

Philosophy 110W - 3: Introduction to Philosophy, Hamilton College, Fall 2007
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Lecture Notes, September 27

I. Recapitulation

On Tuesday, I went a bit gaga over Chisholm's article.
It *is* begging the question against Descartes; he rejects the whole project.
We discussed the Descartes's rejection of the resemblance hypothesis.
I limned some metaphysical and epistemological categories.
We looked a bit at two of Locke's criticisms of Descartes.
Questions?

II. Empiricism and mathematics

One problem for empiricists is how to explain the necessity of ' $2+2=4$ '.
No possible experience can support our knowledge of necessity.
 2 schminkles + 2 schminkles = 4 schminkles, even if we never experience schminkles.
Sense experience thus seems insufficient to justify our knowledge of mathematics.
We know a lot about objects we could not possibly sense.
Locke's account of our knowledge, of the world and of mathematics, does not rely on innate ideas.
In fact, he thinks we can account for all of Descartes's Class III ideas on the basis of experience.
We learn particulars, first.
Then, we generalize, or abstract, to find universals, like those of mathematics.
We will not spend a lot of time on Locke's doctrine of abstract ideas, though it is the source, Berkeley thinks, of the materialist's error.

III. Abstract ideas and materialism

Terms are supposed, by Locke and Descartes and Berkeley, to stand for ideas.
All three philosophers hold what we can call the representational theory of ideas, on which ideas are like pictures in the mind.
The resemblance hypothesis says that the ideas in my mind are a fair representation of reality.
Ideas correspond to external objects, like chairs, people, or even circles.
Particular terms, names, correspond to particular ideas which correspond to particular objects.
General terms (like those of mathematics, but any term which can hold of more than one object) correspond to abstract ideas which correspond to abstract objects.

The senses at first let in particular ideas, and furnish the yet empty cabinet, and the mind by degrees growing familiar with some of them, they are lodged in the memory, and names got to them. Afterwards, the mind proceeding further, abstracts them, and by degrees learns the use of general names. In this manner the mind comes to be furnished with ideas and language, the materials about which to exercise its discursive faculty (Locke's *Essay*, Book I, Chapter I, §15).

So, consider that we have a general term 'bodies'.

The term stands for an abstract idea of bodies.

(It must be abstract, since there is no particular object called a body.)

An idea is a representation of an external object.

So, the term bodies, which we have constructed to stand for an abstract idea, refers to bodies, which are physical objects.

Locke's doctrine of abstract ideas helps him avoid Descartes's claim that the senses are irrelevant to knowledge.

Locke thinks that we can trace all of our uses of general terms, including mathematical ones, to our original sense experiences.

IV. Locke's reliance on the senses

Recall that Descartes rejected the resemblance hypothesis.

Sensory information could not rise to the level of knowledge.

On the contrary, Locke claims that we do use the senses to get knowledge, and that Descartes underestimates the role of the senses.

Locke's point is much like Mersenne's example of the stick in the water in the *Objections and Replies*.

Our senses do give us some misrepresentations.

But if we had no senses, we could not even start to understand the physical objects.

Consider the water temperature experiment, §21.

The problem is similar to the one that Descartes faced with the wax.

One object seems to have two conflicting properties.

Locke's example is even more compelling than the wax, because the conflict occurs in one object at one time.

No Heraclitean rescue is available.

Our idea of an object includes many different qualities.

Locke thinks that Descartes is right that at least some qualities are not veridical, like those of hot and cold.

An idea is veridical if it truly represents an external object.

For example, if my idea of an apple were fully veridical, then the apple itself would be red and sweet.

Descartes, of course, argues that no sensory information is veridical.

Locke thinks that some are, and so has to distinguish between those that are and those that are not.

V. Distinguishing veridical from misrepresentative ideas.

Consider an apple.

We might have the following ideas of the apple:

- Red
- Round
- Cool to the touch
- Sweet, though a bit sour
- Shiny
- Smooth
- Sits still on the table
- Crunchy
- Weights 4 oz.
- Has a mass of 120 grams
- Is one apple
- Is being considered by you
- Smells like an apple

Some of these properties are really properties of the apple.

So, our ideas of them are veridical.

Others of these properties are misrepresentative.

Locke uses two principles to distinguish the veridical ideas, which represent real properties of the apple, from the misrepresentative ideas, which tell us nothing directly about the apple itself.

VI. First principle for distinguishing veridical from misrepresenting ideas

Locke tacitly presumes the following principle:

If we perceive an object as having two (or more) incompatible ideas, then those ideas do not represent real properties of the object.

Descartes tacitly presumes the same principles in his discussion of the wax.

Locke does not discard all sense properties, in contrast to Descartes.

The following sense ideas are not veridical, according to Locke's first principle:

Hot and cold, §21

Color, because porphyry loses color in dark, §19

Taste and odor, because an almond changes taste and odor when mashed, §20

VII. A corollary to the first principle

Even if a change in us entails the change in the perceived quality, the ideas which change can not be veridical.

In this case, we are like two people: one before and one after.

The object appears to have incompatible properties to two different stages of us.

For example, consider tasting orange juice before and after brushing your teeth.

What tasted sweet before, tastes sour (for want of a better word) after.

Thus, the sweetness and sourness are not real qualities of the orange juice.

VIII. A second principle for distinguishing veridical from misrepresenting ideas

If an idea of an object is the same under all conditions, that idea is veridical.

The object truly has that property.

See §9: Qualities such as are utterly inseparable from the body...

A corollary: If every one has the same idea, then that idea is veridical.

See §21 and the discussion of figure (shape).

IX. Applying the principles to the apple

Red	Misrepresentative
Round	Real
Cool to the touch	Misrepresentative
Sweet, though a bit sour	Misrepresentative
Shiny	Misrepresentative
Smooth	Misrepresentative
Sits still on the table	Real
Crunchy	Misrepresentative
Weighs 4 oz.	Misrepresentative
Has a mass of 120 grams	Real
Is one apple	Real
Is being considered by you	Misrepresentative
Smells like an apple	Misrepresentative

X. The Primary/Secondary Distinction

See §§9-10

<u>Primary Qualities</u>	<u>Secondary Qualities</u>
Solidity	Color
Extension	Odor
Figure	Hot/ Cold
Motion/ Rest	Sound
Number	Texture
	Taste

Thus, Locke accepts the Resemblance Hypothesis, for primary qualities only, §15.

Our ideas of extension, for example, resemble extension in the world.

That is, I have an idea that this piece of paper is 11 inches long.

So, the paper really is 11 inches long.

Also, my idea of the motion of a car resembles the real motion of that car.

The car really is moving.

Note that the primary qualities are mathematically describable.

My ideas of secondary qualities do not resemble anything in an object.

Note also that Locke and Descartes do not disagree substantially about the nature of the physical world.

They do disagree about how we know about those properties.

In technical terms, their disagreement is epistemological, not metaphysical.

We should expect this, since both Descartes and Locke were writing in support of modern science.

XI. So, why do we see yellow lemons?

There is something in the object that makes me think it is the way it is.

The world really consists of particles (atoms) in motion.

These unite in varying ways.

Depending on how they unite, they affect us in different ways.

Their arrangement determines how we experience an object.

The arrangement of particles in the apple makes the light reflect from its surface so that I have a red experience.

We might say that the apple has a dispositional property which makes us see it as red, §13.

But the dispositional property is not redness, which is, properly speaking, a property only of my experience.

We have ideas which arise from the interaction between our senses and the material world.

The material world exists independently of us, but depends on us for sensory (secondary) properties.

The material world has its primary qualities truly.

Locke's position is called the corpuscular, or atomic, theory.

Atomic theory is not original with Locke, writing in 1689.

Democritus had posited the existence of atoms in the fifth century BC.

Boyle, the founder of modern chemistry, had written similarly in the 1660s.

Galileo (1564-1642) wrote:

...that external bodies, to excite in us these tastes, these odours, and these sounds, demand other than size, figure, number, and slow or rapid motion, I do not believe, and I judge that, if the ears, the tongue, and the nostrils were taken away, the figure, the numbers, and the motions would indeed remain, but not the odours, nor the tastes, nor the sounds, which, without the living animal, I do not believe are anything else than names.

Compare Galileo's quote with Locke, §17.

XII. Nominalism

Nominalism is the claim that some words are merely names and do not denote real objects or properties.

We are all nominalists about fictional objects, like the Easter Bunny.

Some people are nominalists about numbers.

Locke is a nominalist about color, and other secondary properties.

XIII. Locke, mathematics, and Berkeley

Descartes's description of our knowledge of the physical world was implausible, since it denied the senses a role.

But Descartes had an account of our knowledge of mathematics and science.

Descartes's account relied on pure reason.

Locke rejects pure reason, and produces a more intuitive sensory account of our knowledge of the physical world.

But Locke's account of mathematics, which relied on the doctrine of abstraction, is less plausible. According to Locke, we sense particulars, like doughnuts and frisbees. Then, we generalize, forming an abstract idea, like that of a circle. Berkeley calls this claim that we can generalize our ideas the doctrine of abstract ideas. He argues that Locke's use of the doctrine of abstract ideas in his accounts of both the physical world and mathematics creates a serious problem for his commonsense account of our knowledge.

XIV. An Empiricist's Problem

The empiricist claims that all knowledge comes from experience. But we experience sensations, not the causes of our sensations. So, we have no knowledge of what causes our sensations, i.e. objects in the supposedly material world. That is, we seem only to know our experiences, and not the external world.

Descartes argues that we judge that there is an external, material world, and what it is like, with our minds.

This option is not available to an empiricist like Locke or Berkeley. Locke says that our ideas of primary qualities of objects resemble real qualities of those objects. So we have some knowledge of the material world in that way. Berkeley argues that there are no material objects.

XV. Metaphysics and Epistemology

Recall the three positions concerning the nature of reality we have discussed: materialism, dualism, and idealism.

Note that these metaphysical positions are independent of epistemology.

Locke and Descartes agree on dualism, despite their disagreement over epistemology.

And Berkeley disagrees with Locke about metaphysics, though he agrees with Locke about epistemology. That is, Berkeley and Locke agree on methodology: that one should try to account for all knowledge on the basis of sense experience.

In fact, while Berkeley is mainly concerned to show that Locke's materialism is an error, the beginning of Berkeley's introduction to the *Principles*, which I have posted, may be taken as criticism of Descartes's work.

Here is a sample:

Philosophy being nothing else but the study of wisdom and truth, it may with reason be expected that those who have spent most time and pains in it should enjoy a greater calm and serenity of mind, a greater clearness and evidence of knowledge, and be less disturbed with doubts and difficulties than other men. Yet so it is, we see the illiterate bulk of mankind that walk the high-road of plain common sense, and are governed by the dictates of nature, for the most part easy and undisturbed. To them nothing that is familiar appears unaccountable or difficult to comprehend. They complain not of any want of evidence in their senses, and are out of all danger of becoming Sceptics. But no sooner do we depart from sense and instinct to follow the light of a superior principle, to reason, meditate, and reflect on the nature of things, but a thousand scruples spring up in our minds concerning those things which before we seemed fully to comprehend. Prejudices and errors of sense do from all parts discover themselves to our view;

and, endeavouring to correct these by reason, we are insensibly drawn into uncouth paradoxes, difficulties, and inconsistencies, which multiply and grow upon us as we advance in speculation, till at length, having wandered through many intricate mazes, we find ourselves just where we were, or, which is worse, sit down in a forlorn Scepticism. (Berkeley, Introduction to the *Principles*, §1)

Note that Berkeley has described the position of Descartes at the beginning of the third meditation. Berkeley claims that we can avoid these skeptical problems, which arise from raising dust and complaining we can not see.

The rest of Berkeley's introduction contains an extended attack on Locke's materialism, and the materialist element of dualism, which he claims leads to skepticism.

Berkeley, like Descartes, claims that skepticism is unjustified.

Berkeley thinks that the main problem with Lockean materialism is its reliance on abstract ideas.

I will hand out the relevant sections of the introduction, on abstract ideas, §6-§13.

The entire introduction to the *Principles* is on the course website.