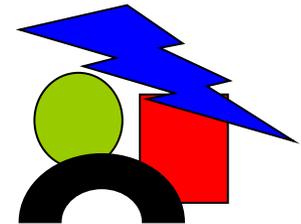
- Recall Locke's adherence to the 'mechanical philosophy': all observable, macroscopic, properties of objects can be explained in terms of the arrangement of microscope corpuscles that constitute them.
- So perhaps for Locke substrata play a *scientific role* (explaining the observable) rather than a *metaphysical* one (so substrata *are* identical with Locke's 'real essences' – see next week).
- Evidence for the sanitised interpretation: "we come to have ideas of particular sorts of substances, by collecting such combinations of simple ideas, as are by experience and observation of men's senses taken notice of to exist together, and are therefore supposed to flow from the particular internal constitution, or unknown essence of that substance." (II.xxiii.3)

An alternative, sanitised, interpretation of Locke on substances (ctd.)

- Evidence against the sanitized interpretation: “If anyone should be asked, what is the subject wherein Colour or Weight inheres, he would have nothing to say, but the solid extended parts: And if he were demanded, what is it, that Solidity and Extension inhere in, he would not be in a much better case, than the *Indian* . . . who, saying that the World was supported by a great Elephant, was asked, what the Elephant rested on; to which his answer was, a great Tortoise: But being again pressed to know what gave support to the broad-back'd Tortoise replied, something, he knew not what.” *Essay* II.xxiii.2.

“Bundle theory” of concrete particulars

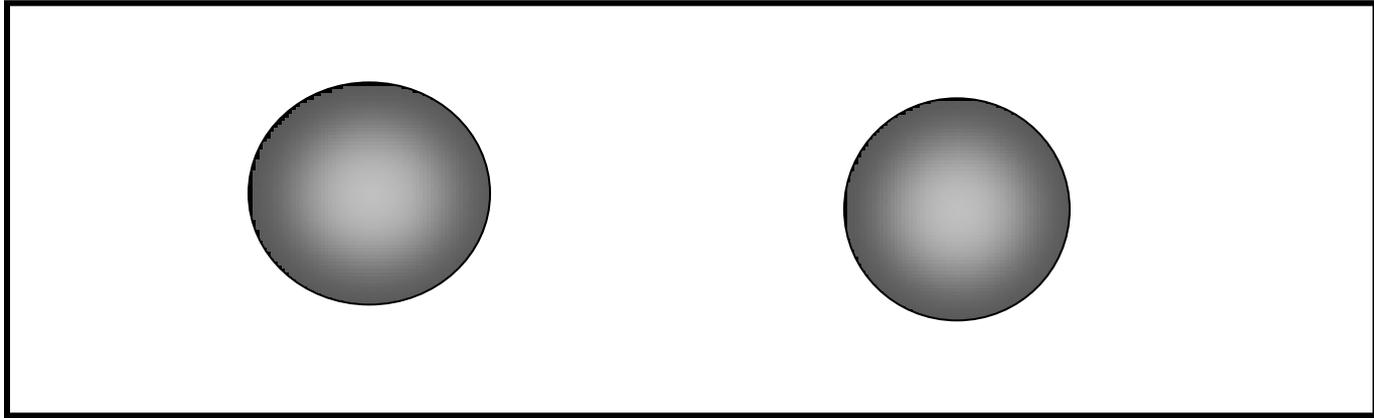
- Concrete particulars (e.g. George W. Bush) are bundles of universals or qualities. They are identical with sets of qualities.



Objections

- Qualities are not particular, but concrete objects are.
- On this account, qualitative identity entails numerical identity....

Two Sphere Case



- A universe containing two perfectly similar iron spheres and nothing else
- Properties shared: greyness, ferrousness, being next to an iron sphere...
- I.e. The bundle theory implies:
 - **Identity of Indiscernibles:** Indiscernible objects are identical.

A third interpretation of substance (Lowe pp.87-91).

- Qualities are not 'things' in the way that e.g. trees, chairs are. They are not *even* ontologically dependent things.
 - Compare adverbialism in the theory of perception: 'ideas' are not *things*.
- They do not stand in some relation (e.g. 'inherence', 'instantiation') to substances.
- Rather, they are *modifications of substances* ('modes').
- It is a *category mistake* to ask: "Take away the qualities, what is left?". This question only makes sense when asked of things of the same ontological category.
- For Lowe, substances are of the category 'Independent existences' and qualities are of the category 'ways substances are'.

Reading

- *Locke, J. Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Book 2, chapters 12 & 23, Book 3, chapter 6.
- Lowe, E.J. *Locke on Human Understanding*, chapter 4.
- Mackie, J.L. *Problems from Locke*, chapter 3.
www.oxfordscholarship.com
- For further reading see Module Guide

Questions?

- neil.sinclair@nottingham.ac.uk
- Tel: 0115 95 13428
- **Office hours:** Thursdays and Fridays 12-1 (room C8a, top floor, Trent building).