

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Spring 2006  
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Lecture Notes, April 10

I. Quiz: Present a Lockean argument against any one primary quality.

II. 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, §10.

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.

Again, Berkeley considers objects as what we see, hear, smell, touch, and taste.

Their esse is percipi, being perceived, §3.

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

But this, for Berkeley, is an illegitimate inference.

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

III. 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, 'bodies', which corresponds to bodies, which are physical objects.

If, on the other hand, we can not form an abstract idea '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', 'the universe', etc.

#### IV. Two kinds of abstraction

There are two kinds of processes which might be called 'abstraction', and which Berkeley thinks lead to belief in material objects.

Read §4-5.

If we can abstract in either way, then we can have ideas of material objects.

And if we have ideas of material objects, then they correspond to matter; there is a physical world.

But Berkeley denies that we can have these abstract, general ideas.

The first kind of abstraction is described also in §17.

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.

Berkeley discusses the second kind of abstraction in §18.

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.

This is the core of his argument, and you can see it, again, at Introduction §13.

There, he argues that we can not have an idea of 'triangle' since it would have to correspond to equilateral, isosceles, and scalene triangles.

And 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.

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.

#### V. Two misuses of A2

(Of course, all uses of A2 will be misuses.)

Read §99.

M1: Abstracting extension from other properties of an object.

M2: Abstracting the extension of an object from our perception of it.

Sometimes, Berkeley phrases M2 as:

M2\*: Abstracting *existence* from perception.

In both cases, the misus involves thinking that the so-called primary qualities are real properties of external, physical objects.

## VI. Berkeley and particulars

Since we can not abstract, we can not have ideas of material objects.

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

Berkeley considers an apple, §1.

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.