

Tackling Berkeley's Puzzle

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1. Introducing the Puzzle

Among the various concepts that we employ in our thinking are concepts of objects. To judge that apples grow on trees or that the suitcase one is carrying is heavy is to employ concepts of objects in one's thinking because apple, tree, and suitcase are examples of such concepts. Indeed, they are not just concepts of objects but concepts of mind-independent objects. Objects in this sense are individuals that can be perceived and exist unperceived. Apples, trees, and suitcases are mind-independent objects, and it is natural to assume that the possibility of existence unperceived is somehow built into our grasp of concepts of such objects.

One prominent form of scepticism focuses on whether it is possible for us to know that there are mind-independent objects. Berkeley asks a more basic question: how is it possible for us even to have concepts of mind-independent objects? He raises this question because he has a view of the relation between concepts and experience that appears to make it impossible for us to grasp concepts of mind-independent objects. He does not deny that we have concepts like apple, suitcase and tree but he concludes that these are concepts of mind-dependent objects, objects whose esse is their percipi.

This is how John Campbell describes Berkeley's reasoning in support of this surprising conclusion:

Berkeley is trying to respect a principle about the relation between experience and concepts that is both important and difficult to keep in place. This is what I will call the explanatory role of experience. The principle is that concepts of individual

physical objects, and concepts of the observable characteristics of such objects, are made available by our experience of the world. It is experience of the world that explains our grasp of these concepts. The puzzle that Berkeley is addressing is that it is hard to see how our concepts of mind-independent objects could have been made available by experience of them. The resolution he finds is to acknowledge that we do not have concepts of mind-independent objects (2002a: 128).

Why is it hard to see how our concepts of mind-independent objects could have been made available by our experience of mind-independent objects? Because we don't have such concepts unless we have the conception of objects as mind-independent, as capable of existing unperceived.¹ If we have this conception then experience of objects has to explain how we have it. But experience of objects cannot explain how we have the conception of objects as mind-independent. So we do not have this conception, and therefore do not have concepts of mind-independent objects. We have concept of objects but they are concepts of concepts of mind-dependent objects.

This complex argument can be summarized as follows:

1. We have concepts of objects.
2. Concepts of objects are made available to us by experience; it is experience of the world that explains our grasp of concepts of objects.²
3. We cannot have concepts of mind-independent objects unless we have the conception of objects as mind-independent.
4. We can only have the conception of objects as mind-independent if experience makes it available to us; experience of objects has to explain how it is that we have the conception of objects as mind-independent.

5. Experience of objects cannot make available to us the conception of objects as mind-independent; it cannot explain how we have the conception of objects as mind-independent.
6. We don't have the conception of objects as mind-independent.
7. We don't have concepts of mind-independent objects.
8. Our concepts of objects must be concepts of mind-dependent objects.

We can call premise 3 the Possession Premise since it states a condition on possession of concepts of mind-independent objects. Premise 4 Berkeley's is Explanatory Requirement and premise 5 is the Experience Premise.

The conclusion of Berkeley's argument is unacceptable. We have the conception of objects as mind-independent and concepts of mind-independent objects so it is false that our concepts of objects must be concepts of mind-dependent objects. The case for thinking that we have the conception of objects as capable of existing unperceived is this: to have this conception is to be able to think or reason in certain ways.³ So, for example, someone who thinks that the table in his study exists even though no one is now perceiving it, or who reasons that the table he can now see is the same as the one he saw last week, is manifesting his grasp of the conception of objects like tables as mind-independent. To say that someone thinks and reasons in these ways is not to say that he is justified in doing so or that he has a right to conceive of objects as mind-independent. The point is rather that someone who thinks and reasons in these ways is conceiving of objects as mind-independent. Since we actually think and reason in these ways it follows that we do conceive of objects as mind-independent.

Berkeley would be unconvinced by this line of argument because, for reasons we do not need to go into here, he would think that thinking and reasoning in these ways is not sufficient for grasp of the possibility of existence unperceived.⁴ For the purposes of the present discussion I'm going to assume that Berkeley is wrong about this and that there is at least a strong prima facie case against 6. However, 6 follows from 4 and 5 so if we want to reject 6 then we must show what is wrong with the Explanatory Requirement or with the Experience Premise. If we accept 6 we can still avoid 7 by denying the Possession Premise but it makes more sense to start with 6 and the premises from which it follows. So the first question is this: what is the motivation for the Explanatory Requirement?

Someone who has the conception of objects as mind-independent is someone who has the concept of a mind-independent object.⁵ Berkeley is adamant that experience has to explain how it is that we have this concept because he has an empiricist conception of the relation between concepts and experience. On this conception, the explanatory role of experience is not limited to concepts of objects and their observable characteristics. The empiricist principle about the relation between experience and concepts is assumed to apply to all our concepts. There are no exemptions from the Explanatory Requirement. If we have the concept of a mind-independent object then experience of objects has to be able to explain how we have it.

Why accept the Experience Premise? On one reading, to think that experience of objects 'makes available' the conception of objects as mind-independent is to think that it is possible for us to extract or acquire this conception from experience of objects.⁶ So the question is whether it is possible for us to extract from experience of objects the idea that the objects of experience can exist unperceived. Here is one reason for thinking that this is

not possible: experience of objects only gives us conscious images of objects. These images are mind-dependent; that is, they depend for their existence on being experienced. So ‘if your conception of the object was provided by your experience of the object, you would presumably end by concluding that the object would not have existed had you not existed, and that the object exists only when you are experiencing it’ (Campbell 2000b: 121).

As Campbell sees things, this argument for the Experience Premise relies on what he calls a Representational View of experience. He claims that this premise can be resisted on a Relational View of experience.⁷ This says that experience of an object involves the mind-independent thing itself as a constituent. This undermines the Experience Premise since it seems that ‘it ought to be possible to extract the conception of a mind-independent world from an experience which has a mind-independent object as a constituent’ (2002b: 121). The Representational View has to accept the Experience Premise because it cannot allow that experience of objects has mind-independent objects as constituents.

Are Campbell’s arguments in support of the claim that the Representational View is stuck with the Experience Premise good ones? I will argue in part 2 that they are not. There are good reasons for thinking that the Representational View fails to explain how the concept of a mind-independent object can be extracted from experience but they are different from the ones that Campbell gives. Does the Relational View fare any better in this regard than the Representational View? I will argue that it does not. Even if perceptual experiences of mind-independent objects have such objects as constituents this does not explain how we can acquire the concept of a mind-independent object from experience. The right thing to think is that this is a concept that cannot be extracted from experience. If this is the point of the Experience Premise then we should endorse this premise.

One worry about arguing in this way is that it raises a question about the possibility of extracting concepts of mind-independent objects – concepts like tree - from experience. If the Possession Premise is correct, how can concepts of mind-independent things be extracted from experience if the concept of a mind-independent thing can't be extracted from experience?⁸ I will address this question in part 3. In part 4, I will focus on a different issue: if the concept of a mind-independent object cannot be extracted from experience then it would appear that we must either conclude that we do not have this concept or that we have at least one bona fide concept that can't be extracted from experience. The former is Berkeley's conclusion, the latter is Kant's. In Kant's terminology, legitimate concepts that can't be acquired from experience are non-empirical or a priori concepts.⁹ If Kant is right that the concept of a mind-independent object is a priori then it would seem that the Explanatory Requirement has to be given up. However, Berkeley's point is that this requirement is non-negotiable, so we are back to square one: either the concept of a mind-independent object is one that we do not possess or experience has to be capable of making it available to us.

The key to resolving this stand-off, and to solving Berkeley's Puzzle, is to recognize that the Explanatory Requirement and the Experience Premise can both be read in different ways. On one interpretation, the Explanatory Requirement is concerned with the acquisition of concepts. It says that:

(ER_a) If we have the concept of a mind-independent object it must have been acquired from experience.

On a different reading, the Explanatory Requirement focuses on what it is to grasp the concept of a mind-independent object. The claim is that:

(ER_g) If we have the concept of a mind-independent object then experience must have a role to play in explaining our grasp of this concept.

The non-negotiable version of the Explanatory Requirement is (ER_g). (ER_a) is far more contentious. I will suggest that we can and should endorse (ER_g) without endorsing (ER_a).¹⁰

The two versions of the Experience Premise are:

(EP_a) The concept of a mind-independent object cannot be acquired from experience of objects.

(EP_g) Experience of objects can play no role in explaining our grasp of the concept of a mind-independent object.

One can think that (EP_a) is true without thinking that (EP_g) is true. Given (ER_a), (EP_a) puts pressure on the idea that we have the concept of a mind-independent object but we should not endorse (ER_a). (ER_g) commits us to denying (EP_g), but we should reject this version of the Experience Premise.

We now have the outlines of a response to Berkeley's Puzzle: Berkeley is wrong to deny that we have the concept of a mind-independent object but right to claim that this is not a concept that can be acquired from experience. Nevertheless, experience of objects can and must play a role in explaining our grasp of this concept, and this means that there is no conflict with the non-negotiable version of the Explanatory Requirement. The challenge is to identify the precise explanatory role of experience in relation to the concept of a mind-independent object given that this concept can't be extracted from experience. I will return to this issue below. In the meantime, it is worth noting that the right thing to say about the concept of a mind-independent object is exactly what Kant says about his categories: it is an a priori concept our grasp of which nevertheless has a basis in experience.¹¹

2. The Experience Premise

The idea that the Representational View of experience is stuck with the acquisition version of the Experience Premise is, on the face of it, implausible.¹² The Representational View says that many of our perceptual experiences are not just experiences of what are in fact mind-independent objects but experiences as of mind-independent objects.¹³ Experiences as of mind-independent objects are experiences with a certain representational or intentional content: they represent mind-independent objects as such and thereby make it possible for us to acquire the concept of a mind-independent object from experience.¹⁴ Or so it would seem. The Representational View insists that the representational content of an experience of a mind-independent object may be the same as that of a matching vivid hallucination of a mind-independent object but this is not a reason for thinking that this view precludes the acquisition of the concept of a mind-independent object from experience. It is only a reason for thinking that one could just as well acquire the concept of a mind-independent object from hallucinations of such objects.

What should we make of the concern that, on the Representational View, experience only gives us mind-dependent images of objects, and that 'we cannot extract the conception of a mind-independent world from a mind-dependent image' (Campbell 2002b: 121)? This account of the Representational View might be disputed by representationalists who do not use the terminology of conscious images. Even representationalists who are prepared to speak in these terms should insist that what is important for their purposes is the content of the images rather than the nature of the images themselves. Mental images are mind-dependent but proponents of the Representational View who think that the concept of an object can be extracted from experience of objects do not need to suppose that the content

of this concept is fixed by the ontological status of conscious images as such. What matters is the content of the images. The proposal is that the concept of a non-mental object can be acquired from experience as long as objects of experience are represented in experience as mind-independent. The mind-dependence of the bearers of this content is neither here for there.

A potentially serious objection to this proposal is this: it is only possible for one to have experiences as of mind-independent objects if one already has the concept of a mind-independent object, and this means that this concept cannot be extracted from such experiences. Why not? Because the experiences from which a concept F is extracted must, on pain of circularity, not presuppose one's possession of F. It is the fact that one has experiences as of mind-independent objects that is supposed to make it possible for one to get hold of the concept of a mind-independent object so it had better not turn out that one's grasp of this concept is what makes it possible for one to have experiences as of mind-independent objects in the first place.

The claim that a concept F cannot be acquired from experiences that presuppose it is not beyond dispute but let that pass.¹⁵ A more pressing question is whether it is true that one cannot have experiences as of mind-independent objects if one lacks the concept of a mind-independent object. The underlying issue here is whether the Representational View has to regard the representational content of such experiences as conceptual. Campbell thinks that it does. He claims that the Representational View takes the intentionality of experience for granted, and that taking this for granted is equivalent to taking it for granted that 'experience of the world is a way of grasping thoughts about the world' (2000b: 121). The implication is that the Representational View regards the representational content of

experience as conceptual, and this is the basis of Campbell's allegation that it can't account for the explanatory role of experience: if experience of objects is a way of grasping thoughts then how can it explain how it is that we are able to think about the world around us?

It is true that the Representational View takes the intentionality of experience for granted but it is not committed to the conception of intentionality that Campbell attributes to it. Many proponents of this view characterize the representational content of experience as at least partly non-conceptual.¹⁶ They do not think that experience of objects is a way of grasping thoughts and are happy to accept that someone who, say, lacks the concept sphere can still have an experience as of a sphere. Why, then, should they not think that one can have an experience as of a mind-independent object even if one lacks the corresponding concept? Perhaps the worry is that only relatively basic contents can be non-conceptual. A person who lacks the concept sphere might be able to have an experience as of a sphere but it is much less plausible that someone who lacks the concept of a Geiger counter can have an experience as of a Geiger counter. Some representational contents can only be conceptual. However, the important question for present purposes is whether the content of experiences as of mind-independent objects must be conceptual. Given that even babies and some animals can have such experiences despite their lack of conceptual sophistication the obvious thing to think is that such experiences need not presuppose the concept of a mind-independent object. So it appears that the Representational View can avoid (EP_a) as long as it takes seriously the possibility of non-conceptual representational content.

The problem with this argument is that the considerations that make it plausible that experiences as of mind-independent objects needn't be conceptual make it correspondingly

difficult to see how the concept of a mind-independent object could be extracted from such experiences. For what makes it plausible that experiences as of mind-independent objects need not be conceptual is the suggestion that more intellectual sophistication is required for grasp of the concept of a mind-independent object than can reasonably be attributed to the many creatures that are capable of having experiences as of mind-independent objects. The more demanding our idea of what it is to grasp the concept of a mind-independent object the stronger the case for denying that possession of this concept is necessary for one to have experiences as of mind-independent objects. At the same time, however, the more demanding our idea of what it is to grasp the concept of a mind-independent object the harder it becomes to see how this concept could be extracted from experience.

Consider what is involved in having the concept of a mind-independent object. The concept of such an object is the concept of something that can exist unperceived and that possesses mind-independent properties such as shape. We can, of course, find out the shape of an object, and some of our ways of discovering an object's mind-independent properties are canonical. For example, perceiving the shape of an object from different perspectives is a canonical method for establishing its shape. However, as Peacocke observes:

For someone who has at least a rudimentary conception of objectivity, an object's having a certain property is not something constituted by a certain method's having a particular outcome. It is rather something that may potentially be investigated by new means, in need of discovery, new means whose detailed nature cannot be circumscribed in advance. New means are possible because the canonical methods are conceived as latching on to independently existing objects and properties.... For

the thinker with some conception of objectivity, the methods that are canonical need not be exhaustive (2001: 614-5).

Perceptual states can exist in the absence of the ability to conceive of canonical methods as latching on to independently existing objects and properties, and this strengthens the case for regarding the content of such states as non-conceptual. Yet given how much is built into even a rudimentary conception of objectivity there is little prospect of this conception being one that can be acquired from experience. It is not possible to read off from experience the idea that an object's having a certain property is not constituted by a certain method's having a particular outcome. Intuitively, this is too sophisticated an idea to be built into the content of a non-conceptual representational state, and therefore too sophisticated an idea to be extracted from such a state.¹⁷

A closely related consideration is that to think of a perceivable object as capable of existing unperceived is to think of it as a space-occupier. I think of the table in my study as existing unperceived by thinking of it as occupying a region of space at which no perceiver is present. To think of the table as a space-occupier is to think of it as possessing primary properties, and a grasp of such properties relies on implicit knowledge of the propositions of a primitive mechanics. These propositions, which specify the ways in which bodies can and cannot behave, are incapable of being, as Evans puts it, 'woven out of materials given in experience' (1980: 97). This has a bearing on (EP_a) because it is only a short step from the claim that the principles of primitive mechanics cannot be woven out of the materials given in experience to the conclusion that the concept of a mind-independent object cannot be extracted from experience.¹⁸

On this account of the case for (EP_a) a Relational View of experience does not make this version of the Experience Premise any less plausible. Suppose that, as the Relational View claims, experiences of objects have objects as constituents. Campbell suggests that it should be possible to extract the concept of a mind-independent object from an experience which has a mind-independent object as a constituent but it is not clear that this is right. To get a sense of the problem consider the following analogy: gold has the atomic number 79, and lumps of gold are things that we can perceive. But even if experiences of lumps of gold have those lumps as constituents it does not follow that it is possible to extract the concept of an atomic number from such experiences. Lumps of gold don't give us the concept of an atomic number just because they have an atomic number, and the fact that an experience has a lump of gold as a constituent does not explain how the concept of an atomic number can be derived from experience. By the same token, mind-independent objects do not give us the concept of mind-independence just because they are mind-independent, and the fact that an experience has a mind-independent object as a constituent does not explain how the concept of a mind-independent object can be extracted from the experience.

It might be objected that this is not a good analogy. The fact that gold has an atomic number does not show up in our experience of gold, and that is why the concept of atomic number cannot be derived from experience. In contrast, the mind-independence of an object of experience does show up in an experience of that object that has it as a constituent. The experience registers the object's mind-independence and that is what allows us to derive the concept of a mind-independent object from experience. But what is it for an experience of a mind-independent object to register the object's mind-independence? An obvious thought is that for an experience of a mind-independent object to do this kind of registering is for it to

represent the object as mind-independent. One question, therefore, is whether the Relational View can allow that experiences are, in this sense, representational.¹⁹ If not, then it is still a mystery how an experience is supposed to give one the concept of a mind-independent object just because it has a mind-independent object as a constituent. If, on the other hand, the Relational View allows that experiences have representational content and sees this as the key to explaining how the concept of a mind-independent object can be acquired from experience then it faces the same difficulties in this regard as the Representational View.²⁰ So whether or not we think of experiences as having objects as constituents, there is still a strong case for (EP_a).

None of this commits us to (EP_g). Even if the concept of a mind-independent object cannot be extracted or acquired from experience it could still be the case that experience has a role in explaining our grasp of this concept, whether we have a Representational or a Relational View of experience. One might think, for example, that in order to have the concept of a mind-independent object one must have some concepts of mind-independent objects. Mind-independent object is a formal concept. Concepts of objects – concepts like apple, suitcase, and tree - are sortal concepts.²¹ On the plausible assumption that experience plays a direct role in explaining our grasp of sortal and other empirical concepts it follows that it plays at least an indirect role in explaining our grasp of the concept of a mind-independent object. To endorse (EP_g) would be to think, in effect, that one can have the a priori concept of a mind-independent object even if one has no empirical concepts, and this is not a sensible thing to think. Indeed, the role of experience in relation to the concept of a mind-independent object might be even more direct than the discussion so far suggests. To imagine someone who has no experience of mind-independent objects is to imagine

someone whose grasp of the concept of a mind-independent object is empty and formal. Concepts without intuitions are empty, and this puts further pressure on (EP_g).²² This version of the Experience Premise is both implausible and unmotivated. There is no reason to think that experience of objects can play no role in explaining our grasp of the concept of a mind-independent object, despite the range of powerful arguments in support of (EP_a).

3. The Possession Premise.

Although the acquisition version of the Experience Premise has a lot going for it we might still be reluctant to endorse it. One reason is this: the Possession Premise says that in order to have concepts of mind-independent objects one must have the concept of a mind-independent object. But if the latter cannot be derived from experience then how can the former still be derived from experience? The problem is that concepts like apple, tree and suitcase are empirical concepts, that is, ones that are derived from experience. If they come from experience then it seems either that (EP_a) is false or that the Possession Premise is false: either the concept of a mind-independent object originates in experience or one does not need this concept in order to have concepts of mind-independent objects.

This argument turns on the following Parity Thesis:

(PT) If possession of the concept of a mind-independent object is necessary for possession of concepts of mind-independent objects then the latter can be derived from experience only if the former can be derived from experience.

Why should one accept (PT)? That depends on why the Possession Premise – the antecedent of (PT) - is thought to be correct. One way of motivating this premise would be to appeal to the Containment Model of concepts. According to this model, most concepts are structured complexes of other concepts.²³ One concept is a structured complex of other

concepts just if it has those other concepts as proper parts. If the concept F has the concepts G and H as proper parts then it is plausible that one cannot have F unless one has both G and H, and that F cannot be derived from experience unless G and H can be so derived. So if we assume that concepts of mind-independent objects are complex concepts that have the concept of a mind-independent object as a proper part then the Possession Premise and the Parity Thesis follow straightforwardly: if concepts like apple, tree and suitcase embed the concept of a mind-independent object then one cannot have the former unless one has the latter, and concepts like apple, tree and suitcase cannot be derived from experience unless the concept of a mind-independent object can be derived from experience.

Strictly speaking this argument only shows that sortal concepts cannot be entirely or exclusively derived from experience, but the idea that even supposedly empirical concepts have an a priori component is not incoherent. One might, in any case, be sceptical about the Containment Model and the suggestion that the Possession Premise is committed to this model. It is worth remembering how the concept of a mind-independent object was first introduced into the discussion. The initial thought was that in order to have concepts of mind-independent objects one must have the conception of objects as mind-independent or, as Campbell puts it, ‘the conception of a mind-independent world’ (2002b: 121). It was then stipulated that someone who has the conception of objects as mind-independent is someone who has the concept of a mind-independent object. To say that someone has the latter concept is simply a way of making the point that they have the conception of a mind-independent world. If they don’t have this conception they can hardly be said to have concepts of mind-independent objects, but this has little to do with the idea that concepts of mind-independent objects contain the concept of a mind-independent thing. If F and G are

distinct concepts one can coherently think one must have G in order to have F without thinking that F contains G.

Even if F doesn't contain G, one might think that there is still something odd about combining the following claims:

- (a) In order to have F one must have G.
- (b) F is an empirical concept.
- (c) G is a non-empirical concept.

The coherence, or otherwise, of combining these claims is an issue that Kant takes up in his account of the relationship between empirical concepts and the categories. He claims that the concept tree is an empirical concept that is acquired from experience by means of various operations of the understanding, and that these operations presuppose the prior synthesis of experiential input by means of categorial concepts like substance and object.²⁴ The categories are themselves non-empirical. They cannot be acquired from experience but they make it possible for us to acquire empirical concepts from experience and thereby make it possible for us to possess empirical concepts: in order to have the concept tree one must have one or more of the categories, tree is an empirical concept but the categories are non-empirical. This is how Kant combines (a), (b) and (c). His idea is that the enabling conditions for the acquisition or possession of empirical concepts do not themselves have to be empirical.²⁵

The role of the concept of a mind-independent object in relation to sortal concepts is analogous to the supposed role of the Kantian categories in relation to sortal or other empirical concepts. To have the concept of a mind-independent object or conception of a mind-independent world is to be able to think or reason in certain ways. Being able to think

or reason in the relevant ways is an enabling condition for grasp of empirical concepts but this does not imply that concepts like apple, tree and suitcase are not really empirical or that the concept of a mind-independent object is really just another empirical concept. Without the Containment Model hovering in the background there is no reason to believe the Parity Thesis. But the Possession Premise remains in good shape: someone who lacks the concept of a mind-independent object, and all that this concept brings with it, is either someone who lacks concepts like apple, tree, and suitcase or someone for whom these concepts can only be concepts of mind-dependent objects.

4. The Explanatory Requirement.

Suppose that (EP_a) is right and that the concept of a mind-independent object can't be derived from experience. What follows, according to Berkeley, is that we don't have the concept of a mind-independent object.²⁶ He thinks this follows because he is committed to the acquisition version of the Explanatory Requirement (ER_a), which says that if we have the concept of a mind-independent object it must be acquired from experience. If (EP_a) is right and the concept of a mind-independent object can't be derived from experience then we do not have this concept. Kant's reaction to the success of (EP_a) is different. His idea is that since we clearly do have the concept of a mind-independent object, and since this concept can't be acquired from experience, (ER_a) has got to be false. Indeed, he views the impossibility of deriving any of his categorial concepts – concepts like substance and cause - from experience as the single most powerful argument against the concept empiricism to which (ER_a) gives expression.

The proposal that the acquisition version of the Experience Premise casts doubt on the acquisition version of the Explanatory Requirement is one that Georges Rey takes up in

his response to Campbell's discussion of Berkeley's Puzzle. Commenting on the worry that experience of objects could not be what explains our having the conception of objects as mind-independent Rey protests:

But who besides the Classical Empiricists is even tempted by the view that experience alone could "be what provides us with our concepts" of mind-independent objects – or, for that matter, with any other of our fundamental concepts? It seems to me that Berkeley's idealism was a superb reductio of that idea, but, if that wasn't good enough, the failure of classic phenomenalist reductions and the substantial evidence for nativism have surely been nails in the coffin (2005: 140).

Campbell's response to Rey is instructive. He denies that Berkeley's Puzzle rests on the idea that experience alone must be what provides us with our concepts of mind-independent objects. On Campbell's reading of Berkeley, 'the point is only that perceptual experience has some role to play in explaining our grasp of concepts, not that it is the only thing that has a role to play' (2005: 162). If this very modest Explanatory Requirement is sufficient to generate the Puzzle then Rey's response misses the point since it consists in disputing a quite different Explanatory Requirement.

What is striking about the exchange between Rey and Campbell is, in my terms, that while (ER_a) is Rey's target Campbell does not defend (ER_a) . What he does instead is to insist on (ER_g) . (ER_g) and (ER_a) are not equivalent, and defending (ER_g) is not a way of defending (ER_a) . So Campbell and Rey are, to some extent, arguing at cross purposes. Be that as it may, the philosophically significant questions raised by their exchange are these:

- (i) Should we accept (ER_a) ?

- (ii) Does (ER_a) make it hard to see how we could have the concept of a mind-independent object or concepts of mind-independent objects?
- (iii) Should we accept (ER_g)?
- (iv) Does (ER_g) make it hard to see how we could have the concept of a mind-independent object or concepts of mind-independent objects?

The answer to (i) is ‘no’. There is little to be said in favour of (ER_a) and one major thing to be said against it: we have plenty of concepts, including the concept of a mind-independent object, that can’t be extracted from experience. The answer to (ii) is, as argued above, ‘yes’. However, the empiricism to which (ER_a) gives expression is far from irresistible so the fact that the concept of a mind-independent object cannot be extracted from experience does not show that this concept is not available to us.

Turning to (iii) and (iv), (ER_g) says that experience must have a role in explaining our grasp of the concept of a mind-independent object. Whether this is something we should accept depends on what specifically the explanatory role of experience is supposed to be. There are some concepts in relation to which the explanatory role of experience is substantial. For example, colour experience plays an important role in our grasp of colour concepts.²⁷ In the absence of colour experience one might be able to talk about particular colours but one would not really know what it is for something to be, say red. One’s grasp of the concept red would be deficient because it would lack any experiential underpinning and so would be purely theoretical. In the case of other concepts, like black hole or quark, it would be bizarre to think that one needs to be able to experience their instances in order to count as having a proper grasp of the concept. A physicist’s grasp of such concepts is not deficient for being ‘purely theoretical’ since these are theoretical rather than observational

concepts. The explanatory role of experience in relation to concepts that are incapable of being instantiated or realized in experience is bound to be even less direct and substantial than its explanatory role in relation to concepts that can be instantiated in experience.

The concept of a mind-independent object is both theoretical and observational. While grasp of this concept requires grasp of a surrounding theory it is integral to a proper grasp of it that we can perceive its instances.²⁸ The specific role that experience must play in relation to the concept of a mind-independent object is to present us with instances of it. Experience is what gives the concept what Kant would call its ‘objective reality’, and that is why we must be able to perceive mind-independent objects, and perceive them as mind-independent objects, if we are to count as grasping the concept. There is more to grasping the concept than being able to perceive its instances but mind-independent object is not purely a purely theoretical concept.²⁹ If this is the point of (ER_g) then we should accept this version of the Explanatory Requirement. The answer to (iii) is ‘yes’.

It should now be clear that the answer to (iv) is ‘no’: we can and do perceive mind-independent things as such so (ER_g) does not make it hard to see how we could have the concept of a mind-independent object or concepts of mind-independent objects. To think that (ER_g) states a requirement that cannot be satisfied would be to agree with Berkeley and Hume that the senses are incapable of presenting their objects as mind-independent. Both representationalists and relationalists about experience can agree that Berkeley and Hume were wrong about this, and this means that there is no longer a puzzle about our possession of concepts of mind-independent objects. The version of the Explanatory Requirement that can’t be satisfied is (ER_a) rather than (ER_g). The version of this requirement that we should accept is (ER_g) rather than (ER_a). So there is no puzzle: even on a Representational View of

experience there is no Explanatory Requirement on our grasp of the concept of a mind-independent object that is both compelling and incapable of being fulfilled.

The question that Berkeley raises is a how-possible question, a question of the form ‘How is X possible?’. Such questions are obstacle-dependent. They get their bite from the factors that make X look impossible.³⁰ So Berkeley’s question is: how is it possible for us to have concepts of mind-independent objects given the factors that make it look impossible for us to have such concepts? Suppose that the factor that makes X look impossible and that prompts the how-possible question is some requirement R that looks like it cannot be fulfilled. One response to the how-possible question would be to accept that R is a genuine requirement but argue that this requirement can be fulfilled. This is what might be called an obstacle-overcoming response to the question. An obstacle-dissipating response would be to argue that while R cannot be fulfilled it does not represent a genuine requirement on X. X is possible regardless of whether R can be fulfilled.

Berkeley thinks that the Explanatory Requirement is fundamentally what makes it impossible for us to have concepts of mind-independent objects. He asks: how, given this requirement, is it possible for us to have such concepts? And his answer is: it isn’t possible. I have been recommending a response to Berkeley’s how-possible question that is neither exclusively obstacle-dissipating nor exclusively obstacle-overcoming. It can be described as an obstacle-dissipating response to the extent that it questions the legitimacy of (ER_d). It can also be described as an obstacle-overcoming response to the extent that it accepts (ER_g) and tries to show that this requirement can be fulfilled. As with all the best how-possible questions in philosophy there is a genuine insight that underlies Berkeley’s question. What Berkeley recognizes is that there is a sense in which our concepts are made available by our

experience of the world. There are, however, also some serious mistakes at the heart of his thinking. One is to think that all concepts are empirical. The other is his failure to see that experience can present its objects as mind-independent. Kant's discussion of these issues is so much better than Berkeley's because he makes neither mistake. He sees that there must be some a priori concepts and also that the content of perceptual experience is not nearly as limited as Berkeley supposes. In tackling Berkeley's Puzzle it is Kant's lead that we should follow.³¹

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¹ This is the key to Berkeley's Puzzle. As Campbell writes: 'Our topic is the role of experience in providing the conception of objects as mind-independent. How can experience of an object provide you with a grasp of the idea that the object can continue in existence through gaps in observation. How can perceptual experience of objects be what provides you with a grasp of the possibility of existence unperceived? This is Berkeley's puzzle' (2002a: 137).

² The formulations before and after the semicolon are Campbell's. One might wonder whether they are equivalent. This is an issue taken up below.

³ Cf. Campbell 2002a: 137.

⁴ As Ayers points it, Berkeley thinks that the content of my thought that the table in my study exists unperceived is that it would exist (i. e. be perceived) if someone were looking at it. Unperceived, the table does not actually exist. See Ayers 1975: xii.

⁵ There are purposes for which it might be important to distinguish between concepts and conceptions. I'm taking it that 'S has the conception of objects as mind-independent' and 'S has the concept of a mind-independent object' are equivalent.

⁶ This is sometimes what Campbell appears to have in mind. See his 2002a: 135.

⁷ The core commitments on the Relational View are that (a) when one sees an object the object itself is a constituent of one's experience, (b) experience of objects is more primitive than, and in fact explains, the ability to think about objects, and (c) there is nothing intrinsic in common between the case in which one perceives, say, a dagger and the case in which one is having a vivid hallucination of the dagger. Campbell represents the Representational View as denying all three claims. I argue below that there are versions of the Representational View that can endorse (b).

⁸ Strictly speaking the Possession Premise says that we cannot have concepts of mind-independent objects unless we have the conception of objects as mind-independent. I am taking this as equivalent to the claim that we cannot have concepts of mind-independent objects unless we have the concept of mind-independent object. The worry is that if one needs the concept of a mind-independent object in order to have any concepts of mind-independent objects then the latter can be derived from experience only if the former can be so derived. See part 3 below for more on this.

⁹ In the terminology of Cassam 2003 bona fide concepts that can't be derived from experience are 'derivationally a priori'.

¹⁰ Campbell tends to run the two versions of the Explanatory Requirement together in his discussion.

¹¹ In Kant's terminology experience is what provides the categories – concepts like substance and cause- with 'objective reality'.

¹² As Mohan Matthen also notes. See Matthen 2006 and compare Campbell 2002b: 121.

¹³ Cf. Susanna Siegel's remark that 'the objects we seem to see are presented to us as subject-independent' (2006: 356).

¹⁴ To be more precise, such experiences make it possible for us to acquire the concept of a mind-independent object because they represent their objects as mind-independent.

¹⁵ See Cassam 1999 for further discussion.

¹⁶ See, for example, Peacocke 2001. Campbell claims that 'the move to thinking in terms of "non-conceptual" content does not help' (2002b). It is not clear why Campbell thinks that this move does not help.

¹⁷ This is not to deny that there is some sense in which creatures that lack the concept of a mind-independent object can perceptually represent ‘object permanence’. See, for example, Baillargeon 1999 for more on this.

¹⁸ Readers who are familiar with Evans 1980 will recognize the argument of this paragraph as one of Evans’ arguments in that wonderful paper. Although Evans isn’t entirely explicit about this he seems to think that the primitive mechanics is innate.

¹⁹ From the claim that there is nothing intrinsic in common between perceptual experiences and matching hallucinations it does not follow that the former lack representational content. However, Campbell talks about perceptual experiences having ‘phenomenal character’ rather than representational content.

²⁰ Notice that if the Relational View regards experiences as representational then it would open itself up to the ad hominem objection that it takes the intentionality of experience for granted and so cannot allow that experience of objects explains our ability to think about objects. To deal with this objection it would need to avail itself of the idea that the representational content of experience is non-conceptual. Perhaps it would be better, in that case, for the Relational View to ally itself with those who think that experience does not have a representational content. See Travis 2004.

²¹ For the distinction between formal and sortal concepts see Wiggins 1980: 63-4.

²² On the idea that concepts without intuitions or experiences in some way corresponding to them are ‘empty’ see Kant 1932, especially the opening paragraphs of the Transcendental Logic and the Schematism of the Pure Concepts of Understanding.

²³ This is the account of the Containment Model given in Margolis and Laurence 1999.

²⁴ The operations of the understanding by means of which empirical concepts are acquired from experience are comparison, reflection and abstraction. See Longuenesse 1998 for further discussion and references.

²⁵ For an account of Kant's conception of the relationship between empirical and categorial concepts see Longuenesse 1998 and Cassam 2007, chapter 4.

²⁶ The explicit target of Berkeley's attack is the notion of matter. He says that this notion 'involves a contradiction in it' (1975: 79) because it is the concept of something that can exist unperceived.

²⁷ See Campbell 2006 for much more on this.

²⁸ See Evans 1980 for the idea that the concept of a mind-independent object cannot stand on its own, without grasp of a surrounding theory.

²⁹ In this respect the concept of mind-independent object is similar to Kant's categories. It is worth remembering that Kant describes his categories as 'concepts of an object in general, and argues that if they are not sensibly realized – instantiated in experience- then they are merely functions of the understanding that represent no object. My account of the role of perceptual experience in providing the concept of a mind-independent object with objective reality is self-consciously Kantian.

³⁰ This is the account of how-possible questions given in Cassam 2007.

³¹ Thanks to John Campbell for stimulating discussions of the topic of this paper and to Ciara Fairley for helpful comments on an earlier draft.