John Locke (1632-1704)

• Locke's theory of mind
  – the mind at birth is a blank slate (tabula rasa)
  – all knowledge is derived from experience
  – the concept of self is based on the continuity of our conscious experience

Primary vs. secondary qualities

• "For the rays, to speak properly, are not coloured. In them there is nothing else than a certain power and disposition to stir up a sensation of this or that colour."
  – Isaac Newton, Optics (3rd ed. 1721, original in 1704).

John Locke (1632-1704)

• Primary qualities – perceived attributes resemble the physical objects that cause them
  – e.g., solidity, extension, motion, number
• Secondary qualities – perceived attributes do not correspond to any physical properties
  – e.g., color, taste, smell, and sound

John Locke (1632-1704)

• Paradox of the basins
  – Does warmth reside in the water basin or in the mind?
  – Warmth is a secondary quality

John Locke (1632-1704)

• Physical realism
  – physical objects stimulate the sense organs and cause the mind to form an accurate representation of external reality
• Copy theory of perception
  (Democritos, 460-370 BC)
Molyneux’s problem

“Suppose a man born blind, and now adult, and taught by his touch to distinguish between a cube and a sphere of the same metal, and nighly of the same bigness, so as to tell, when he felt one and the other, which is the cube, which the sphere. Suppose then the cube and sphere placed on a table, and the blind man be made to see: quaere, whether by his sight, before he touched them, he could now distinguish and tell which is the globe, which the cube?”

Locke’s political writings

• Two Treatises on Government
  • government as a social contract
  • all people are born equal
  • universal education as a right

George Berkeley (1685-1753)

• Born in Kilkenny, Ireland
• Lecturer at the University of Dublin
• Traveled to America, hoping to set up a new college in Bermuda
• Bishop of Cloyne for last 18 years of his life

George Berkeley (1685-1753)

• Dissatisfied with the prevailing metaphor of a clockwork universe
• Materialism responsible for decline in morals and religion
• Denied existence of matter (material world)

George Berkeley (1685-1753)

• Mental monism (idealism) denies the existence of a physical world distinct from our perceptions of it.
• esse is percipi “to be is to be perceived”

George Berkeley (1685-1753)

• All we can ever know about the world comes from sensory perception.
• No “external reality” beyond our perceptions of the world.
George Berkeley (1685-1753)

- Problem: if perception determines existence, then do things cease to exist when we no longer perceive them?
- Do perceptions vary from one individual to another?

There was a young man who said, “God Must think it exceedingly odd If he finds that this tree Continues to be When there’s no one about in the quad”

Dear Sir: 
Your astonishment’s odd 
I am always about in the quad. 
And that’s why the tree 
Will continue to be 
Since observed by 
Yours faithfully, 
God

George Berkeley (1685-1753)

- Human knowledge is based on ideas: sensory experience plus reflections of the mind

George Berkeley (1685-1753)

- Our psychological experiences reflect the world as it actually is
- distinction between primary and secondary qualities makes no sense

George Berkeley (1685-1753)

Principle of association

- An object is nothing more than a combination of its perceived qualities
- Apple=color+smell+taste+shape+size

George Berkeley (1685-1753)

There are no abstract ideas.

- Attributes are grouped together on the basis of contiguity and similarity
George Berkeley (1685-1753)
(1) the active mind or spirit, perceiving, thinking, willing
(2) passive objects of mind, ideas derived from sensation, memory or imagination

Theory of vision
- An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision (1709)
- Molyneux’s problem
- Distance perception is learned, not innate

Theory of vision
- Distance perception is not based on abstract geometrical relationships, but on learned associations between cues derived from different senses (visual & kinesthetic)
- Eye movements (convergence and divergence)

David Hume (1711-1776)
- Scottish philosopher, economist, historian

David Hume (1711-1776)
- Radical skepticism
- Foundations of human knowledge
- Theory of meaning
- Causality

Theories of perception
- Causal theory of perception: The philosophical position that our perceptual experiences are caused by external objects in the real world.
- Representative theory of perception: The idea that our percepts resemble these external objects, or represent them to us.
- Naïve realism: The belief that our perceptions are the external objects, that they are one and the same.
Disagreement with Locke

- Hume sees a problem in Locke’s realism.
- If our ideas are representations and our thoughts are simply copies of those representations, then we can never know how accurate our sensory representations are, nor can we ever form any ideas of the real world, outside of our impressions of it.

Does perception provide us with representations of objects?

"It is a question of fact whether the perceptions of the senses be produced by external objects resembling them. How shall this question be determined? By experience, surely, as all other questions of a like nature. But here experience is and must be entirely silent. The mind has never anything present to it but the perceptions, and cannot possibly reach any experience of their connections with objects. The supposition of such a connection is, therefore, without any foundation in reason."

David Hume, An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding

Hume’s reply to Berkeley

"To have recourse to the veracity of the Supreme Being in order to prove the veracity of our senses is surely making a very unexpected circuit. If his veracity were at all concerned in this matter, our senses would be entirely infallible, because it is not possible that he can ever deceive. Not to mention that, if the external world be once called into question, we shall be at a loss to find arguments by which we may prove the existence of that Being or any of his attributes."

[Inquiry XII(i)]