

## **Empiricism**

The belief that the mind is an empty slate (tabula rasa). All knowledge comes from experience

## **Commonsense or Naive Realism**

This is the belief that the world really is as it appears to our senses.

Problem: What about the role of the senses? They process the information they receive e.g. light hitting our retina becomes a 3D image in our minds. Commonsense realism misses this point

## **Representative Realism**

A modification of commonsense realism

We don't actually see what is "out there". Instead, we have an *internal mental representation* of what's out there.

Locke (1632-1704) made a distinction between primary and secondary properties

**Primary properties** (real) – size, shape, movement

**Secondary properties** are the result of the interaction between these primary properties and our minds – colour, taste, smell.

If we accept Locke's ideas then the grass is not green if everybody is blind!

## Problems with representative realism

### Unknowable real world

The real world is unknowable. I can never access the real world, so I can't ever know if my interpretations are accurate. I cannot "step outside" my senses to check if what I'm seeing is correct.

### Perceiver in the head

What is it that's doing the interpretation/conversion of primary into secondary properties? There must be an internal perceiver.

Would this internal perceiver "see" the world as it really is and then make the interpretation for me?

It is impossible for this internal perceiver to see the world as it really is. According to representative realism, it too would be interpreting the information it receives.

If this is the case then this internal perceiver would also need an internal perceiver to make the interpretation.

But even this second internal perceiver cannot directly see the world as it is. It too would need an internal perceiver...

### The existence of primary properties can be questioned

What evidence do I have for primary properties? I only ever see secondary properties. How do I know that there is actually anything behind what I experience? The theory collapses into idealism

## Idealism

There is no real world beyond our experience. Material things do not exist, only ideas.

Berkeley (1685-1753) "to exist is to be perceived"

no perception=no existence

Berkeley's idealism is immediately faced with the huge question:

**"What happens to things when I am not perceiving them? Do they disappear?"**

Berkeley's response: They do not disappear because God is perceiving everything at all times!

*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 this tree  
Will continue to be  
Since observed by Yours faithfully, God."*

Berkeley's epistemology, as explained by Ronald Knox (1888-1957)