



V71LAR: Locke: Appearance and Reality

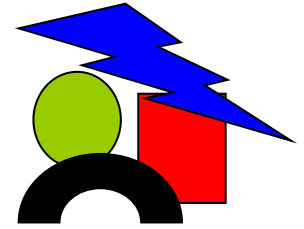
TOPIC 4: SUBSTANCE AND ESSENCE,
continued...



Summary from last time: Substrata vs. Universals

- Universals are: abstract, multiply-located (repeatable), explain resemblances, dependent, instantiated.
- Substrata: concrete, particular (non-repeatable), bearer of qualities, unified, ontologically primary.
- Problems with substrata:
 - Inconsistent with analytic empiricism.
 - Logical objection: EITHER 'being a substrata' is a quality OR it is not a quality.

1. Bundle theory of concrete particulars

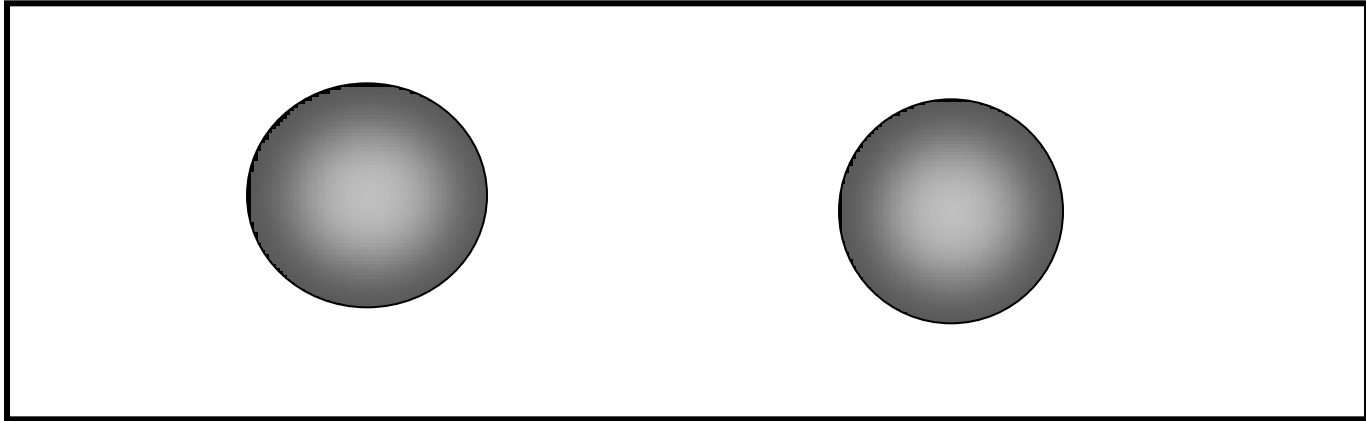


- Concrete particulars (e.g. George W. Bush) are bundles of universals or qualities. They are identical with sets of qualities.

Objections

- Qualities are not particular, but concrete objects are.
- How are qualities bundled together? E.g. The set of qualities that define the mythical, flying horse Pegasus. These form a bundle in the sense of a set, but there is no object, Pegasus.
- 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.

2. 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 particular substances. (Hence avoiding absurdities of substrata and instantiation.)
- Rather, they are *modifications of particular substances* ('modes'). 'Ways things can be'.
- 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'.
- Perhaps this is a version of *nominalism* (about universals): the view that only particular objects exist. Problem: Explaining resemblances.

3. Real and Nominal Essences

- Locke discusses not only *substance in general* (*Essay* II.xxiii) but also *particular substances*, i.e. particular kinds of object. Aswell as the question of the nature of substance in general, in *Essay* III.vi he addresses the *question of classification*:
- **What makes it the case that a particular object is of the kind that it is?**
- This question can be put in terms of language: For a given classificatory term, e.g. 'gold', what determines its extension (i.e. the range of objects it applies to)? E.g. What makes something an instance of gold?
- NB. Locke uses the term 'species' to refer to kinds or types.

3. Real and Nominal Essences (ctd.)

- **Locke's distinction between real and nominal essence (III.vi.3-6):**
- The *Real Essence* of gold is the hidden structure which typically causes a sample of gold to have the superficial observable qualities it has.
 - *An explanatory* notion.
- The *Nominal Essence* of gold is the cluster of superficial qualities by which we typically recognise something, or classify it, as being gold: e.g. yellow, shiny, heavy, hard.

4. Locke's claims about real and nominal essence

1. The real essences of particular objects are unknown to us.

“Nor indeed *can we rank, and sort things, and consequently (which is the end of sorting) denominate them by their real essences, because we know them not.*” (III.vi.9).

Problem: Isn't the real essence of gold (for example) just its particular internal atomic constitution (atomic number 79)? (Recall the real essences are *explanatory*.)

4. Locke's claims about real and nominal essence (ctd.)

2. What determines whether something is an instance of a particular kind is its nominal essence. I.e. classification of objects into kinds "must proceed by reference to readily observable characteristics along" (Lowe p.82). See III.vi.7-9.

For example:

G1. A particular object counts as a sample of gold iff. it shares the observable characteristics of gold i.e. yellow, shiny, heavy, hard.

Problems:

- Some objects that share these qualities are not gold. E.g. fool's gold. So satisfying the nominal essence of is not sufficient for being gold.
- Some objects that do not share these qualities are gold. E.g. liquid gold is not hard. So satisfying the nominal essence of Gold is not necessary for being gold.

4. Locke's claims about real and nominal essence (ctd.)

- So what *does* it take for a particular object to be a sample of gold?
- **G2.** A particular object counts as a sample of gold iff. it has that hidden structure which typically explains why samples of gold have the observable qualities they have.
- I.e. ...iff. it has the *real essence* of Gold (atomic number 79).
- So some classification is in terms of *real essences* (contra Locke).

5. Linguistic Division of Labour

- According to the foregoing, some (not necessarily all) classificatory terms of language divide up the world according to real essences. E.g. "Gold".
- Yet many people use these terms without being aware of the real essence. E.g. Many people use the word "Gold" without knowing that it's real essence is atomic number 79. (The meaning of "Gold" doesn't change upon that discovery.)
- It follows that some "meaning just ain't in the head" (Putnam). I.e. what determines the extension of some terms is not the thoughts of people who use those terms
- How can this be? How can the meaning of our words transcend what we have thought of? (Locke thinks it is impossible – see III.vi.25).

5. Linguistic Division of Labour (ctd.)

- The Division of Linguistic Labour (See Putnam “The Meaning of Meaning”):
- The ordinary folk use some words in classifying objects, thereby *intending* to refer to that underlying real essence (whatever it is) that explains why common samples of the stuff have the observable properties they do.
- Experts investigate the nature of this real essence, thus finally determining the reference of the term.

5. Linguistic Division of Labour (ctd.)

- E.g. In using “Gold”, common folk intend to refer to that real essence (whatever it is) that explains why common samples of gold are heavy, shiny, yellow, hard. This turns out, after investigation, to be atomic number 79.
- Once the real essence is known, it can regulate our usage. E.g. We might reclassify things that we thought were gold as non-gold (e.g. fool’s Gold). Thus scientists can over-rule common usage.
- Terms that function in this way are sometimes called “Natural Kind Terms”. They pick out natural explanatory kinds in nature, thus “carving nature at the joints”.
- Question to consider:
 - Are all classificatory terms natural kind terms?
 - If a term, x , is not a natural kind term, does it make sense to talk of a ‘fool’s x ’?

Reading

- *Locke, J. Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Book 2, chapters 12 & 23, Book 3, chapter 6.
- Lowe, E.J. *Locke on Human Understanding*, chap. 4.
- H. Putnam 'The Meaning of "Meaning"' in his *Mind, Language and Reality* CUP, 1975.
- Mackie, J.L. *Problems from Locke*, chapter 3.
www.oxfordscholarship.com
- For further reading see Module Guide.

Questions?

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