

Philosophy 110W - 3: Introduction to Philosophy, Hamilton College, Fall 2007
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Lecture Notes, October 4

I. Discussion of reorganization

I plan to post more information on line this weekend.

II. Recapitulation

On Tuesday, we looked at two of Berkeley's arguments for idealism.

The argument from the sensibility of objects relies on the empiricist's commitment to grounding all knowledge in sense experience.

The Lockean arguments show that even the primary qualities vary with the perceiver.

III. Berkeley's reductive argument against the primary qualities

We have seen two of Berkeley's three arguments for idealism.

The first was from the sensibility of objects.

The second was the extended Lockean argument.

Berkeley provides a last, and direct, argument that the primary qualities reduce to secondary properties, p 127.

The argument is expressed more clearly in *Principles*, §10:

Now, if it be certain that those original qualities are inseparably united with the other sensible qualities, and not, even in thought, capable of being abstracted from them, it plainly follows that they exist only in the mind. But I desire any one to reflect and try whether he can, by any abstraction of thought, conceive the extension and motion of a body without all other sensible qualities. For my own part, I see evidently that it is not in my power to frame an idea of a body extended and moving, but I must withal give it some color or other sensible quality which is acknowledged to exist only in the mind. In short, extension, figure, and motion, abstracted from all other qualities, are inconceivable. Where therefore the other sensible qualities are, there must these be also, to wit, in the mind and nowhere else.

Thus:

1. You can not have an idea of a primary quality without secondary qualities.
 2. So, wherever the secondary qualities are, the primary are.
 3. Secondary qualities are only in the mind.
- So, the primary qualities are mental, too.

Locke thinks that our ideas of primary qualities resemble properties of material objects.

But, for Berkeley, Locke makes an illegitimate inference to the cause of his ideas from the ideas themselves.

There is no primary/secondary distinction, since all qualities are secondary.

IV. Accounting for Locke's materialist error

Locke is a nominalist about the secondary qualities, but a realist about the primary qualities. Our ideas of primary qualities, like extension, correspond to real properties of real, material objects. But those ideas do not correspond to particular sensations. We experience an extended chair, say, but not extension itself. We have to strip away the other qualities in our minds to get to the new and abstract idea of extension. For Locke, ideas of primary qualities all arise from abstraction, as do mathematical ideas. I mentioned earlier that Berkeley thinks that the doctrine of abstract ideas leads Locke to paradoxes and inconsistencies.

Recall Locke's doctrine.

The process of abstraction leads us from particular sensations to ideas of bodies.

Locke argues that our term 'bodies' stands for an abstract idea of bodies, which corresponds to bodies, which are physical objects.

If, on the other hand, we can not form an abstract idea of bodies, then there is no reason to claim that there are any bodies.

The term 'bodies' is, Berkeley says, empty.

The same process of reasoning applies to terms for individual bodies, like 'apple', and for other general terms, like 'physical object', 'the physical world', and 'the universe'.

V. Two kinds of abstraction

There are two kinds of processes which might be called abstraction, p 127.

A1: Considering one property of an object independently of others.

For example, we can consider the blackness of a chair, apart from its size, or shape, or texture.

Or, the taste of an apple, apart from its crunchiness, or color.

We can just focus on one of the sensations that is bundled together with the others.

It is agreed on all hands that the qualities or modes of things do never really exist each of them apart by itself, and separated from all others but are mixed, as it were, and blended together, several in the same object. But, we are told, the mind being able to consider each quality singly, or abstracted from those other qualities with which it is united, does by that means frame to itself abstract ideas. For example, there is perceived by sight an object extended, colored, and moved: this mixed or compound idea the mind resolving into its simple, constituent parts, and viewing each by itself, exclusive of the rest, does frame the abstract ideas of extension, color, and motion. Not that it is possible for color or motion to exist without extension; but only that the mind can frame to itself by abstraction the idea of color exclusive of extension, and of motion exclusive of both color and extension (Berkeley, §7 of the introduction to the *Principles*).

Berkeley discusses the second kind of abstraction in the next section of the introduction:

Again, the mind having observed that in the particular extensions perceived by sense there is something common and alike in all, and some other things peculiar, as this or that figure or magnitude, which distinguish them one from another; it considers apart or singles out by itself that which is common, making thereof a most abstract idea of extension, which is neither line, surface, nor solid, nor has any figure or magnitude, but is an idea entirely prescinded from all

these. So likewise the mind, by leaving out of the particular colors perceived by sense that which distinguishes them one from another, and retaining that only which is common to all, makes an idea of color in abstract which is neither red, nor blue, nor white, nor any other determinate color. And, in like manner, by considering motion abstractedly not only from the body moved, but likewise from the figure it describes, and all particular directions and velocities, the abstract idea of motion is framed; which equally corresponds to all particular motions whatsoever that may be perceived by sense (Berkeley, §8 of the introduction to the *Principles*).

A2: Forming an actual abstract, general idea.

For example, having an idea of blackness, or of color.

Even the idea chair is an abstract, general idea.

Berkeley insists that we have no ability A2, p 127.

This is the core of his argument, and you can see it, again, in the introduction to the *Principles*, where he responds directly to Locke's claim that an abstract idea of triangle corresponds to all different kinds of triangles:

If any man has the faculty of framing in his mind such an idea of a triangle as is here described, it is in vain to pretend to dispute him out of it, nor would I go about it. All I desire is that the reader would fully and certainly inform himself whether he has such an idea or no. And this, methinks, can be no hard task for anyone to perform. What more easy than for anyone to look a little into his own thoughts, and there try whether he has, or can attain to have, an idea that shall correspond with the description that is here given of the general idea of a triangle, which is "neither oblique nor rectangle, equilateral, equicrural nor scalenon, but all and none of these at once?" (Berkeley, §13 of the introduction to the *Principles*)

No idea, no picture in our minds, could have all these properties.

Similarly, we can not have an idea of chair, because it would have to apply to all chairs.

Some chairs are black, others are blue, green, etc.

An idea which corresponds to all of these is impossible.

No image will do as the idea of man.

For, it would have to be an image of a short man and a tall man, of a hairy man, and of a bald man.

We can use general terms, if we wish, according to A1.

We should not be misled into thinking that they correspond to some thing.

We should think with the learned and speak with the vulgar.

Only particulars, single discrete sensations, exist.

In sum, we have no ability A2.

A1 is unobjectionable.

But A1 will not lead to beliefs in a material world.

Since we can not abstract, we have no abstract ideas; we can not have ideas of material objects.

Our ordinary ideas of these objects are actually collections of particular sensations, p 127.

The particular sensations (e.g. the feel of the apple, its taste, and odor) are all things we know about.

But all we have is this passing show, our experiences of the particulars.

All our ideas are ideas of particulars.

Thus, we can see that A1 is really not a process of abstraction at all.

It is just the recognition of the separate ideas of sensation, and their independence.

VI. Berkeley's world

According to Berkeley, we have a bundle of sensations which form an experience which we call a red chair, say, or apple.

We use the term 'apple' to refer to this collection of (strictly speaking distinct) sensory ideas.

'Apple', or even 'this apple', does not correspond to any abstract idea of apple, or of red, or of sweet, etc. The names 'apple' and 'chair' and 'red' are just convenient labels, and should not indicate any existence of the apple or chair or color beyond my current experience of it.

If 'chair' actually referred to a thing, it would have to refer to red chairs and blue chairs and tall chairs and short chairs.

We can give a name to commonalities among particular sensations, but this is just a name.

Berkeley is thus a nominalist about everything except particular experiences.

We have no positive idea of man, or triangle, or matter, as all are abstractions.

Locke and Descartes posit matter as the cause of our ideas.

This matter really has only the primary qualities as properties.

But on this picture, there is no yellow, no sweetness: all secondary properties are just names.

Berkeley tries making the terms refer to my sensory states.

The lemon is yellow, since I really have a yellow sensory experience.

Berkeley's account solves the problem of error for our beliefs based on the senses, like the water experiment.

This is the problem that led both Descartes and Locke to reject the resemblance hypothesis for ideas of secondary qualities.

But Berkeley has a new set of problems.

VII. Intersubjectivity and persistence

One of Berkeley's new problems is the problem of intersubjectivity.

How do we account for different people having similar experiences?

Similarly, how do we account for the fact that objects do not seem to go in and out of existence, that they seem to persist?

Berkeley posits God, to ensure both intersubjectivity and persistence.

On a metaphoric level, our experiences are like peering into the mind of God.

What happens to ideas when we are not perceiving them?

They may subsist in the mind of other spirits.

But what if no person is perceiving them?

Sensible things have to be perceived.

But it does not follow that they are frequently created and annihilated.

Consider the limerick:

There was a young man who said God
Must think it exceedingly odd
When he finds that this tree
Continues to be
When there's no one about in the quad

Dear sir, your confusion is odd
I am always about in the quad
and that's why this tree
will continue to be
Since observed by, yours faithfully, God.

VIII. Berkeley, the resemblance hypothesis, and God

Berkeley accepts the resemblance hypothesis, in a way.

Locke used the resemblance hypothesis as support for his materialism, for his view that material objects are the causes of our ideas.

Obviously, Berkeley does not follow Locke in this way.

Consider two different refinements of the resemblance hypothesis.

(RH1): My ideas resemble material objects.

(RH2): My ideas resemble their causes.

Berkeley rejects RH1, but accepts RH2.

So, what are these causes, if they are not material objects?

Ideas can only resemble other ideas, p 134.

Thus, Berkeley infers the existence of God, p 136.

IX. Common sense, and atheism, materialism and skepticism

Berkeley urges that his position is more commonsensical than materialism (and the materialistic side of dualism) which leads to atheism and skepticism:

For, as we have shown the doctrine of matter or corporeal substance to have been the main pillar and support of skepticism, so likewise upon the same foundation have been raised all the impious schemes of atheism and irreligion. Nay, so great a difficulty has it been thought to conceive matter produced out of nothing, that the most celebrated among the ancient philosophers, even of those who maintained the being of a God, have thought matter to be uncreated and co-eternal with Him. How great a friend material substance has been to atheists in all ages were needless to relate. All their monstrous systems have so visible and necessary a dependence on it that, when this corner-stone is once removed, the whole fabric cannot choose but fall to the ground, insomuch that it is no longer worth while to bestow a particular consideration on the absurdities of every wretched sect of atheists. (Berkeley, *Principles*, §92)

Materialism makes the world independent of God.

We claim that our sensations depend on a world of objects.

This seems to dismiss God from our natural science.

At least it pushes God out of our explanations.

Berkeley sees natural scientific explanations as evidence of atheism.

Berkeley says that materialism also entails that we do not experience the objects in themselves.

We can not get out of our minds into those objects, so we are forced into skepticism.

All the properties we experience are sensible, and so in us.

If we posit matter in addition, we can have no knowledge of it.

This is just the Empiricist's Problem.

Skepticism and atheism are wrong, says Berkeley.
Thus, idealism is right.

Berkeley gets to retain colors, sounds, and smells. Recall 1 and the apple.
The apple is just how I experience it.
Remember, he thinks there is a real world.
It is just not a material world.
The drawback is that we are left with only our mental states.
Berkeley's world is purely psychological.

The big question for Berkeley, then, is whether we can get out of our mental states to refer to, or understand, the world, even if it is not a physical world?
The story about peering into the mind of God can not be taken literally, since the same problem about experiencing sensations and not causes arises here.
Berkeley could appeal, like Descartes, to the benevolence of God, but this would amount to an abandonment of empiricism.
The solipsistic picture of Descartes returns.
We are back to only the cogito.

Next up: Moore and Wittgenstein.
Also, papers are due on Tuesday.