

1. A conflict between philosophy and common sense

...the wisdom of *philosophy* is set in opposition to the *common sense* of mankind. The first pretends to demonstrate, *a priori*, that there can be no such thing as a material world; that sun, moon, stars, and earth, vegetable and animal bodies, are, and can be nothing else, but sensations in the mind... The last can conceive no otherwise of this opinion, than as a kind of metaphysical lunacy, and concludes that too much learning is apt to make men mad... If this is wisdom let me be deluded with the vulgar. (Reid, p. 231)

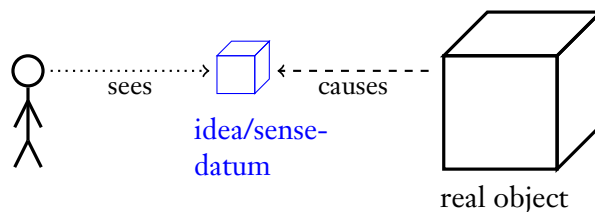
To what purpose is it for philosophy to decide against common sense in this or any other matter? The belief of a material world is older, and of more authority, than any principles of philosophy. (p. 232)

A valid argument presents us with a choice of two ways to reason:

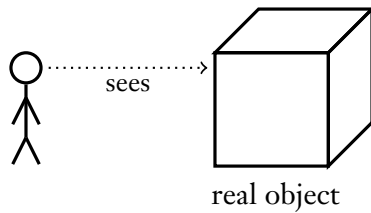
A		
B		
C	versus	not-D
Therefore, D		Therefore, either not-A, or not-B, or not-C

2. Against ideas

Descartes and Russell have this picture of perception



Why not instead this picture?



Russell's argument for sense data, concerning a rectangular table that looks trapezoidal from one's perspective:

1. What you see is trapezoidal
2. The table isn't trapezoidal
3. Therefore what you see isn't the table

The reason for premise 1 seems to be:

Perception Principle When it seems to a person that she perceives something that is F , there really is something that is F that she directly perceives

Two views about perception:

Indirect realism We perceive real-world objects by infallibly perceiving intermediary objects

Direct realism We directly—but fallibly—perceive real-world objects

3. Reid's constitutional beliefs

All reasonings must be from first principles; and for first principles no other reason can be given but this; that, by the constitution of our nature, we are under a necessity of assenting to them... We cannot prove the existence of our minds, nor even of our thoughts and sensations. A historian, or a witness can prove nothing, unless it is taken for granted that the memory and senses may be trusted. A natural philosopher can prove nothing, unless it is taken for granted that the course of nature is steady and uniform... That our sensations of touch indicate something external, extended, figured, hard or soft, is not a deduction of reason, but a natural principle. The belief of it, and the very conception of it, are equally parts of our constitution. If we are deceived in it, we are deceived by Him that made us, and there is no remedy. (pp. 233–4)

“Constitutional” beliefs: beliefs that we naturally form, without inferring them from indubitable foundations. These include external-world beliefs based on the senses, the belief in the uniformity of nature, and the belief that we ourselves exist.

4. Externalism

Externalism Whether my belief system is a good one can depend on “external” factors—factors that may not be accessible to me

Descartes approaches knowledge “from the inside”. You start with things you can know for sure from the inside, and see how far you can get. Externalists approach knowledge from the outside. They look at people, and the world, and ask: what do those people need to be like, and how do they need to be connected to the world, in order for them to know things about the world?