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(This is one of my earliest philosophy papers and some thoughts might need more explanation)

Philosophic Thoughts on Substratum

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The question “Do we have good reason to believe in substance?” has been puzzling my mind since our class started reading Locke and Berkeley. In this essay I would like to find an answer by first examining my personal experience of matter, second by comparing it to the writings of Descartes, Locke, and Berkeley, and third by investigating the possibility of a substratum and its underlying causes and laws.

At the beginning of this mental exploration, I examined a wooden fence that was next to me. I know that if I can see its green color and feel its hardness when I push against it. It even appeared to me against my will and therefore I am absolutely convinced that this fence exists. Luckily, none of the above mentioned philosopher would disagree with me on this respect. They all believe in the reality of an external world. However, they disagree just how I perceived my information. Berkeley thinks that the original fence exists only in God's mind, and that God sent me the idea of greenness and hardness just in the moment I examined the fence. Both Descartes and Locke believe that I saw a representation of the actual fence by receiving primary and secondary qualities. Primary qualities, according to Descartes, can be verified by use of intellect, e.g. by measuring its length. For Locke, primary qualities are best experienced if they are perceived by several senses. Secondary qualities are not in the fence itself, but are caused by it. For example, if I were to hit that fence with my fist, the following pain would not be in the fence itself, but only in me. Descartes and Locke both believe in the Substance Theory. That means they speculate on an underlying substratum for these qualities. For them, there is a some bottom layer that holds all properties together and causes their ideas. So, according to their view, my fence has an unknown and unnoticed glue-like layer. Berkeley doesn't believe in such a layer. To him, the fence is just an accumulation of its properties. If we

were to believe in an unperceivable sublayer, we could never know the true nature of things. For Berkeley, God is the active source of our ideas and they [ideas] can only exist in minds.

I focus back on my fence and reflect on what is causing my ideas. Neither can I perceive of a substratum nor a god. So, the problem of uncertainty remains in both ways. If I analyzed a piece of wood microscopically, I would find more properties; yet no substratum. If I were to analyze my fence on a subatomic level, I would find even more properties. In return, these properties require their own substratum. In order to escape this hopeless situation we would need an immaterial substratum. Ben Wiens explained in his essay “Energy Science Made Simple”¹ that there is indeed the possibility of a substratum devoid of matter. It is similar to an electromagnetic field, but he points out that it can only be poorly described and its mechanism is not well understood. But, if there were such a field, it would fulfill Locke’s philosophical requirements for a substratum, as it would provide support for primary and secondary qualities, and be the cause of those qualities. Since it is thought to consist of an immaterial mechanism, it can therefore have no material properties of itself. It is also thought that this substratum covers the complete universe. If we assume our universe to be infinite, then the substratum has to be infinite too. If these assumptions prove to be true, then this substratum might provide a plausible support and cause for the existence of minds as well.

As I am examining my fence, hypothetically, my mind might be a force field surrounding my brain. Material properties are being transported to my mind by a yet unexplained substratic mechanism. I picture this to be similar to a radio tower producing

¹ <http://www.benwiens.com/energy1.html>

electromagnetic waves that are picked up by an antenna. Our minds then are capable of perception, thought, and memory. This view of the mind is in accordance with Descartes, Locke and Berkeley.

However, I can't help but wonder why I perceive these qualities. What is the purpose of knowing them? I know that pain is not in the fence itself, but according to today's scientific understanding, it is merely a physiological response of my body. I infer that by using physiological feedback, my mind is able to analyze and evaluate the environment I am in. An unpleasant feeling of hunger will alert me to find food. The pleasure of eating food will condition me to do it again. Also, if I eat something bad, I will get sick, whereas an enjoyable meal will be consumed again. Furthermore, I assume that everything alive will always tend to do what is most pleasurable. Plants automatically face the progress of the sun, and even water follows the path of least resistance. I think that this pleasure principle might also serve as an analogy for the forming of stable electron configurations in atoms. Since we are composed of atoms I find it not surprising that we have the like tendencies to act in a way that is best for us. I reason that if this pleasure principle is within us, it might also be in atoms. If it is within atoms, it must also be within the essence of things on a substratic level. According to my principle even atoms have some limited perception of their surrounding, When we consider the evolution of life, which we assume started as single cells, we will find more evidence that we are determined to progress into something more complex and better. I dare to make the outlook that we will eventually progress into one very complex and perfectly stable force field. I know that this seems very far-fetched, but given that my

previous assumption about the substratic essence is true, and that our evolution is indeed based on an infinite force field, then I think this lies within our possibility.