

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Spring 2006
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Lecture Notes, April 26

I. Quiz: How is Berkeley a nominalist?

II. Berkeley on the resemblance hypothesis

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?

Recall, that Berkeley says that ideas can only resemble other ideas, §8.

III. Berkeley on inference

I mentioned that Berkeley also has a problem accounting for the existence of perceivers.

There is no universally accepted argument for the existence of other minds.

This is a perennially troubling problem in philosophy.

Thus, we have the question of how we know that other “people” are not craftily constructed robots.

Philosophers like to say that every one’s problem is no one’s problem.

But the problem seems even worse for Berkeley than for the rest of us.

We do not perceive our minds (our selves).

It would seem that even our own existence is an illegitimate inference!

Berkeley agrees that we have no idea of ourselves, §27.

He says that we can have a notion, rather than an idea, §140.

We get to this notion, by inference, §145.

We infer both ourselves, and other minds.

And we can infer God, §146, 148-9.

IV. Berkeley, Aquinas, and God

Berkeley’s arguments for God’s existence are reminiscent of arguments from Aquinas.

See a selection from Aquinas here: <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/100203.htm>

While Anselm’s (and Descartes’s) ontological argument is an a priori argument, Berkeley and Aquinas (mostly) argue a posteriori, or empirically.

Empirical arguments start with observation.

Consider the argument from design: a watch in the desert leads you to infer that a person had been there.

Aquinas's 5 ways: *Summa Theologica*, Question 2, Article 3

God as unchanged changer.

God as first cause.

God as necessarily existent being, since creation out of nothingness is impossible.

God as the greatest thing.

The arrow (i.e. the world) must be directed by an archer.

Notice that God is not the foundation of Berkeley's work, but a conclusion.

The *Principles* is philosophy, not theology.

Still, there are theological components to the work.

He argues, for example, that both uniformity in nature and blemishes in nature support God's existence, §146 and §152.

Notice that the representational theory of mind is cracking.

Berkeley is distinguishing thought from ideas of sensation.

This was Descartes's achievement, and perhaps we should be led back to his work.

V. 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, §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.

See Berkeley §86, and following.

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, §38.

The drawback is that we are left with only our mental states.

Berkeley's world is purely psychological.

VI. The Big Question for Berkeley:

Can we 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.

Hume shows that the prospects are even worse for empiricism, even if we reject Berkeley's idealism.

VII. Introduction to Hume

Consider each of the following sentences.

- 1) You are taking a philosophy class.
- 2) Your best friend likes you.
- 3) Enron committed accounting fraud.
- 4) Shakespeare wrote *The Tragedy of Macbeth*.
- 5) $2 + 2 = 4$.
- 6) The sun will rise tomorrow.
- 7) $F = ma$. Or, objects near the surface of the Earth accelerate toward the center of the Earth at 9.8 m/s^2 .
- 8) The future will resemble the past.

For each of the preceding statements:

A) Is the sentence something you know, or merely something you believe?

B) If it is a mere belief, is your doubt merely skeptical?

For example, I believe both that the Mets are a baseball team and that they will win 81 games this year.

Only skeptical doubts make me doubt that they are a baseball team.

C) How do you know it? Or, why do you believe it?

The answers to these questions may differ.

The answer to the first question might involve some kind of introspection.

The answer to the last might involve scientific principles, or assumptions about the world.

The last four are problems for empiricism.

Empiricists may even deny them.

Many empiricists are nominalists about mathematical terms.

Fictionalism: mathematical objects are convenient fictions.

Berkeley is a nominalist.

Consider his claims about infinite divisibility and the minimum sensibilia.

For him, scientific laws are regularities, provided by God for convenience, but with exceptions (miracles).

But these regularities, as abstract ideas, are not real ideas.

Hume agrees with Berkeley, in part, about abstract objects, p106.

So why should we believe in empiricism?

Berkeley and Locke start by assuming empiricism.

Hume has an argument.