

Can the Solipsist be Refuted?
A conversation with a self confessed Solipsist

"So you are claiming to be a Solipsist?"

"Yes, I know that solipsism is the truth"

"Tell me first of all what you think a solipsist is"

"It means that I believe that all that exists is myself and my perceptions"

"So you don't believe that I exist independently of you?"

"No, you have no existence outside of my perception of you"

"I am conscious of my own existence I can assure you"

"No you aren't, I am just imagining that you are telling me that you are"

"So what you experience is just what you imagine"

"Yes, I am imaging you"

"Do you ever imagine what you might do tomorrow?"

"Yes, I like to imagine that sometimes"

"Is your imagination of what you will do tomorrow as vivid as what you are imagining is happening now?"

"No, it never seems as real as what I am experiencing now"

"So you have an imagination of almost infinite capacity with which you imagine the world you live in but also imagine having another weaker imagination with which to imagine other experiences that you aren't having right now"

"Yes"

"Why do imagine with your super-imagination having this more mundane everyday imagination?"

"I can imagine anything I want"

"Seems a strange thing to imagine, why not just imagine what you will do tomorrow with the same intensity with which you are imagining today?"

"I wouldn't know the difference between what I am doing now and what I will do tomorrow"

"They are both in your imagination though so you aren't really doing either"

"I like to imagine that there is a today that is different from tomorrow"

"Why?"

"I can imagine anything I want"

"Do you imagine speaking?"

"Yes, of course, I am speaking to you"

"Do you imagine thinking thoughts in your head?"

"Yes, I sometimes think thoughts inside my head"

"Why imagine both being able to speak with your imaginary mouth and being able to speak to yourself inside your imaginary head?"

"So I can think private thoughts and speak to the people in my world"

"Yes but the people in your world only exist because you imagine them, why bother imagining that you talk to them with your mouth instead of just talking to them psychically?"

"I can imagine anything I want"

"In what way to do you consider yourself to exist?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you said that all that is real is your perception, the things that you perceive only exist to the extent that you perceive them"

"Yes that's correct"

"If you only exist in your perception then your existence isn't any more real than I am, if you exist separately from your perception then there is something that exists beyond your perception"

"So, what's your point?"

“Either way you are undermining your position of solipsism. If nothing exists outside your perception that means you are only an illusion and hence any conclusion you reach about your own existence should be treated with extreme scepticism. If you are not just part of your own perception than that means that there is something real beyond your perception”

“My position is that all that exists is myself and my perceptions”

“So you have a reality beyond your perceptions?”

“Yes, I suppose I must do”

“Why stop at just you then, it seems arbitrary to suppose that only you exist beyond your perceptions”

“I can imagine anything I want”

“So you don’t believe that the visual experience of an object is connected to an external object beyond your experience?”

“No”

“How can you name things then, if all that you are naming is the visual experience”

“I don’t understand”

“I could hold up a cylinder so it looks like a rectangle to you, I could turn it so it looks like a circle, would you say they were two different objects?”

“No, it’s the same object from different angles”

“To conceive that a rectangle and a circle are two different views of the same object means you must have a conception of that object existing separately from those two different visual experiences”

“I can imagine there is an object that those are two different views of”

“So you imagine that there is an external world that your visual perception is a representation of?”

“Yes”

“So you are naming something in that external world that you imagine existing?”

“Yes”

“How do you imagine it existing if all that is real is your perception, your perception changes all the time, how do conceive that there is a consistent world that your different visual perceptions are just different perspectives of?”

“I just can”

“So you imagine your changing visual perceptions and you imagine the world that those different visual perceptions are different representations of? How do you imagine that external world?”

“I just do, I can imagine it”

“But every time you imagine anything it is just one way of imagining it. How do imagine it in its totality?”

“I can’t obviously”

“So how do you imagine the external existence of an object like a cylinder and also imagine the different ways you can perceive it?”

“I can imagine anything I want”

“How did you learn to think about yourself and your imaginary world?”

“I just can”

“So your thoughts have meaning? What gives them meaning if all that exists is your imagination?”

“I don’t understand”

“It’s simple enough, if all that exists is what you imagine to exist then all the meaning your thoughts have is the meaning you imagine that they have”

“Yes I suppose so”

“So how can you trust your own thoughts?”

“I imagine they mean what I want them to mean”

“How do you decide what your thoughts should mean?”

“By thinking about them?”

“But if you are thinking about your thoughts you are thinking about them using thoughts that must already

have meaning if you are to meaningfully think about your thoughts”

“Yes”

“So your thoughts must have a meaning that isn’t just the meaning you have given them”

“Yes, I suppose so”

“So where did they get their meaning from?”

“Why do they have to have meaning?”

“If they have no meaning then you can make no claims at all including the claim that you are a solipsist”

“I can imagine that they have meaning”

“Then their meaning is completely up to you and hence any conclusion you reach by thinking is totally arbitrary because you can decide that your thoughts can mean anything at all”

“Maybe they have do have meaning”

“How did they get their meaning?”

“They get it from the external world that I imagine exists”

“We have already established that it is extremely unlikely that you can imagine a consistent external world and if even if you could it would be what you decided it to be so any meaning your thoughts obtain from the world is ultimately up to you”

“I can imagine anything I want”